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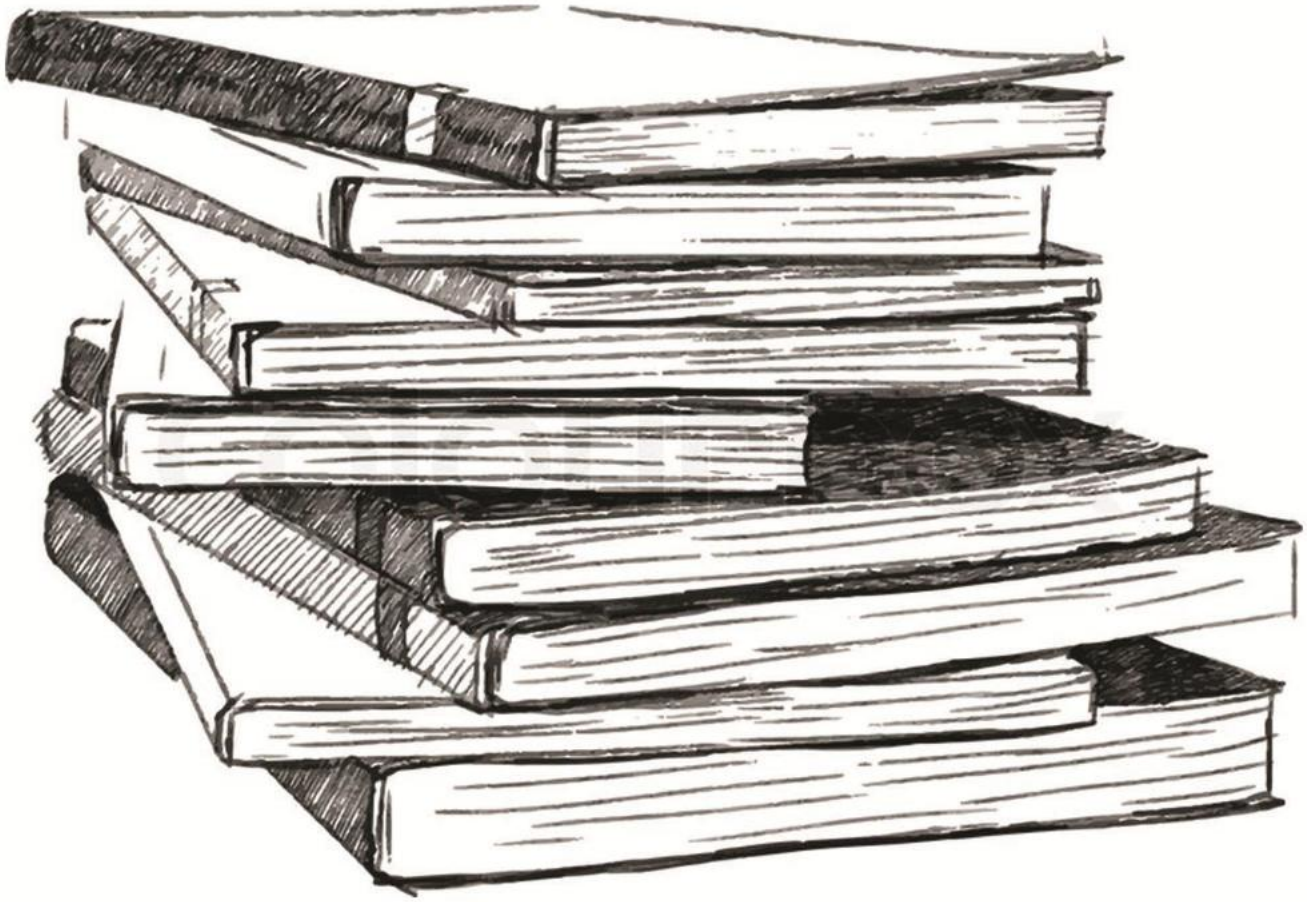
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FOREWORD

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you for being so committed to scholarly excellence.

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A Comparative Study of Crisis Communication Discourse Between Chinese and American Companies under the Tariff War—A Case Study of Apple and Huawei

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Abstract— *Against the deepening process of globalization, the United States launched global tariff wars and intensified its suppression of China's development. Trade disputes and tariff frictions between the two sides persisted from 2018 to 2025. Under such circumstance, policy-driven external crises have become a key research context for corporate crisis communication discourse. This study conducts a comparative analysis of Apple and Huawei based on Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model. Since neither company issued official statements during the 2025 trade conflicts, this paper just analysis the text released in the initial phase of the tariff war from 2018 to 2020. The paper examines their crisis communication discourses. The research findings indicate that Huawei adopted a clear and confrontational discourse strategy, constructing an identification of "survival and development". Through emotional mobilization, historical narration and collective identity rhetoric, it linked corporate prospects to national industrial security. In contrast, Apple maintained a neutral, restrained and depoliticized stance and established an identification of "efficiency and win-win cooperation". It upheld shared interests via rational elaboration, interest balancing and data expression. The difference between the two companies stems from ownership nature, supply chain structure, market reliance and political and economic contexts. This research broadens the application of Critical Discourse Analysis in studies on crisis communication discourse triggered by policy-driven external crises, and provides references on discourse strategies for both multinational corporations and local enterprises to deal with international political risks.*

Keywords— ***Trump Tariff War; Crisis Communication; Critical Discourse Analysis***

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Background

With the development of globalization, trade frictions among countries have intensified. The problem of Policy-driven external crises, industry access restrictions, and new carbon emission regulations have assumed an increasingly important role in corporate crisis management.

For multinational enterprises and Chinese local enterprises, tariff wars and entity lists are not merely issues of commercial costs. They pose severe challenges to reputation management, stakeholder communication, and legitimacy maintenance. How to articulate positions, assume responsibility, reassure the public, and mobilize support through crisis communication discourse has become an urgent task for enterprises.

From 2018 to 2020, the Trump administration imposed tariff policies, pushing China and the United States into a crisis of "tariff hike–countermeasure". This forced enterprises to upgrade from traditional market risk

management to policy-oriented risk management.

At this background, enterprises need to articulate stances and responsibilities to construct corporate images. And they need to engage in discursive struggles around relevant information. How to control situations, reconstruct corporate images and gain consumer trust through right crisis communication discourse has become a challenge for both multinational and local firms.

Current research on crisis communication focuses on strategy selection, public opinion response, and image repair. Few scholars conducted comparative studies of political crises from a micro-discursive perspective. In addition, the research applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to corporate crisis communication discourse remains insufficient.

As one of the largest U.S. technology companies, Apple relies heavily on Chinese manufacturing for its product supply chains. So tariff policies directly impact its competitiveness. Huawei, a leading Chinese technology firm, has been regarded by the U.S. as a "national security threat" and subjected to severe sanctions and technological blockades. Faced with common policy pressures, the two companies adopted different discursive strategies. This paper conduct an in-depth comparative analysis of these differences and their underlying causes. This research holds important theoretical and practical significance for understanding corporate communication behavior in policy-driven crises. Accordingly, this paper conducts a comparative study of crisis communication discourse between Apple (a U.S. firm in China) and Huawei (a Chinese local firm).

This study addresses three core research questions:

Against the tariff war, what differences exist between Apple's and Huawei's crisis communication discourse at the text, discursive practice, and social practice dimensions?

What are the underlying social and structural factors?

What practical implications can the findings provide for multinational and local firms in responding to policy-driven external crises?

Early Critical Discourse Analysis focused mainly on media and political discourse. This study integrates CDA with crisis communication discourse research and applies it to corporate crisis communication discourse in policy-driven external crises. It not only provides an integrated analytical framework but also expands the application of discourse analysis to corporate policy crisis contexts.

Furthermore, by selecting two firms from different national backgrounds, this study analyzes differences in discursive strategies between multinationals and local firms under external pressure. It reveals how corporate ownership, supply chain structure, market dependence, and political-economic contexts shape crisis communication discourse. The findings offer actionable discursive insights for multinationals to balance home- and host-country interests. This research provides directions for discourse construction in corporate public relations, brand management, and international communication, enhancing capabilities and skills in crisis response.

1.2 Literature Review

Early crisis communication studies adopted diagnostic and linear organizational crisis models. The most representative theories include Benoit's (1997) Image Repair Theory (IRT) and Coombs's (2007) Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). This research field has remained a major academic focus in recent years. Deng Youping (2023) employed Hu Baijing's fact-value model and conducted a two-case study to compare the crisis communication discourses and strategies of Huawei and ZTE. He identified the similarities and differences between their strategies from three dimensions: issue management, relationship management and discourse power structure.

Nevertheless, Dunn & Eble (2014) argued that traditional research on crisis communication discourse mainly explores how organizations use language to protect their reputation. Such studies overlook some critical factors such as power, social class and context. From the perspective of these conventional theories, a crisis is treated merely as an isolated emergency, ignoring the social status and power relations of relevant actors. For this reason, they proposed integrating Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) into the theoretical framework of crisis communication. This helps prevent institutional discourse from being marginalized and stops other diverse voices from being suppressed. In their analysis of the crisis communication, they found that the company's press releases presented a contradictory narrative: it claimed to care for employees and described the incident as an accident, while prioritizing business operations, downplaying fatalities and obscuring layoff arrangements. The local community accepted the company's crisis framing due to its reliance on the enterprise for jobs. The lack of legal constraints and trade unions formed a silencing mechanism, which stifled the voices of injured workers.

Furthermore, an increasing number of scholars have approached crisis communication from the perspective of discourse analysis. Peng Xiubin (2020) applied Fairclough's three-dimensional framework to examine

discursive conflicts in transnational consular crises, and found that multiple stakeholders demonstrated polyphonic features resulting from disparities in discourse power and ideology. Wang Yan (2015) adopted Critical Discourse Analysis to explore crisis communication on social media, and analyzed the linguistic, discursive and social practice characteristics reflected in the online discussions about "APEC Blue" on Weibo.

However, obvious research gaps still exist. First, although foreign scholars have pioneered the application of CDA to crisis communication (Dunn & Eble, 2014), relevant empirical studies remain inadequate, especially those targeting policy-driven crises. Second, most domestic studies focus on the framework of SCCT and the strategic classification of IRT, while few adopt Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model to analyze enterprises' official crisis statements. Third, there is a paucity of comparative CDA research on foreign-invested enterprises in China and domestic enterprises under the same policy-driven crisis.

To address these research gaps, this paper takes Apple and Huawei as comparative cases. Drawing on Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model and incorporating core analytical perspectives of SCCT and IRT, this study analyzes the discursive differences between the two companies in the early stage of the tariff war and explores the underlying causes.

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary field that explores the relationships between discourse events and social-political, cultural factors. This theory focuses on how discourse is shaped by social power, and in turn, how it influences power relations. It holds that discourse is not a neutral linguistic tool, but a representation of social structures, power relations and ideology (Fairclough, 1992). Restricted by social power, discourse also reacts upon it and participates in the construction of social status. It can legitimize certain behaviors while marginalizing particular voices. Such research focuses of CDA make it highly applicable to crisis contexts. In crisis situations, corporate discourse serves not merely as a means of information transmission, but also as a battlefield for meaning contestation, responsibility allocation and legitimacy maintenance (Dunn & Eble, 2014).

The three-dimensional analytical model proposed by Fairclough (1995, 2013) provides a practical analytical framework for CDA. The text dimension centers on the surface structure and concrete manifestations of discourse, namely its linguistic features and content, including lexical choices, grammatical structures, rhetorical devices and sign systems. The discourse practice dimension acts as a bridge connecting texts with social-cultural practices. It investigates the production, distribution and consumption of discourse, exploring how discourse is generated and applied in specific social contexts, and how these processes shape its meaning and functions. This dimension also examines how discourse subjects construct and convey their identity, stance and viewpoints through language.

The social practice dimension explores the connections between discourse and power relations, social identity, cultural values, as well as how these connections govern the operation and development of society. It reveals the vital role of discourse in social transformation and cultural inheritance. The three dimensions form a progressive logical relationship: textual features are the products of discursive practices, while discursive practices are constrained by social structures.

2.2 Auxiliary Framework of Crisis Communication Theories

Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) was put forward by Coombs (2007). It argues that crisis communication strategies should be formulated according to specific crisis situations and the public's perception of an organization's accountability, rather than adopting one-size-fits-all communication approaches. Rooted in attribution theory, SCCT guides organizations to select optimal communication strategies across diverse crisis scenarios so as to protect organizational reputation to the fullest extent. It categorizes crises into victim crises, accidental crises and preventable crises, and matches them with corresponding strategies such as denial, diminishment and rebuilding. In this study, the tariff war and entity list sanctions are defined as victim crises driven by external policies, which serve as a reference for interpreting the strategic choices of Apple and Huawei.

Image Repair Theory (IRT), proposed by Benoit (1997), helps organizations and individuals conduct targeted communication after crises to safeguard reputation, regain public trust and rebuild public image. The theory summarizes five major image repair strategies: denial, evasion of responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. This study adopts IRT as a classification tool to identify image repair practices embedded in the two companies' discourse.

This research primarily draws on SCCT and IRT to categorize crisis communication discourse strategies. Nevertheless, these two theories only focus on superficial

content and neglect the power relations and ideology behind discourse (Dunn & Eble, 2014). For this reason, the present study integrates Critical Discourse Analysis with crisis communication research to achieve dual objectives: strategy identification and critical interpretation.

The analytical framework of this study is structured as follows. First, it identifies linguistic features and classifies the communicative functions of crisis discourse. Second, it examines the production, dissemination, audiences and intentions of discourse from the perspective of discursive practice. Finally, it explores the underlying social causes of discursive differences at the social practice level. With this integrated framework, the study not only analyzes the micro-linguistic differences in the crisis communication discourse of Apple and Huawei, but also uncovers the profound social factors leading to such differences.

III. METHOD

This study mainly collects public statements, open letters, internal letters, and media interviews issued by Apple and Huawei between 2018 and 2020, establishing a small corpus consisting of 13 texts in total. The tariff war began in 2018, eased in 2020, and in 2025, the Trump administration again provoked trade disputes under the pretext of tariffs, triggering short-term accelerated turmoil in global financial markets. However, both companies adopted a silent strategy toward the 2025 trade war, which bears no value for discourse analysis. Therefore, this study focuses on the core outbreak period of the Trump tariff war and entity list sanctions from 2018 to 2020, when the two companies released the most intensive crisis statements. After 2020, the frequency of discourse from both sides declined significantly and strategies stabilized, justifying the focus on the critical period of crisis outbreak and response.

This study adopts a two-case comparative research design, selecting Apple and Huawei as comparative cases. Both are leading global technology firms with high degrees of globalization. They have similar global supply chain layouts and direct exposure to the 2018–2020 Trump tariff policies and entity list sanctions—thus sharing identical crisis contexts. As a U.S. multinational and a Chinese local enterprise respectively, they clearly illustrate discursive strategy differences under different ownership regimes. Both also possess abundant publicly available, authoritative crisis response texts suitable for discourse analysis.

The basic analytical procedures are as follows:

This research carries out analysis along three dimensions with matched theoretical tools. At the Text Dimension, the analytical content includes high-frequency words, modal verbs, personal reference, transitivity structures, metaphors and rhetorical devices. The theoretical tools adopted CDA textual analysis combined with IRT strategy classification. At the Discursive Practice Dimension, the analytical content covers production modes, communication channels, audience positioning, and release intentions. This dimension draws on CDA discursive practice analysis and SCCT audience strategy. At the Social Practice Dimension, the analytical content involves corporate ownership nature, supply chain structure, market dependence, and political and economic contexts. The theoretical tools applied consist of CDA social practice analysis as well as power and ideology analysis.

IV. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter adopts Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis model to systematically compare and analyze the crisis communication discourse of Apple and Huawei in the early stage of the 2018–2020 tariff war from three dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice. Through detailed discourse analysis, this chapter aims to reveal the typological differences in discursive strategies between the two enterprises and their underlying social motivations.

4.1 Textual Dimension: Linguistic Strategies and Crisis Response Functions

4.1.1 High-frequency Word Analysis

Word frequency statistics were conducted on the 13 corpus texts of the two companies, from which the most frequently used core content words were extracted.

Apple frequently uses words such as "US", "tariffs", "consumers", "economy" and "jobs", framing the tariff crisis as an economic issue and deliberately avoiding references to political actors and confrontational expressions. This approach abstracts and depoliticizes crisis attribution: the crisis is presented as an objective economic consequence of tariff policies, rather than a deliberate act by any party.

The term "美国" appears repeatedly in Huawei's corpus, directly identifying the U.S. as the responsible party. Meanwhile, Huawei adopts confrontational terms like "反对" and "政治驱动", establishing a clear external attribution framework. In addition, expressions including "影响有限" and "继续" are consistently used to convey the company's resilience and confidence in sustained operation, so as to reassure stakeholders.

Overall, Apple abstracts crisis attribution through lexical choices to mitigate direct confrontation risks, which falls into the responsibility avoidance strategy defined by SCCT. Huawei explicitly constructs a "victim-perpetrator" framework for attribution, thereby justifying its subsequent corrective actions.

4.1.2 Modality System Analysis

Linguistic differences lead to varied uses of modal verbs. In conventional modal verb analysis, researchers usually exclude idiomatic uses of words such as “will” and “would”. However, in Critical Discourse Analysis, modals reflect speakers’ certainty about propositions and claims over corporate controllability, serving as vital linguistic resources for building credibility in crisis communication. Therefore, this study includes modal verbs in the analysis.

Apple extensively employs modals including “will”, “would”, “could” and “may”. While “will” and “would” are common collocations in English, the company alternates them with “could” and “may”, and rarely uses “must” or “can”, showing a preference for conditional and predictive tones. For instance: "Tariffs would affect prices of Apple products" and "Higher tariffs would weigh on its global competitiveness". Such expressions demonstrate Apple’s objective and prudent stance toward the impacts of the tariff war, leaving gaps for potential policy changes. It adopts a rational persuasion strategy to maintain its corporate image.

In contrast, Huawei delivers highly definite statements and seldom uses vague modals. Examples include “华为经营受到的实质性影响有限”. .This high degree of certainty boosts internal morale and external trust, corresponding to the corrective action strategy in Image Repair Theory, which indicates the enterprise is fully prepared and capable of overcoming difficulties.

To conclude, Apple presents a neutral image by adopting an objective and cautious attitude and avoiding explicit commitments. Huawei, by contrast, relies heavily on high-certainty modals to forge a positive image of actively resisting improper practices and safeguarding stakeholders’ interests.

4.1.3 Personal Reference and Identity Construction

In English, apart from modal verbs, modal adjectives and modal adverbs, modal meanings can also be conveyed through personal pronouns, main verbs, tenses, direct and indirect speech (Xin, 2005). The choice of personal pronouns reflects power relations and solidarity between parties.

Apple frequently uses "we" and "our" to refer to itself in official announcements, and repeatedly mentions "U.S. consumers" and "American jobs". This blurs the dividing line between Apple and U.S. interests and links the two closely together. For example: "Our concern is that the U.S. will be hardest hit." This is a strategy to build a community of interests. Through such words, Apple conveys to the U.S. government that tariffs harm American consumers as a whole rather than just the company itself, and that its remarks are intended to safeguard U.S. interests.

Huawei uses terms such as “华为” and “我们” in public statements released on its official website. In internal letters, it adopts expressions like “海思儿女” and “我们”, integrating readers into the same interest group and fostering a sense of community. Meanwhile, it explicitly names external actors behind the crisis with terms such as “超级大国” and “美国”, clearly identifying the responsible party. This strategy shapes an identity of resistance and strengthens employees’ sense of belonging and shared destiny.

In summary, Apple equates its own interests with those of the United States via personal pronouns. Targeting the U.S. government as its audience, it positions itself as a defender of American interests. By contrast, Huawei addresses its internal community through pronoun choices and defines the enterprise as a collective united in the fight against external pressures.

4.1.4 Transitivity and Responsibility Attribution

Halliday’s transitivity system categorizes human experiences of the real world into six types of processes via grammatical structures. Even when describing the same event, adjusting the position of participants or adopting different process types can produce distinct rhetorical effects. To a large extent, the selection of process types and the arrangement of participants are determined by the speaker’s ideology (Cai, 2008).

A material process refers to the process of performing an action. It mainly consists of an actor, the action itself and a goal. The actor and goal are generally nouns or pronouns, while the action is realized by dynamic verbs (Wang, 2008).

The analysis reveals that Apple mostly takes tariffs or policy as the actor in clauses, such as "Tariffs would affect prices..." and "Higher tariffs would weigh on global competitiveness". With policies acting as the agent, Apple presents itself as the affected party. This structure deflects accountability: it only illustrates the consequences of policies without assigning blame to any party, which corresponds to the responsibility evasion strategy in Image Repair Theory.

Huawei adopts two major transitivity patterns. The first is material processes with “美国” or “美国政府” as

the actor, as seen in the example: “美国选择在这个时间点做出这个决定”. The second features material process with “华为” as the actor, for instance: “华为反对这一决定”. The alternating subjects construct three roles: perpetrator, victim and resister. Huawei directly attributes the crisis to the United States, which reflects external crisis responsibility attribution in SCCT.

To sum up, Apple relies on material processes and uses transitivity choices to mitigate confrontation. By contrast, Huawei uses transitivity to defend itself and take corrective actions, so as to maintain a favorable public image.

4.1.5 Rhetorical Strategies

In Critical Discourse Analysis, metaphor is more than a rhetorical device. It is closely linked to cognitive mechanisms and reveals the underlying attitudes, intentions and emotions of discourse communities. Apple favors metaphors related to “economic chains” and “weight”. For example: "The burden of the proposed tariffs will fall much more heavily on the United States than on China." Here, abstract economic costs are materialized as a tangible burden for easier comprehension. Another example: "U.S. tariffs would also weigh on Apple’s global competitiveness." This compares intangible negative impacts to physical weight, creating a vivid sense of pressure. By framing the hardships caused by tariffs as physical obstacles, Apple reduces the issue to a matter of economic efficiency rather than political confrontation, further consolidating its depoliticized stance.

In contrast, Huawei mainly employs “war”, “disaster” and “legal” metaphors to shape its corporate image. Its internal letters contain expressions such as “极限生存”, “长征” and “备胎芯片全部转正”. A typical example reads: “多年前，还是云淡风轻的季节，公司做出了极限生存的假设，预计有一天，所有美国的先进芯片和技术将不可获得，而华为仍将持续为客户服务。为了这个以为永远不会发生的假设，数千海思儿女，走上了科技史上最为悲壮的长征，为公司的生存打造‘备胎’.”

“长征” symbolizes a great journey from the verge of defeat to ultimate victory, marked by setbacks, sacrifices and internal struggles. By drawing on this metaphor to describe technological difficulties amid the tariff war, Huawei evokes people’s perception of hardship associated with “长征” and stirs national sentiment. It elevates a commercial crisis to a national narrative and facilitates emotional mobilization.

To conclude, Huawei uses metaphors for emotional mobilization and historical narration to foster collective identity. Apple, on the other hand, adopts a rational approach and simplifies political disputes by presenting factual implications.

4.2 Discursive Practice Dimension: Production, Communication and Intentions

4.2.1 Communication Channels and Audiences

Apple’s crisis statements are primarily released via its official website. Drafted jointly by its government affairs and legal teams, these documents include formal letters from CEO to the USTR and press releases published on the corporate news page. Such a highly institutionalized and professional production process features elite lobbying. All statements go through strict reviews by the legal department before release to avert potential legal risks.

Huawei adopts diversified discourse production approaches, with strategic information leakage as its most prominent feature. The internal letter issued by He Tingbo, president of HiSilicon, was originally intended for employees only, yet it was fully republished by mainstream media including People’s Daily and Xinhua News Agency shortly after release, becoming a landmark event for emotional mobilization. Internal speeches by Ren Zhengfei are also widely spread to the public via the company’s internal community. This strategy of publicizing internal documents creates an impression of sincerity, facilitating emotional mobilization and corporate image repair.

4.2.2 Communication Channels and Audiences

Apple targets U.S. policymakers, investors and premium business media through channels including its official newsroom, USTR public letter repository and CNBC, adopting a narrowcasting strategy. It aims to precisely influence key decision-makers and avoid widespread controversies on social media.

By contrast, Huawei builds a multi-dimensional communication network covering official websites, internal communities, mainstream media and social platforms. It reaches out to the domestic public, employees, partners and international audiences simultaneously, fulfilling the dual functions of uniting internal members and voicing opposition externally.

4.2.3 Release Intentions

The core audiences targeted by Apple and Huawei in their crisis communication are completely different, and their communication intentions also differ significantly. As an American multinational enterprise, Apple's crisis statements are mainly released to the US government, investors, and American consumers. The main communication intentions include seeking tariff exemptions, avoiding excessive cost transmission,

maintaining long-term global competitiveness and a politically neutral stance in the tariff dispute.

In contrast, Huawei's communication audience includes domestic public, internal employees, international public opinion, and global supply chain partners. Correspondingly, Huawei's crisis communication aims to boost the morale of the internal enterprise, demonstrate its independent technological research and development capabilities, obtain extensive moral support from both domestic and international parties, and expose the inherent political nature of the US sanctions.

4.3 Social Practice Dimension: Structural Root Causes

Corporate public discourse in response to political risks is constrained by the global political and economic system. This section analyzes the disparities in corporate discursive strategies and their underlying logic from three perspectives: ownership identity, supply chain structure and market dependence.

4.3.1 Ownership Nature and Corporate Identity

As a publicly listed company in the United States, Apple is subject to domestic securities regulation. Adopting a depoliticized and economically rational stance is a reasonable and necessary choice. Open opposition to the U.S. government would trigger regulatory risks, while full alignment with official policies would contradict its positioning as a global brand. Accordingly, Apple tries to affect policy decisions by private, off-public lobbying. Its public statements mainly elaborate business operations amid tariffs so as to uphold corporate image.

Though a private enterprise, Huawei has been regarded as a symbol of China’s technological company. While this identity brings extra political risks in the global market, it also legitimizes the company and helps it win public support domestically.

4.3.2 Supply Chain Structure

As a leader in the consumer electronics and technology sector, Apple operates a highly globalized supply chain. Core design work is conducted in the U.S., components are sourced worldwide, and final assembly takes place in China. The tariff war directly drove up its manufacturing costs and hurt sales. For this reason, Apple’s discourse conveys to the U.S. government that harming the company equals harming American interests. This serves as its core appeal for tariff exemptions.

To offset rising global costs and technological risks caused by tariffs, Huawei replaced imported chips with self-developed alternatives. The Entity List primarily cut off its access to advanced technologies, including chip manufacturing services, 5G chips and the Android operating system. Its backup plan was launched specifically to tackle such crises. Therefore, Huawei frames the situation as an existential challenge and centers its discourse on technological independence and breakthroughs.

4.3.3 Market Dependence and Political Context

With a globally distributed supply chain, Apple relies on China for production and the U.S. as its largest consumer market. This split operational model requires it to balance the interests of its home country and host economies. So its public statements focus on seeking favourable policies and reconciling different interests. It avoids aggressive, confrontational language so that it does not upset either side.

After being added to the Entity List, Huawei largely lost access to the U.S. market and no longer needs to cater to American consumers. It therefore adopts a victim narrative to seek international moral support. Its discourse is shaped by the context of technological blockades and survival security, aiming to rally internal support and expose unfair treatment externally.

V. DISCUSSION

This chapter systematically compares the crisis communication discourse of Apple and Huawei from three dimensions: text, discursive practice and social practice. At the textual level, Apple establishes a rational and restrained framework centered on "efficiency and mutual benefit" by adopting ambiguous attribution, conditional modal verbs, impersonal subjects and metaphors related to economic chains. In contrast, Huawei builds an emotional and confrontational framework focusing on "survival and development" through definite attribution, high-certainty statements, alternating subjects, as well as war and crisis metaphors. In terms of discursive practice, Apple applies institutionalized lobbying and narrowcasting strategies to target U.S. policymakers precisely. Huawei, however, uses the strategy of publicizing internal documents and a multi-layered communication network to unite internal members and voice opposition externally. From the perspective of social practice, ownership nature, supply chain structure, market dependence and the overall political and economic context collectively define the scope of discursive choices for both companies.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the analytical method, integrating Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) and Image Restoration

Theory, to systematically compare and analyze the crisis communication discourses of Apple and Huawei during the early stage of the Trump tariff war (2018–2020). The main findings are as follows:

First, Huawei constructs a "survival and development" discourse frame through crisis rhetoric, directly attributing the crisis to external political suppression. It employs a "perpetrator–victim–resister" transitivity structure, reinforcing a confrontational stance via high-certainty modal verbs and war metaphors. In contrast, Apple builds an "efficiency and mutual benefit" frame, blurring crisis attribution, omitting responsible agents, using conditional modality and economic-chain metaphors, and framing issues as matters of economic efficiency rather than political confrontation.

Second, regarding image restoration, Huawei prioritizes "corrective action" and "justification", while mobilizing emotions and historical narratives to gain public recognition. Apple, however, mainly adopts "responsibility evasion" and "reducing aggressiveness" to avoid open confrontation.

Third, Apple engages with the government through institutionalized, elite dialogue and narrowcasting: all statements are drafted by government affairs and legal teams, submitted as formal letters to policymakers, precisely targeting U.S. decision-makers and avoiding unnecessary social media controversies. Huawei, by contrast, publicly releases internal letters and relies on a multi-layered mass communication network. Mainstream media republish internal letters from Huawei executives to arouse public empathy. Meanwhile, its official website and social-media platforms consolidate staff morale, foster a strong community identity and deliver unified opposition externally.

Fourth, the differences in crisis discourse choices stem from differences in ownership nature, supply chain structure, market dependence, and political-economic context. As a U.S. company, Apple must maintain stable relations with its home government, making depoliticization the most rational strategy. As a leading Chinese tech firm, Huawei enjoys domestic legitimacy; its confrontational discourse consolidates internal consensus and secures moral support.

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Dilemmas in Selecting Early Reading Content for Young Children: A Family Perspective

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Abstract— *Early reading plays a well-documented role in young children's language acquisition, cognitive development, and emotional socialisation. Within the family—the primary site of early literacy—parents act as "gatekeepers" who determine which books children encounter. Yet their choices are not purely pedagogical; they are entangled with educational anxiety, commercial marketing, children's preferences, and digital media shifts. This conceptual paper examines the multifaceted dilemmas facing Chinese families when selecting early reading materials. It identifies four parental-level obstacles: insufficient literary knowledge, developmental misjudgements, consumerist influences, and intergenerational conflicts. It then analyses structural imbalances in the children's book market, including the dominance of functional texts over aesthetic works, the prevalence of moralistic narratives, and the underrepresentation of high-quality indigenous picture books. Finally, it explores how algorithm-driven recommendations and screen-based reading further complicate selection. The analysis concludes that these dilemmas reflect a deeper tension between adult-imposed standards and children's authentic needs, calling for a more child-centred approach to content choice.*

Keywords— *early reading; content selection; family literacy; children's literature; media ecology*

I. INTRODUCTION

The foundational role of early reading in young children's language development, cognitive construction, and emotional socialisation has been repeatedly confirmed by scientific research. The family is the primary setting in which early reading takes place, and parents, as "gatekeepers" of reading content, exert a profound influence on the accumulation of children's reading experience. In the home context, however, the selection of reading materials is not a purely educational decision; it is a complex practice interwoven with parental educational anxiety, the commercial logic of the market, children's aesthetic preferences, and the transformation of media technologies. When the traditional belief that "opening a book is always beneficial" encounters the chaotic and uneven children's book market, the question of "what to read" becomes far more perplexing than "whether to read."

For parents, the ideal is to possess a basic literacy in children's literature and aesthetic judgment, to understand the age-specific characteristics and developmental needs of young children, and to maintain a clear critical awareness of the children's book market. The convergence of these three demands, however, leaves most parents feeling ill-equipped in practice. The difficulties manifest in several interrelated dimensions, which this paper aims to explore. Following a conceptual analysis of parental dilemmas, market imbalances, and media-environment complexities, the conclusion synthesises these issues and suggests directions for future empirical research.

II. PARENTAL SELECTION DILEMMAS

2.1 Insufficient Parental Literacy in Children's Literature

Most parents' reading experience is predominantly adult-oriented, and they have only a limited grasp of the stylistic features, artistic standards, and classic canon of children's literature. When selecting books, they tend to prioritise "usefulness"—such as character recognition, knowledge acquisition, and moral instruction—over literary quality, thereby turning reading into a means of early academic preparation. Works that are genuinely outstanding in both literary and child-oriented terms may be dismissed because they contain "too few words" or "do not teach any clear lesson." One parent candidly remarked on a parenting forum: "Spending dozens of yuan on a picture book with only a dozen words feels like a waste." This habit of measuring "value" by "word count" reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of the picture-book form, whose essence lies in the narrative art of text-image interplay rather than in verbal quantity.

2.2 Misunderstanding of Young Children's Developmental Characteristics

Children of different ages differ markedly in cognitive level, language ability, and interests. The Guidelines for Learning and Development of Children Aged 3–6 (Ministry of Education, 2012) point out that three-year-olds enjoy repetitive rhymes, while five-year-olds are capable of actively creating their own rhymes; three-year-olds need simple cognitive picture books, whereas five-year-olds prefer narrative picture books with a distinct artistic logic. In practice, however, many parents follow the anxious logic of "the earlier, the better" and choose content that is developmentally too advanced, or they make purchases casually based on vague impressions with a "good enough" attitude. As a result, mismatches between content and the child's developmental stage are common. Surveys indicate that a considerable proportion of parents select picture books whose plot complexity far exceeds the cognitive processing capacity of children under three, causing the child to lose interest within a few pages; parents then mistakenly attribute the problem to the child's "dislike of reading."

2.3 Erosion of Rational Choice by Consumerism

In the marketing discourse of children's books, labels such as "award-winning," "bestseller," and "celebrity recommended" are proliferated, while external attributes like "hardcover," "large format," and "imported" are endowed with excessive symbolic value. This transforms book selection from an educational judgment into a marker of identity under consumerism. Data from a major e-commerce platform show that boxed sets labelled "international award-winning picture books" sell several times better than comparable unlabelled products, yet some of these awards are often fabricated or lack transparent accreditation. Faced with information asymmetry, parents tend to substitute price and packaging for in-depth content evaluation, mistakenly believing that "expensive" necessarily means "good."

2.4 The Hidden Influence of Intergenerational Value Conflicts

In Chinese families, grandparents often play an active role in young children's early reading, making content selection a process of intergenerational negotiation and even contestation. Systematic differences between generations in views of childhood, reading, and education constitute a dilemma dimension that is easily overlooked but deeply consequential. One mother mentioned in an interview that her choice of Where the Wild Things Are was rejected by the grandparents because of its "dark illustrations" and "strange story," and was replaced by a more "understandable" and "educative" word book. While parents tend to value imaginative stimulation, grandparents lean towards safe, practical, and morally explicit content. The resulting tension over selection criteria often ends in a contest of adult authority, while the child's genuine interests and needs are sidelined.

III. STRUCTURAL IMBALANCES IN THE CHILDREN'S BOOK MARKET

The dilemma of content selection is not only a matter of "who chooses" but is also deeply embedded in "what is available to choose." Although the current children's book market is extraordinarily abundant in quantity, its content structure displays serious imbalances that cannot be ignored.

3.1 Crowding Out of Aesthetic Materials by Functional Materials

Functional reading materials—such as literacy cards, thinking-training books, and behavioural-norm picture books—constitute the "essential" category for family early reading. These materials are designed with explicit instrumental goals, reducing reading to a quantifiable and assessable training exercise. On the bestseller list of a prominent e-commerce platform, functional titles account for more than 60% of the top fifty, while aesthetic picture books that emphasise the artistic interplay of text and image, and that leave room for imagination and contemplation (Nikolajeva, 2014), are notably scarce. Such aesthetic books are often perceived as "useless" and therefore fail to gain priority in family selection—even though they are precisely the vehicles for cultivating

young children's aesthetic sensibility and literary awareness. In this process, the aesthetic enlightenment function of reading is systematically marginalised.

3.2 Erosion of Narrative Quality by Moral Didacticism

Many storybooks for young children follow a rigid moralistic structure of "wrongdoing – punishment – correction," featuring flat characters, formulaic plots, and impoverished language. A typical behavioural-norm picture book might recount: "Little Bear does not wash his hands – gets a stomach ache – goes to hospital – thereafter washes his hands carefully," with characters serving merely as symbols of the lesson. This kind of "disciplinary text disguised as a story" sacrifices narrative richness and openness in the name of education; children gain not the expansion of imagination but the repeated inculcation of standardised behaviours. More troublingly, some parents regard this explicit "educational value" as a marker of quality, creating a low-level lock-in between supply and demand.

3.3 Imbalance Between Imported and Original Works and Its Cultural Implications

Imported picture books have clear advantages in artistic quality and multicultural perspective, but over-reliance on imports weakens the connection between young children's early reading experiences and their own cultural context. Some imported works depict life scenes, interpersonal norms, and value assumptions that are distant from Chinese families' experiential world—for example, frequent references to fireplaces, attics, sleighs, or modes of interaction that emphasise individualistic expression—requiring additional cultural translation for young children. Of course, excellent imported works have an irreplaceable role in broadening children's international horizons and exposing them to diverse artistic styles; the problem lies in the serious disproportion. Although indigenous Chinese picture books have made progress in recent years, they still lag behind in artistic maturity and market recognition. Truly original works that embody both Chinese aesthetic character and child-friendliness remain rare. A telling contrast is that imported classics such as Goodnight Moon and The Very Hungry Caterpillar have been popular in China for decades, while indigenous picture books that can rival them and are widely adopted by families are still few and far between.

IV. NEW COMPLEXITIES ARISING FROM CHANGES IN THE MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

The proliferation of smartphones, tablets, and various reading apps has expanded the channels through which young children access "reading content" from paper books to screens. While convenient, this shift has profoundly altered the logic of content selection.

4.1 Algorithmic Recommendations Replacing Parental Choice

Digital reading platforms promote "age-appropriate recommendations" and "smart book lists," thereby transferring part of the selection power from parents to algorithms. Yet the underlying logic of these algorithms is user retention and commercial monetisation; the materials they tend to recommend are highly interactive, stimulating, and potentially addictive—qualities contrary to the deep attention and imagination cultivation that early reading should foster. Researchers who tracked the recommendation mechanism of a popular children's reading app found that its "smart matching" results overwhelmingly favoured "interactive picture books" with game-like features and sound effects triggered by tapping each page, while works with calm illustrations and literary texts were buried due to "short user dwell time." Parents cede judgment for convenience, but may not fully appreciate the cost of this delegation.

4.2 Dilution of Reading Quality by Screen Reading

The sound effects, animations, and interactive elements in digital picture books, while seemingly enriching the reading experience, may replace the inherent meaning of the text with sensory stimulation, turning children from "constructors of meaning" into "recipients of stimuli." A kindergarten teacher observed that children who regularly used reading apps showed more frequent attention drift during group reading of paper picture books, constantly poking the pages and expecting "something to happen." When children become accustomed to immediate audiovisual feedback, their sustained attention tends to decline significantly when they return to paper picture books that require active imagination and patient contemplation. The change in medium thus alters the very nature of reading.

4.3 Parents' Media Management Dilemmas

Some parents, caught up in the seemingly irresistible discourse of "digital natives," regard digital reading as an inevitable adaptation to the times and relax their screening and regulation of media use; others swing to the opposite extreme, completely rejecting digital reading and viewing screens as purely harmful. Neither approach embodies a rational analysis of media attributes: the crucial issue is "what to read" and "how to read," not simply "whether to use" digital devices. A more constructive practice, adopted by some families, is to confine electronic devices to the specific function of "accessing high-quality animated picture books" with strict time limits, while maintaining paper books as the mainstay of parent-child shared

reading, thus achieving complementarity rather than substitution.

V. CONCLUSION

This conceptual analysis has identified three interconnected layers of difficulty in selecting early reading content for young children in Chinese families: parental dilemmas rooted in limited literary literacy, developmental misconceptions, consumerist pressures, and intergenerational conflicts; structural imbalances in the children's book market, where functional and didactic materials crowd out aesthetically rich and narratively complex works, and where imported titles disproportionately overshadow indigenous creations; and emerging complexities from the digital media environment, including algorithmic recommendation biases, the attentional costs of screen reading, and parents' ambivalent media management strategies.

The primary advantage of this analysis is its systematic integration of these dimensions, highlighting how they mutually reinforce each other—for example, how parental reliance on bestseller lists amplifies market imbalances, and how algorithmic recommendations further erode critical selection skills. The limitations, however, are equally clear: the findings are drawn from secondary sources, observational reports, and illustrative anecdotes rather than systematic empirical data. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track how selection practices evolve as children grow and as the media landscape changes; cross-cultural comparative studies would also illuminate which dilemmas are specific to the Chinese context and which are generalisable. Intervention studies—such as parent training programmes in children's literature appreciation or co-reading protocols for digital picture books—could provide actionable evidence to alleviate the identified dilemmas.

Ultimately, the dilemmas of selecting early reading content in the family are a microcosm of the relationship between the adult world and the child's world. When we seriously address the question of "what to read for young children," we are in effect asking: are we willing to lower ourselves to children's eye level, see the world through their eyes, and, by that standard, choose for them the books that are truly worth encountering?

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Traumatic Saga of Dysfunctional and Domestic Depression in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*

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Abstract— *The intangible subjectivity of beauty creates inferiority and deep perpetual impact in the psyche of innocent child, and The Bluest Eye is the fine epitome of it. Toni Morrison's has indignantly exhibited the sobs and sighs of psychologically inflected wounds of the black family. The concept of the beauty has to be formed to establish the new and equal civil liberties in the world, which will inspire man to look at each other as human being. The novelist depicts a tormenting study of trauma rooted in dysfunctional family and domestic depression within African-American societies. The researcher focuses on how systemic racism, internalized notions of beauty, and socioeconomic marginalization inflict deep psychological wounds on individuals, particularly children. The novel reveals the emotional neglect, domestic violence, and cracked parental associations generate a cycle of despair and self-loathing. It also shows domestic spaces not as situations of protection but as arenas of sustained trauma, where inherited pain is silently transmitted across generations. By interrogating the imposed standards of white beauty and their destructive impact on Black identity. Pecola, the novel's protagonist, has been victimized due to her blackness and ugliness.*

Keywords— ***Dysfunctional, intangible, indignantly, marginalization, strategic, bigoted, hideousness.***

Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye,* published in 1970, symbolizes as an insight into the destructive forces of racism, internalized self-hatred, and the breakdown of domestic foundation within Afro-American societies. It is universally proved and accepted that the futuristic inclusive growth of a child lies in the foundation laid at the initial stage in the family by the parents. The western bigoted idea of beauty is the basic cause of Pecola's traumatic and emotional collapse. The racist standards of beauty destruct self-worth and contribute to emotional and psychological suffering within Black families like Breedloves. Morrison portrays depression not only as an individual condition but as the result of poverty, racism, neglect, and family violence. "The concept of physical beauty as a virtue is one of the dumbest, most pernicious and destructive ideas of the Western world." [1] Pecola feels that blackness has condemned her to ugliness and neglected the Western standards of beauty under racial pressure of the dominant culture. The novelist demonstrates that these beauty standards contribute directly to Pecola Breedlove's emotional and psychological breakdown, showing how external ideals can shape and damage an individual's identity.

Psychologically if a child is constantly imbibed that he/she is not good looking or unattractive, he/she starts believing in it, similarly in his essay Ruth Rosenberg states, "In cantering her story on an ordinary girl who is taught by her colourist culture that she is ugly, Toni Morrison portrays the cruel ground which forecloses Pecola's longing to be loved."[2] For Pecola's family, the Breedloves, life was just one disappointment after another. Poor, black, and ugly left them little room for self-improvement. The Breedloves made their home in a storefront and,

> They lived there because they were poor and black, and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly...Except for the father, Cholly, whose ugliness was behavior, the rest of the family-Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy

> their Breedlove, and Pecola Breedlove-wore ugliness, put it on, so to speak, although it did not belong to them. [3]

The concept of ugliness that did not belong to them was always haunting their lives; everywhere they looked the society shone back at them like a giant mirror portraying nothing but hideousness, which is resulted from biased mind, and incomprehensible to any reasonable person.

The nurturing at home assists a lot in the life of any individual. The opening epigraph of the novel from a Dick and Jane, is strategic placement to signal the tension between idealized social narratives and the lived realities of those excluded from them. The peaceful image of "Dick and Jane and the pink air around them" functions as a cultural standard against which the characters' lives are measured and found wanting. The irony is painful: where white middle-class families are described as happy and complete, the Breedloves are fragmented and emotionally wounded. The contrast between these worlds underscores the novel's central concern with how exclusion from dominant cultural ideals shapes personal and familial identity. "The master had said, 'You are ugly people.' They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard, every movie, every glance." [4]

The novel exhibits the most upsetting and disturbing domestic system, at the both levels: personal and social. Barbara Christian and Deborah McDowell emphasize that the Breedlove family's dysfunction is deeply rooted in internalized racism, economic deprivation, and patriarchal violence. Domestic depression in the novel is not merely psychological but structural, shaped by white aesthetic standards and social exclusion. Cholly Breedlove's brutality and Pauline's emotional withdrawal demonstrate how oppression fractures parental roles, turning love into neglect and protection into harm. Thus, Morrison portrays depression as a collective affliction, passed silently across generations. Essentially, the novel is a traumatic saga that exposes how systemic oppression, entrenched poverty, and broken homes collide to inflict emotional injuries on personalities, especially young Black girls like Pecola Breedlove. "Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes... Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope."[5] It shows the agony and urges of young Black girls like Pecola Breedlove. Morrison not only describes Pecola's psychological collapse but also contextualizes the trauma of Pecola. The safe and harmonious atmosphere is the base for the overall development, on the contrary, Pecola's family suffers from low self-esteem which is rooted in the idea that they are basically ugly. The sense of ugliness is hard to shake because the world around them seems to confirm it. The established American beauty standards are the people with white or light skin, graceful and small noses, and blue eyes, but the Breedloves is exception to it. Being confronted with billboard ads, movie stars, and even candy wrappers that present a beauty ideal the Breedloves could not achieve though it is deeply rooted in the hearts of the them.

As a young black girl, Pecola's sense of self is rooted in rejection. She feels and experiences the contempt she perceives in her parents' voices, in the public places where people talk behind her back, and in the general cultural message that equates beauty with whiteness. "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different...Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes." [6] Pecola's obsession with blue eyes captures the central complexity perpetually exists in her mind.

The domestic situation of the Breedlove family can be considered as pathetic and full of neglect, violence, and hopelessness. Cholly Breedlove, Pecola's father, embodies the destructive effects of trauma inflicted by racism and abandonment. His own history—marked by rejection, loneliness, and early encounters with sexual shame—shapes him into an emotionally volatile and abusive father. "When he was drunk, he was dangerous." [7]Cholly's inability to provide a stable and loving home is not merely a result of individual pathology but reflects the broader social conditions that have systematically stripped Black men of dignity and opportunities for healthy emotional expression. His tragic life story reveals the cyclical nature of trauma: Cholly's father abandoned him, and he, in turn, abandons his children emotionally and physically. "They fought each other with the same, unnatural violence that they displayed toward their children."[8] In this way, the novel illustrates how structural forces such as racism and poverty not only harm individuals but also corrode the familial bonds that might otherwise mitigate suffering.

Pauline Breedlove, Pecola's mother, embodies the interplay between internalized oppression and domestic dysfunction. "She beat Pecola with a blue-handled knife." [9] This stark moment shows how abuse is normalized and sudden within the Breedlove household. When Mr. Cholly has burned the house, Pecola moved to Macteer's house and entered it. In Claudia's words, the Breedlove family has been suddenly homeless and defenceless, and outside the bounds of normal. She remembered how important it was for her as the youngest sister to be without shelter or homeless. She describes it as the true danger of existence and says: There is a difference between being put out and being put outdoors. If you are put out, you go somewhere else; if you are outdoors, there is no place to go. The

distinction was subtle but final. Outdoors was the end of something, an irrevocable, physical fact, defining and complementing our metaphysical condition. Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or creep singly up into the major folds of the garment. [10]

The impact of domestic torture on Pecola is further complicated by the community's reaction to her and her family. "Adults do not talk to us—they give us directions."[11] It proves that the family disturbance is the real cause of the Pecola's ruined world. The shame and ridicule Pecola experiences at school and in social interactions reinforce her belief that she is undeserving of love and beauty. Rather than finding solace among her peers, Pecola is continually reminded of her perceived inferiority, "All of our waste which we dumped on her and which she absorbed." [12] Pecola's internal mind becomes the waste ground of the self-loathing and indignant thoughts

The sexual assault by Cholly is inhuman and unbearable act from the general perspective, it is the dreadful blending violent and tender feelings when he is thirty-seven years old when he rapes his daughter Pecola. He is a drunker, comes upon her while washing the dishes, a weak body, and a ragged dress. He thinks, "Why did she have to look so whipped? She was a child—unburdened—why wasn't she happy?."[13] Cholly is overcome with the emotion of how much his daughter deserves and needs and how unable he is to do anything useful for her. Lynn Orilla Scott writes: The... incest incident takes place at the end of the chapter recounting the father's life and is told exclusively through the eyes of the father. The reader sees the father's deed as the conclusion of his traumatic moments with intimacy and love —traumatic that are strikingly similar to those of his daughter. [14] Pecola's is taken aback, confused, powerless, and violated. She is unable to speak and only makes a sound, which she describes as "a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat... like the quick loss of air from a circus balloon" [15] Finally, she collapses and experiences a sharp and painful anguish, she does not resist her father, which shows her helplessness and suffocation, even she is not capable to realise whether the family member is exploiting her and her home is unsuitable place for her.

Morrison has revealed the realistic situation of domestic depression in in the novels which functions at several stages such as emotional, financial, cultural social, psychological and cultural, and the consequently the community experiences the inhuman treatment imposed on it. Morrison's representation of depression is not intangible but embodied in the everyday experiences of her characters: in Pauline's weary servitude and emotional withdrawal, in Cholly's volatile outbursts and pathetic surrender to despair, and in Pecola's silent suffering and ultimate psychological fragmentation. The narrative exposes how depression is both an indication and a cause of domestic dysfunction. The last remark in the novel is the fine example of juxtaposition "The damage done was total." [16] the traumas of sexual abuse of children with a near jesting routine of physical humour exemplifies Morrison's realist vision's richness and fullness. It also emphasizes that some individuals, like Pecola, have no defenders interested in defending their innocence, while Mr. Breedlove's behaviors such as beating, sexual harassment, and alcohol damage the whole family is ruined and, all the members are departed from each other, the impact of the domestic disintegration. Individuals are distinctively different from the society around them through the society cruelly victimizing them.

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Confined and Classified: Female Madness and Institutional Power in *Jane Eyre* and *The Woman in White*

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Abstract— *Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847) and Wilkie Collins's The Woman in White (1859–60) represent female madness through spaces of confinement and systems of institutional authority. Although the novels differ in genre and narrative technique, both question the authority through which women are classified as mentally unstable and subsequently deprived of autonomy. This article examines Bertha Mason in Jane Eyre and Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie in The Woman in White to argue that female madness is represented not merely as an individual psychological condition but as a category produced and reinforced through patriarchal, domestic, legal, and medical structures. In Brontë's novel, Bertha's confinement in a concealed room on the third floor of Thornfield removes her from social visibility and limits her narrative presence, while Rochester's account of her condition becomes the dominant explanation of her identity. Collins develops the relationship between madness and institutional power more explicitly through the asylum, where Anne Catherick is associated with insanity and Laura Fairlie is subsequently confined under Anne's identity. This substitution exposes the vulnerability of institutional classification and demonstrates how the designation of madness can become an instrument for controlling female identity and autonomy. Drawing on feminist literary criticism, Foucauldian approaches to madness and disciplinary power, and historical perspectives on Victorian confinement, this article compares the two novels to examine how institutional and patriarchal authority regulate women's bodies, identities, mobility, and testimony. It argues that confinement and classification operate as interconnected mechanisms of power: the classification of women as mentally unstable legitimizes their confinement, while confinement further undermines their ability to define and defend their own identities. Ultimately, both novels expose the precarious relationship between female identity, narrative authority, and institutional power in Victorian culture.*

Keywords— ***female madness, confinement, institutional power, Victorian literature, Jane Eyre, The Woman in White, patriarchy, asylum, Bertha Mason, Anne Catherick***

I. INTRODUCTION

Victorian literature frequently connects female madness with social control, confinement, and patriarchal authority. Women considered mentally unstable could be removed from ordinary social life and placed under institutional or familial control. Giordano notes the "risk of being wrongly considered insane and then confined to a madhouse," demonstrating how the classification of female insanity could become a mechanism of social control.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859–60) provide significant examples of this relationship. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason is confined at Thornfield and represented largely through the accounts of others. Oyebode observes that "Bertha Mason, the madwoman in the attic, is rendered voiceless," linking her lack of narrative authority to her representation as mentally ill (140). Rochester similarly keeps her "locked

away from human intercourse" and conceals her presence from the outside world (140).

In *The Woman in White*, Collins develops this relationship through Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie. Anne is associated with asylum confinement, while Laura is subsequently confined under Anne's identity. Giordano puts it like this:

> Anne was affected by a form of intellectual impairment, probably idiocy, a condition which at the author's time was frequently treated with the confinement to a madhouse while Laura is the victim of a conspiracy and misdiagnosed as insane thanks to the power and influence of her husband (Giordano 174).

This passage demonstrates how institutional authority can be manipulated to deprive a woman of her freedom and identity.

This article therefore focuses specifically on the relationship between classification and confinement. It argues that the designation of women as mentally unstable does not merely describe their psychological condition but can function as a mechanism of institutional and patriarchal control. Bertha's domestic confinement and Anne's and Laura's institutional confinement reveal different forms of the same process: once female identity is defined by external authority, women's mobility, testimony, and autonomy become vulnerable to control. The comparison ultimately demonstrates how *Jane Eyre* and *The Woman in White* question the authority of those who claim the power to define female sanity and identity.

II. FEMALE MADNESS AND VICTORIAN INSTITUTIONAL POWER

The Victorian representation of female madness is closely connected with questions of confinement, social exclusion, and institutional authority. Madness is not simply presented as an individual psychological condition; its meaning is also shaped by the structures that classify, isolate, and regulate those considered mentally unstable. Michel Foucault's analysis of confinement provides a useful theoretical framework for examining this process. He argues that confinement places madness within a "world of exclusion" and functions to remove from the social order what is perceived as having no legitimate place within it (Foucault 116). Thus, confinement is not merely a response to madness but a practice through which madness becomes socially defined and controlled. Foucault further observes that confinement "suppressed" madness by reducing it to what he describes as the "empty negativity of reason" (116). This relationship between classification, exclusion, and confinement is particularly relevant to the representation of women in *Jane Eyre* and *The Woman in White*.

Feminist criticism extends this understanding by examining confinement as a gendered experience. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar identify recurring "images of enclosure and escape" in nineteenth-century women's writing and argue that women writers were "literally and figuratively confined" by the social conditions surrounding female authorship (Gilbert and Gubar xvii). Their interpretation of *Jane Eyre* connects Jane's movement toward independence with different forms of oppression, including "madness (at Thornfield)" (339). The figure of Bertha Mason is therefore significant not simply because she is labelled mad but because her confinement at Thornfield represents the physical manifestation of a broader system that restricts female autonomy.

Bertha's representation also demonstrates the relationship between madness and narrative authority. Femi Oyebode argues that in *Jane Eyre*, Bertha "is rendered voiceless," suggesting that her absence of an independent narrative voice is central to her construction as mentally ill (Oyebode140). He further notes that "Bertha did not utter any intelligible speech" in Brontë's novel. It took Jean Rhys's (1966) novel *The Wide Sargasso Sea* to give her voice" (144). Bertha's confinement therefore operates at both physical and narrative levels: she is removed from the social world and simultaneously denied the authority to explain herself.

This relationship between madness and institutional control becomes more explicit in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*. Giordano identifies the possibility of women being "wrongly considered insane" and subsequently confined, linking institutional treatment of madness with social control (173). His discussion of Collins's novel further connects Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie with confinement and identifies Laura as being wrongly treated as insane through the manipulation of her identity. Unlike Bertha's concealed domestic confinement, Anne and Laura become connected with the formal asylum, where institutional classification carries legal and social consequences.

Taken together, these perspectives establish the theoretical foundation for this study. Foucault explains how confinement transforms madness into an object of social exclusion; Gilbert and Gubar reveal the gendered significance of enclosure; Oyebode demonstrates how Bertha's confinement is accompanied by the loss of narrative voice; and Giordano illustrates the connection between wrongful confinement and institutional control in *The Woman in White*. The present study builds on these approaches by focusing specifically on the relationship

between classification and confinement. It examines how the designation of women as mad enables their removal from ordinary social life and weakens their authority over their own bodies, identities, and testimony.

III. BERTHA MASON: MADNESS AND DOMESTIC CONFINEMENT IN *JANE EYRE*

Bertha Mason is introduced not as an independent speaking subject but as a secret contained within Thornfield Hall. Her first major function in the novel is spatial: she occupies an upper room that most inhabitants of the house do not enter. Before Jane discovers her, Bertha is experienced indirectly through strange laughter, unexplained movements, and disturbances within the supposedly ordered domestic space. The structure of this revelation is significant because Bertha's identity is withheld from both Jane and the reader, while the explanation of her condition is eventually supplied primarily by Rochester. This creates an unequal distribution of narrative authority: Bertha is physically present but narratively marginalized, whereas Rochester possesses the social and linguistic authority necessary to explain her history.

When Rochester finally reveals Bertha's identity, he explicitly classifies her as mentally ill: "Bertha Mason is mad" (Brontë, 210). He subsequently explains her condition through hereditary language, claiming that her family has a history of "idiots and maniacs" (Brontë, 210). This explanation appears to provide a medical justification for her confinement, but its reliability is complicated by Rochester's personal involvement. He is not a detached medical observer; he is Bertha's husband, the person responsible for her confinement, and the man whose desired marriage to Jane depends upon concealing Bertha's existence. His description therefore performs more than a diagnostic function. By defining Bertha as incurably insane, Rochester presents her confinement as necessary and legitimizes his own authority over her.

The relationship between classification and confinement becomes clearer in Rochester's description of Bertha as the "mysterious lunatic kept there under watch and ward" (210). The language reduces Bertha's identity to a category of mental disorder while simultaneously emphasizing surveillance. She is not merely confined; she is watched and controlled. Her domestic confinement consequently assumes functions associated with institutional authority. Although Thornfield is a private household rather than a public asylum, Rochester creates a space in which Bertha can be isolated from ordinary social interaction and placed under continuous supervision. Foucault's analysis of confinement is relevant here because it emphasizes the relationship between madness and exclusion from the social world. In Bertha's case, the domestic space itself becomes an instrument of exclusion.

The novel's description of Bertha's body further reinforces her classification as abnormal. When Jane encounters her, she struggles to identify her and her dilemma is expressed as:

> whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell: it grovelled, seemingly, on all fours; it snatched and growled like some strange wild animal: but it was covered with clothing, and a quantity of dark, grizzled hair, wild as a mane, hid its head and face." she is, while Bertha moves and "growled like some strange wild animal (Brontë 211).

The language is significant because Bertha's body is transformed into visible evidence of her supposed madness. She is described through images of savagery, animality, and monstrosity rather than through her own account of herself. This representation corresponds with Oyebode's observation that "The association of the idea of madness with savagery and the less than human is clear. Thus, madness can be either comical or terrifying" (Oyebode 141). The description of Bertha as animalistic therefore does not merely establish her as frightening; it demonstrates how madness is narratively constructed through the denial of ordinary human identity. Her body becomes an object to be observed and interpreted rather than a subject capable of defining itself. Thus, the classification of Bertha operates not only through Rochester's verbal diagnosis but also through the narrative construction of her body as threatening and other.

The gendered significance of Bertha's confinement becomes clearer when her position is considered alongside Jane's experience of restriction. Jane repeatedly encounters spaces and structures that limit her freedom, but she gradually develops the ability to resist and leave them. Bertha, by contrast, remains confined within Thornfield and has no comparable control over her circumstances. Gilbert and Gubar place "madness (at Thornfield)" within the larger pattern of female oppression represented in the novel, connecting it with the "oppression" and "starvation" experienced by Jane at earlier stages of her life (339). Their interpretation helps illuminate the contrast between the two women, but Brontë's text makes the distinction particularly stark: while Jane can eventually escape the spaces that restrict her, Bertha remains physically contained by Rochester's authority. Her position as Rochester's wife does not provide her with greater autonomy; instead, marriage becomes another structure through which her body and identity are controlled. Bertha's confinement thus

represents an extreme form of the restrictions that the novel associates with female dependence, transforming the domestic space of Thornfield into a site where patriarchal authority is enforced through physical isolation.

Bertha's representation is also connected with sexuality and colonial difference. Rochester's account emphasizes her supposed sexual and moral disorder, presenting her behavior as evidence of a deeper degeneracy. At the same time, Bertha's Creole identity distinguishes her from the English social environment into which Rochester brings her. Oyebode notes that her foreignness contributes to her alienation within the novel and observes that feminist readings have connected her representation with the patriarchal arrangements of nineteenth-century English society. Bertha's characterization therefore brings together gender, sexuality, colonial difference, and madness. Her confinement functions as a means of containing these perceived forms of disorder within the domestic space of Thornfield.

Yet Bertha is not entirely passive. Her actions repeatedly disrupt the domestic order that Rochester attempts to establish. She tears Jane's wedding veil, enters Rochester's room, attacks Richard Mason, and eventually sets Thornfield on fire. These actions cannot be treated only as symptoms of madness because they also perform an important narrative function: they expose the secret upon which Rochester's proposed marriage to Jane depends. Bertha's physical resistance becomes the means through which the concealed truth repeatedly returns to the surface.

The destruction of Thornfield therefore intensifies the paradox at the centre of Bertha's representation. Her classification as mad makes her vulnerable to confinement, yet the confined woman becomes the force that repeatedly disrupts the patriarchal order that confines her. Her final act of setting the house on fire destroys the physical space in which Rochester has hidden her and maintained his authority. Her death subsequently removes her from the narrative, but not before her actions have exposed the deception surrounding Rochester's marriage. The destruction of Thornfield thus marks the collapse of the domestic structure that had enabled Bertha's confinement and Rochester's concealment of his first marriage.

Bertha's representation consequently demonstrates that madness and confinement are mutually reinforcing mechanisms of control. Rochester's classification of Bertha legitimizes her physical isolation, while that isolation contributes to the loss of her social and narrative identity. Yet Brontë simultaneously gives the confined woman disruptive physical agency. Bertha cannot control the narrative through speech, but she can challenge the order imposed upon her through action. Her confinement therefore produces both her marginalization and her disruptive power, making her central to the novel's examination of female identity, patriarchal authority, and the unstable boundary between madness and resistance.

IV. ANNE CATHERICK AND THE ASYLUM IN *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*

While *Jane Eyre* locates female confinement largely within the domestic sphere, Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* makes institutional confinement central to its plot. Anne Catherick's first appearance immediately establishes a connection between female vulnerability, escape, and the asylum. When Walter Hartright encounters her on the road, she has escaped from an institution, yet his immediate response is not to assume that she is insane. After learning that she has been confined, he reflects: "But the idea of absolute insanity which we all associate with the very name of an Asylum … never occurred to me, in connection with her" (Collins 22). Hartright's response is significant because it separates Anne's observable behavior from the institutional label attached to her. The asylum suggests insanity to society, but Hartright's direct encounter with Anne produces uncertainty rather than confirmation.

This uncertainty establishes one of Collins's central concerns: the authority to classify a woman as insane. Hartright has seen Anne as an individual before learning that she has been an asylum inmate, and the discovery consequently changes the framework through which her behavior is interpreted. The institution possesses an authority that can potentially override personal observation. Collins therefore introduces the asylum not simply as a place where madness is treated but as a structure capable of producing an authoritative identity for the person confined within it. Giordano similarly identifies the novel's concern with "misdiagnosis and wrong confinement" and connects this concern with questions of gender and social control.

The relationship between institutional authority and confinement becomes even more significant when Anne's history is considered alongside Laura Fairlie's fate. Giordano notes that Anne and Laura are both confined to a private asylum at different points in the narrative and "Laura is the victim of a conspiracy and misdiagnosed as insane" through Sir Percival Glyde's power and influence (Giordano 174). Collins thus moves beyond the representation of a woman whose mental condition may be uncertain to expose the possibility that the machinery of confinement can be deliberately manipulated. Anne's identity becomes the instrument through which Laura can be confined.

The asylum consequently becomes a space where external signs can override personal testimony. Laura insists upon

her own identity, yet the institution receives her as Anne Catherick. The problem is therefore not simply whether Laura is sane or insane; it is whether the institution recognizes her as the person she claims to be. Her confinement demonstrates that a woman's testimony may become powerless once an institutional classification has been established. In this respect, Collins makes identity itself vulnerable to institutional authority.

Foucault's account of the asylum helps clarify the significance of this process. He describes the modern asylum as "a juridical space where one is accused, judged, and condemned", arguing that madness remains subject to judgment even within an apparently medical institution (Foucault 269). This formulation is particularly relevant to Laura's confinement because the asylum does not simply observe her mental state. It effectively determines the meaning of her behavior and places her within a predetermined category. Foucault further emphasizes the authority of the medical figure, noting that the physician becomes responsible for admission and that a medical certificate becomes central to confinement. Collins's narrative exposes the danger inherent in such authority when the information on which classification depends has itself been manipulated.

The contrast between Anne and Laura is therefore central to Collins's critique. Anne is presented as psychologically vulnerable and associated with institutional confinement, whereas Laura is a woman who is deliberately made to occupy Anne's institutional identity. The two cases demonstrate that the asylum does not necessarily distinguish reliably between actual mental illness and imposed identity. Giordano similarly emphasizes that Anne's confinement and Laura's wrongful confinement arise from the interests and influence of Sir Percival Glyde.

Collins consequently transforms the asylum from a background institution into an instrument of narrative and social power. Anne's escape initially raises the possibility that institutional classification may be mistaken; Laura's subsequent confinement demonstrates that it can also be exploited. The asylum becomes a place where identity is determined externally, and where the testimony of the confined woman can be rendered ineffective by the authority of medical, legal, and patriarchal structures.

This produces an important parallel with Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*. Bertha is confined within Thornfield and Rochester controls the dominant explanation of her condition; Laura is confined within the asylum and the institution accepts an identity imposed upon her. The mechanisms differ, but the underlying structure is similar: the woman's own identity becomes subordinate to an authoritative classification imposed by others. In Brontë, domestic authority produces confinement; in Collins, institutional authority formalizes and legitimizes it. Both novels therefore expose the vulnerability of female identity when male and institutional power possesses the authority to define who a woman is and whether she is considered sane.

V. CLASSIFICATION, IDENTITY, AND THE POWER TO DEFINE MADNESS

The comparison between Bertha Mason and Laura Fairlie reveals that the power to define madness is closely connected to the power to define identity. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha's condition is interpreted largely through Rochester's account, whereas *The Woman in White* makes the instability of such classification central to its plot. Collins complicates the association between institutional confinement and actual mental illness through Anne Catherick, whose behavior after escaping from the asylum is frequently purposeful and intelligible. A critical study of the novel observes that Anne "appears quite sane throughout the novel" and her escape is "portrayed as an act of self-preservation." (Sherman 66) Her attempts to locate Laura, warn her about Sir Percival Glyde, and investigate her family circumstances suggest deliberate action rather than an absence of reason. Collins therefore creates a gap between Anne's institutional classification and the behavior witnessed outside the institution.

This gap becomes more significant when Anne's identity is transferred to Laura. Laura Fairlie is not confined because her own behavior has independently established her as mentally ill; she is confined because she is made to occupy Anne Catherick's identity. The physical resemblance between the two women makes the deception possible, but Collins uses their resemblance to expose the weakness of a system that depends upon external forms of identification. Once Laura is accepted as Anne, her own declaration of identity loses authority. Giordano accordingly describes Laura as being "misdiagnosed as insane" through Sir Percival Glyde's power and influence (174).

The episode demonstrates that institutional classification can become more powerful than individual testimony. Laura knows that she is Lady Glyde, yet the people responsible for her confinement interpret her claim according to the identity already assigned to her. Her assertion of self therefore becomes evidence against her. Instead of correcting the mistaken classification, her speech is absorbed into it: because she is considered Anne, her insistence that she is Laura can be interpreted as proof that she is incapable of recognizing her own identity. Collins thus exposes a circular logic in which the classification produces the very evidence used to sustain it.

The distinction between Anne and Laura is crucial to this process. Anne has actually been confined and carries the institutional identity of a woman regarded as mentally unstable, while Laura is subsequently confined under Anne's name despite not being mentally ill. The two cases demonstrate that institutional classification does not necessarily correspond to an individual's actual psychological condition. The critical discussion of Anne emphasizes precisely this contradiction, noting that her actions following her escape are largely rational and directed toward protecting herself and Laura. Collins consequently separates the categories of madness, behavior, and institutional identity, showing that they cannot automatically be treated as equivalent.

This instability also reveals the connection between patriarchal authority and medical classification. Laura's confinement is made possible through Sir Percival's manipulation of the circumstances surrounding her identity. Giordano connects the wrongful confinement of Laura with Sir Percival's control and identifies the episode as part of the novel's broader concern with "misdiagnosis and wrong confinement" (Giordano 174) The asylum therefore does not operate independently of the social structures surrounding it. Its authority can be activated by information supplied and manipulated by those who possess greater social and legal power.

Collins's narrative structure strengthens this critique of authority. Rather than providing one uncontested account of events, *The Woman in White* reconstructs its story through different narrators, testimonies, documents, and retrospective accounts. The reader must therefore evaluate competing versions of reality. This narrative method parallels the novel's treatment of institutional classification: just as the reader must determine which account can be trusted, the characters must confront the question of whose account of identity should be accepted. Truth is not automatically guaranteed by the authority of the person or institution presenting it.

Laura's case is particularly revealing because she is able to speak but cannot make her speech authoritative. This distinguishes her situation from Bertha Mason's in *Jane Eyre*. Bertha is largely excluded from the narrative and has little opportunity to establish her own account, whereas Laura is physically present and capable of asserting her identity, yet the institutional framework prevents that assertion from being accepted. Bertha's confinement therefore operates through silencing, while Laura's operates through the discrediting of speech. In both cases, however, male authority determines how the woman is understood.

The comparison demonstrates that classification has consequences beyond diagnosis. Once a woman is placed within the category of madness, her behavior, speech, and identity can all be interpreted through that category. Anne's rational actions do not automatically overturn her institutional reputation, while Laura's rational insistence upon her identity is treated as evidence of insanity. The novel therefore reveals the circular relationship between classification and interpretation: the label determines how subsequent behavior is read.

Thus, *Jane Eyre* and *The Woman in White* present different forms of classificatory power. Brontë emphasizes the domestic control through which Rochester confines and represents Bertha, while Collins exposes the medical, legal, and documentary mechanisms through which Laura can be transformed into Anne. Yet both novels demonstrate that women become particularly vulnerable when others possess the authority to determine the meaning of their bodies, behavior, and identities. Madness is consequently represented not only as a psychological condition but also as a social classification whose effects depend upon who has the power to impose and sustain it.

VI. CONCLUSION

Jane Eyre and *The Woman in White* represent female madness as a condition shaped not only by individual behavior but also by structures of patriarchal and institutional authority. Bertha Mason's domestic confinement and Anne Catherick's asylum experience reveals how women can be removed from social visibility and defined through the interpretations of others, while Laura Fairlie's wrongful confinement demonstrates how institutional classification can override individual identity and testimony. Although Brontë emphasizes domestic and marital control and Collins foregrounds medical and institutional power, both novels expose the vulnerability of women when others possess the authority to define their sanity and identity. Ultimately, the novels challenge the stability of madness as a category and present confinement as a powerful means of regulating female bodies, voices, and identities.

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Breaking the Fetters of Family and Shame: Meerabai, Krishna Bhakti, and the Gendered Politics of Devotion in Sixteenth-Century Rajasthan

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Abstract— *Meerabai (also Mirabai; c. 1498–c. 1546), a Rathore princess of Merta who was married into the Sisodia house of Mewar, is among the most widely remembered women saints of the North Indian bhakti tradition. Later hagiography presents her as a widow who refused sati, rejected the honor codes of a Rajput court, sang and danced in public temples, kept the company of sadhus across caste lines, and survived attempts on her life before vanishing into the image of Krishna at Dwarka. This article reconstructs that story with scholarly caution. Court chronicles of Merta and Mewar are almost silent on her; the earliest firm literary notice appears in Nabhadas's Bhaktamal (c. 1600). The immense padavali sung in her name is a layered, co-authored corpus rather than a closed authorial canon (Hawley, 2005; Martin, 2023). Reading life-narrative, attributed Hindi and Rajasthani padas, and modern critical literature together, the essay argues that Meerabai's significance lies less in a fully recoverable biography than in a durable public language of devotion that made gender, caste, and royal honor contestable in the name of Krishna.*

Keywords— ***Meerabai, Mirabai, bhakti, Krishna, Rajasthan, gender, Rajput honor, padavali, hagiography, women's spirituality***

Introduction

Few figures in the religious history of Rajasthan occupy as charged a place as Meerabai. In popular memory she is at once princess and wandering ascetic, widow and bride of Krishna, victim of a hostile court and victor who drinks poison as charanamrita. Temples at Merta, Chittor, and Dwarka, countless bhajan mandalis, school textbooks, nationalist biographies, feminist recoveries, and film and television serials all claim her. That abundance is itself a historical fact. As Martin (2023) has shown in her study of how the saint was "made," Meerabai is known less as a single recoverable subject than as a tradition of story and song through which communities have argued about devotion, womanhood, and authority across four centuries.

This article does three things. First, it situates the conventional life-story against the thinness of contemporary documentation and the richness of later hagiography (Hawley, 2005; Taft, 2002). Second, it analyzes the social, gendered, and religious pressures that the tradition says she faced at the Sisodia court and in the wider Vaishnava world (Mukta, 1994; Sangari, 1990). Third, it reads selected Hindi padas attributed to her as the principal medium through which those pressures were answered—not as modern political tracts, but as songs of a love that refused to stay inside the zenana (Alston, 1980; Chaturvedi, 1973). The aim is neither to dissolve Meerabai into legend nor to treat every later miracle as eyewitness report, but to show why the figure remains historically consequential.

Historical Context and the Problem of Sources

The political world into which Meerabai was born was one of Rajput consolidation and accelerating Mughal pressure. Merta, founded by her grandfather Rao Duda, belonged to a Rathore branch related to the house of Jodhpur. Mewar, under Rana Sanga, was the preeminent Sisodia kingdom of southern Rajasthan and the last major Rajput coalition against Babur. The marriage of a Merta princess to Sanga's

eldest son Bhoj Raj in 1516, the date most scholars now accept, was a political alliance as much as a household event (Hawley, 2005; Martin, 2023). Bhoj Raj died of battle wounds in 1521. Sanga and Meerabai's father Ratan Singh Rathore both fell in the aftermath of the Battle of Khanwa (1527). The Mewar court that the young widow inhabited was therefore a court of military trauma, succession anxiety, and heightened concern for Rajput honor (maryada).

That honor system is crucial for any reading of Meerabai's resistance. Rajput royal women were expected to practice seclusion, uphold the kul's reputation, accept arranged marriage as a political instrument, and, in the most extreme construction of widowhood, consider sati (Sangari, 1990). Public singing and dancing, association with male sadhus, and the claim that Krishna—not the earthly husband or his lineage—was one's true spouse cut against all three expectations. Later tellers made this collision the center of the saint's life.

Yet the documentary trail is uneven. Inscriptions and dynastic genealogies of Merta and Mewar do not furnish a contemporary royal biography of Meerabai. Taft (2002) has noted how cold the archival trail becomes the closer one approaches the early sixteenth century. The earliest widely cited literary notice is the brief praise in Nabhadas's Bhaktamal, composed around 1600, which already presents her as one who broke the fetters of family and the chains of shame (Nabhadas, ca. 1600/n.d.; Martin, 2023). Priyadas's 1712 commentary on Nabhadas supplies the narrative architecture still familiar today: the childhood gift of a Krishna image, the unwilling marriage, the refusal of the family goddess, the poison cup and the cobra in a basket, the departure from Chittor, and the final disappearance into the deity at Dwarka (Priyadas, 1712/n.d.). Muhnot Nainsi's seventeenth-century Khyat records, with the caution of "people say," that Bhoj Raj married Mira Rathore (Taft, 2002). From these slender early notices a vast later literature grew.

A parallel problem attends the poems. Thousands of padas circulate under Meerabai's name in Rajasthani, Braj Bhasha, and later standardized Hindi. Hawley (2005), working from the oldest manuscript layers, has argued that poems which would securely "tie Mirabai to her own century do not seem to exist" in the way a modern critical edition might wish. The first-person signature "Mira" at the close of a pad is a convention of bhakti song, not an autograph. The corpus is therefore best treated as a living, co-authored voice: songs composed by a historical woman, songs composed in her manner, and songs through which later singers inhabited her predicament (Martinez, 2018; Martin, 2023). That does not empty the poetry of historical meaning. It means the historian must read the songs as evidence of a tradition that found in Meerabai a usable first person.

From Kudki and Merta to the Court of Mewar

Standard reconstructions place Meerabai's birth around 1498 at Kudki (Kurki) in present-day Pali district, in the household of Rao Ratan Singh Rathore, younger son of Rao Duda of Merta (Alston, 1980; Hawley & Juergensmeyer, 1988). Her mother is often named Veer Kanwar (Vir Kunwari) and is said to have died while Meerabai was a child. The girl was raised in a Vaishnava environment. Nabhadas (ca. 1600/n.d.) lists several men of the Merta line among Krishna devotees; family piety, not only individual rebellion, is part of the story. A recurrent childhood episode—present in Priyadas (1712/n.d.) and endlessly retold—has a visiting sadhu give the child an image of Giridhar (Krishna as the lifter of Govardhan). When she asked who would be her bridegroom, her mother or grandfather is said to have pointed to the image. The anecdote explains, in narrative form, the later claim that her marriage to Krishna preceded and outranked her marriage to Bhoj Raj.

In 1516 she was married to Bhoj Raj, crown prince of Mewar and son of Rana Sanga. Older Gujarati and some colonial accounts had made her the wife of Rana Kumbha (r. 1433–1468), a chronological impossibility for a woman born near 1500. Later historians corrected the identification (Taft, 2002). The correction places Meerabai in the generation that faced Babur, widowhood, and a contested succession under Vikramaditya and later Udai Singh.

Hagiography insists that she refused to consummate the earthly marriage in any sense that displaced Krishna, would not worship the Sisodia kuldevi in the manner required, received sadhus in her private shrine, and sang in spaces that mixed ranks and sexes (Kishwar & Vanita, 1989; Martin, 2023). After Bhoj Raj's death she refused sati. Whether every detail is factual, the pattern is consistent: Meerabai is remembered as a woman who treated the palace as a temporary lodging and the temple as her true household.

Societal and Familial Resistance

The resistance attributed to Meerabai's marital family is usually personified as "the Rana." In different tellings this figure is her husband, her father-in-law, or—most often in modern reconstructions—her brother-in-law Vikramaditya, who ruled Mewar in the unsettled years after Sanga (Hawley, 2005). The Rana of the songs is less a biographical identification than a structural opponent: the voice of kul, shame (laj), and royal command.

Three legendary assassination attempts dominate the later vitae. A cup of poison is sent as charanamrita; Meerabai drinks it and is unharmed. A basket said to contain a garland

or prasad conceals a cobra; she finds an image of Krishna, or the snake becomes a garland. A bed of thorns or nails is prepared for her; she sleeps unhurt (Kishwar & Vanita, 1989; Priyadas, 1712/n.d.). These episodes belong to the grammar of saintly ordeal. Their historical status is unverifiable. Their cultural work is clear. They convert persecution into proof: the court that tries to kill the devotee only discloses that Krishna, not the Rana, governs the outcome. Songs that mention the poison cup fold the ordeal back into performance. The most widely sung version is the pad of the ankle-bells (Chaturvedi, 1973):

पग घूँघरू बाँध मीरा नाची रे।

मैं तो मेरे नारायण की आपहि हो गई दासी रे।

लोग कहै मीरा भई बावरी, न्यात कहै कुलनासी रे।

विष का प्याला राणाजी भेज्या, पीवत मीरा हाँसी रे।

मीरा के प्रभु गिरिधर नागर, सहज मिले अविनासी रे॥

Tying bells to her ankles, Mira danced.

"I have become, of my own will, the servant of my Narayan."

People say Mira has gone mad; the clan says she is the ruin of the family.

The Rana sent a cup of poison; Mira drank it laughing.

Mira's Lord is Giridhar Nagar; the Imperishable met her with ease.

The pad compresses an entire social drama into a few lines. Dance with ghunghru is temple performance and public female motion, both suspect in a royal zenana. The charge of madness (bawari) and of being kul-nashi—destroyer of lineage—names the precise injury a Rajput household feared: a woman whose conduct could be cited against the honor of the house (Sangari, 1990). The laugh with which she drinks the poison is the conversion of a death sentence into rasa. Mukta (1994), studying twentieth-century low-caste and peasant communities that sing Mira, has shown how this episode is heard not only as miracle but as the memory of a woman who would not be silenced by landlords and husbands.

Familial resistance also had a quieter register: isolation, slander, pressure to remarry or to accept a confined widowhood, and the demand that she abandon the company of itinerant Vaishnavas. Some reconstructions suggest that political suspicion compounded religious disapproval. A princess who received wandering sadhus in a fortress recently at war might be imagined, by a nervous court, as a security risk as well as a scandal (Hawley, 2005). What the songs themselves emphasize is not espionage but incompatibility of loyalties. The palace wants a daughter-in-law; Mira answers that she already has a husband whose crown is a peacock feather.

Gender, Widowhood, and the Rajput Code

Gender is not an optional theme laid over Meerabai's spirituality; it is the condition under which her devotion became visible as transgression. In the household ideology of a sixteenth-century Rajput court, a woman's religious life was supposed to support, not rival, her roles as wife, daughter-in-law, and potential mother of heirs (Sangari, 1990). Widowhood intensified the demand. A royal widow who refused sati already stepped outside one ideal of heroic femininity. A royal widow who then claimed to be a bride—of God—stepped outside another.

Sangari's (1990) influential essay remains the most rigorous warning against a simple liberationist reading. She argues that the female voice in bhakti, including Mira's, is produced inside patriarchal structures even as it strains them. The devotee's abjection before a male deity can reproduce, in a spiritual key, the dependence expected of a wife. Male bhaktas routinely adopt the voice of the waiting woman (virahini) as a spiritual technique; when a woman saint uses the same voice, the politics change, but they do not automatically become modern feminism. Meerabai does not write a treatise against marriage. She over-identifies with marriage and then relocates it. Krishna is mero pati, my husband. The earthly marriage is not theorized away; it is relativized until it cannot command her body or her song.

That relocation is stated with canonical clarity in the pad that generations of singers treat as her signature creed (Alston, 1980; Chaturvedi, 1973):

मेरे तो गिरधर गोपाल दूसरो न कोई॥

जाके सिर है मोरपखा, मेरो पति सोई।

तात मात भ्रात बंधु आपनो न कोई॥

छांड़ि दई कुलकी कानि, कहा करिहै कोई।

संतन ढिग बैठि बैठि लोकलाज खोई॥

चुनरीके किये टूक ओढ़ लीन्हीं लोई।

मोती मूंगे उतार बनमाला पोई॥

अंसुवन जल सींचि-सींचि प्रेम-बेलि बोई।

अब तो बेल फैल गई, आणंद फल होई॥

दूध की मथनियां बड़े प्रेम से बिलोई।

माखन जब काढ़ि लियो, छाछ पिये कोई॥

भगति देखि राजी हुई, जगत देखि रोई।

दासी मीरा लाल गिरधर, तारो अब मोही॥

Mine is Giridhar Gopal; there is no other.

He whose head bears the peacock plume—that one is my husband.

Father, mother, brother, kinsman: I have none of my own.

I have thrown off the honor of the clan; what can anyone do?

Sitting among the saints, I have lost the world's shame.

I tore the bridal scarf to rags and wrapped myself in coarse wool.

I took off pearls and coral and strung a garland of wild-forest flowers.

Watered with tears, I planted the vine of love.

Now the vine has spread; it bears the fruit of bliss.

With great love I churned the pot of milk.

When I had taken the butter, let who will drink the whey.

Seeing devotion I rejoiced; seeing the world I wept.

Mira the servant says: O beloved Giridhar, save me now.

The poem is a systematic inventory of renunciation. Kinship is declared empty. Kul-kani—the honor-code of the lineage—is discarded. Lok-laj, the shame that polices women in public, is lost in the company of saints. The visual markers of a married Rajput woman, the chunari and the jewelry of pearls and coral, are exchanged for the coarse wrap and vanamala of an itinerant devotee (Kishwar & Vanita, 1989). The butter-and-whey image, drawn from Krishna's own childhood theft of butter, turns spiritual discrimination into kitchen labor: keep the essence, leave the residue to the world. Gendered domestic skill becomes theological method.

At the same time the speaker remains "dasi Mira," Mira the maidservant. The social vocabulary of female service is not abolished; it is redirected. This is why Sangari's (1990) caution and Martin's (2023) emphasis on multiple Miras both remain necessary. Communities have heard in these lines a charter for women's spiritual independence. Other communities have heard an ideal of total wifely surrender, merely pointed at a better husband. The historical power of the padavali is that it can sustain both hearings without collapsing into either.

Religious and Spiritual Challenges

Meerabai's conflict was not only with a palace. It was also with the institutional religious field of her time. North Indian Krishna bhakti in the early sixteenth century was itself plural: the growing influence of Vallabha's pushtimarg, the Gaudiya presence around Vrindavan, older nirguna currents associated with figures such as Raidas and Kabir, and local Rajasthani Vaishnava practice (Hawley, 2005; Hawley & Juergensmeyer, 1988). Later tradition sometimes names Raidas (Ravidas) as Mira's guru. Chronology makes a direct discipleship difficult to prove, but the claim is ideologically eloquent. It attaches a Rajput princess to a saint remembered as a Chamar leatherworker and so restates bhakti's promise that birth does not ration access to God (Mukta, 1994).

Vallabhite sources, by contrast, are often cool or hostile. Mira does not fit easily into a sampradaya that organized devotion around hereditary maharajas, temple seva, and household purity. A woman who danced in public, crossed caste lines, and acknowledged no institutional guru on Vallabha's terms was difficult to canonize inside that structure. Hawley (2005) notes that she remains formally unaffiliated and is in some lineages explicitly set aside. Her Krishna is not primarily the child of the haveli ritual or the royal patron of a sect. He is Giridhar Nagar, the elegant mountain-lifter, addressed as husband, healer, and thief of the mind.

That address has theological consequences. Conventional temple hierarchy places the deity above the worshipper and the priest between them. Mira's madhurya-bhakti shortens the distance until it becomes the intimacy of lovers, with all the jealousy, waiting, accusation, and joy that the gopi tradition had already made available. She does not deny Krishna's supremacy; she refuses to let supremacy mean remoteness. In several padas the soul and the Lord are imagined as bound by a relationship that no priest, husband, or Rana can cancel. This is less a doctrine of metaphysical equality than a relational theology in which the devotee's first-person desire is treated as authoritative knowledge (Alston, 1980; Martin, 2023).

A different spiritual emphasis appears in songs that treat the Name as inexhaustible wealth. Here the courtly world of treasure, dowry, and royal gift is inverted (Chaturvedi, 1973):

पायो जी म्हें तो राम रतन धन पायो।

वस्तु अमोलक दी म्हारे सतगुरू, किरपा कर अपनायो॥

जनम-जनम की पूँजी पाई, जग में सभी खोवायो।

खरच न खूटै चोर न लूटै, दिन-दिन बढ़त सवायो॥

सत की नाँव खेवटिया सतगुरू, भवसागर तर आयो।

'मीरा' के प्रभु गिरिधर नागर, हरख-हरख जस पायो॥

I have found it—the jewel-wealth of the Name of Ram.

My true guru gave me a priceless thing and, in grace, made me his own.

I gained the capital of birth upon birth; I lost whatever the world could claim.

Spent, it is not depleted; stolen, it cannot be looted; day by day it increases a quarter more.

The boat is truth, the boatman the true guru; I have crossed the ocean of becoming.

Mira's Lord is Giridhar Nagar; in joy upon joy I have found his praise.

Ram and Giridhar stand together in the same pad, a reminder that Mira's idiom is Vaishnava rather than narrowly sectarian. The economic metaphors—capital, expenditure, theft, compound increase—are those of a woman who knew what royal wealth looked like and chose a treasure that a hostile court could not confiscate. Alston's (1980) translation-anthology, based on Chaturvedi's (1973) Hindi selection, helped carry this register to readers outside the bhajan community. Viraha, the pain of separation, supplies a further challenge: it refuses the consolation of completed ritual. Songs in which Mira watches the monsoon or searches for a physician who can treat the wound of love keep desire unfinished. Within Rajasthan those songs join a woman's waiting to the region's seasonal calendar. Devotion here is not an escape from landscape; it is a way of inhabiting it.

Poetry, Voice, and the Question of Authorship

A research account must pause over what it means to print "Hindi poems of Meerabai." The oldest layers are not modern standard Hindi but a mixture of Rajasthani and Braj Bhasha, later regularized by anthologists. Chaturvedi's (1973) Padavali produced the relatively stable texts quoted here. Manuscript work by Hawley (2005) shows how few padas can be pushed securely into the first half of the sixteenth century. Martinez (2018) describes an "autobiographical pose": later singers use Mira's first person to narrate their own transformations. Martin's (2023) phrase "many Miras" names that openness without denying that a sixteenth-century woman almost certainly stood at the beginning of the chain. Three features remain robust across layers: exclusive attachment to Krishna as husband; acceptance of stigma—madness, caste-mixing, the loss of laj—as its price; and a sensory piety of bells, dance, tears, and the dark color of the beloved.

A quieter pad of presence rather than combat deserves quotation, because the tradition is not only oppositional. It is also contemplative (Chaturvedi, 1973):

बसो मेरे नैनन में नंदलाल।

मोर मुकुट मकराकृत कुण्डल, अरुण तिलक दिए भाल।

मोहनि मूरति, साँवरि सूरति, नैना बने बिसाल।

अधर-सुधा-रस मुरली राजत, उर बैजंती-माल॥

छुद्र घंटिका कटि-तट सोभित, नूपुर सबद रसाल।

मीरा प्रभु संतन सुखदाई, भक्त बछल गोपाल॥

Dwell in my eyes, O Nandalal.

Peacock crown, makara earrings, a red mark upon the brow.

Enchanting form, dark complexion, eyes made wide.

On the lips the flute of nectar; on the chest the vaijayanti garland.

Tiny bells shine at the waist; the sound of anklets is sweet.

Mira's Lord, giver of joy to the saints, Gopal who is tender to his devotees.

Here resistance is implicit. To ask Krishna to live in the eyes is to make the body itself a shrine that no palace can lock. Darshan, the exchange of seeing that structures Hindu temple worship, is internalized. The detailed iconography—crown, earrings, tilak, flute, garland, waist-bells—shows a poet trained in the visual theology of Krishna images, the very training a Merta child raised before a Giridhar murti would have received. Beauty is not an ornament added to doctrine. It is the doctrine.

Legacy: From Hagiography to Public Culture

Meerabai's afterlife is longer and better documented than her life. Colonial ethnography and the making of a Hindi canon circulated her as both Rajput heroine and literary classic. Nationalist writers then put her to new work. As Martin (2023) traces, Tagore, Gandhi, and Mahadevi Varma found in her precedents for women's self-respect, nonviolence, and a wider life for the modern Indian woman. Domesticating biographies tried, against the grain of the songs, to make her a better earthly wife. Late-twentieth-century recoveries pulled the other way: Kishwar and Vanita (1989) in Manushi, Mukta's (1994) fieldwork among oppressed-caste singers, and Sangari's (1990) critique together made Mira indispensable to debates on women and religion in South Asia.

In Rajasthan the living culture is concrete: the Meera Temple at Merta's Charbhuja complex, memorials at Chittorgarh, and the Dwarkadhish tradition of her merging with the image. Folk genres such as the khyal Mira Mangal and the oral epic Mira Janma Patri retell her ordeal in registers that expose caste and gender violence more bluntly than courtly hagiography (Martin, 2023). Recorded bhajans and school recitation have made a handful of padas part of a shared North Indian soundscape. The usable scholarly consensus is modest. Meerabai was in all likelihood a historical Rathore woman married into Mewar in the 1510s. The miraculous vita and the enormous padavali are later

communal compositions anchored in that memory (Hawley, 2005; Taft, 2002). What communities needed from her was a way to say that love of God could authorize a woman to leave the script she had been given.

CONCLUSION

To rewrite Meerabai's story as a research article is to accept a double obligation: to the stubbornly thin historical record and to the stubbornly rich tradition that grew around it. The princess of Merta who married Bhoj Raj, survived the disasters of Khanwa's generation, and would not become the kind of widow Mewar required is a plausible historical figure (Taft, 2002). The woman who drank poison laughing, who tore the chunari for a coarse wrap, who declared that Giridhar alone was her husband, and who disappeared into stone at Dwarka is the figure that bhaktas, poets, reformers, and scholars have needed her to be (Martin, 2023; Martinez, 2018). Between those two sentences lies the whole problem of writing saints.

What can be said with confidence is that Meerabai's name marks one of the most consequential female voices in the religious literature of Rajasthan and of North India. The padas attributed to her do not abolish gender; they work through it, using the language of marriage, shame, service, jewelry, and tears to claim a loyalty higher than the kul (Sangari, 1990). They do not abolish social hierarchy; they embarrass it by seating a princess among saints of every rank (Mukta, 1994). They do not replace temple Hinduism; they insist that the temple's god may be met in the eyes, the throat, and the open road. That is a sufficient legacy. It does not require that every later miracle be accepted as reportage, and it does not require that Mira be conscripted as a twenty-first-century feminist avant la lettre. It requires only that her songs continue to be read as they were meant to be heard: aloud, in company, as a wager that love can outlast a court.

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The Hyperreal in Select Short Fiction of Kurt Vonnegut and Robert Sheckley

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Abstract— *This paper proposes an examination of two postmodernists who incorporated many existential questions in their portrayal of other-worldliness: a world torn between humans and sub-humans and other entities. While Vonnegut's larger and more profound works center on the questions of war and humanity faced with destruction, in some of his shorter works he examines other designs meant to confound humanity. Those challenges to humanity include using advanced technological means through which to control pleasure, breach privacy, inhibit thinking, and so on. Sheckley, on the other hand, puts the problems of alienation and identity-formation, or the lack thereof, at the core of his investigation. He offers alternative realities where man gets to flee from the tyranny of being alive in the world that he himself made uninhabitable. While Vonnegut swirls from past to present, or even blends flashbacks with fast-forwards such that there are no certain points from which to begin or at which to stop, Sheckley tends to be more linear, even as he inserts flashbacks here and there. Both authors, in writing short fiction, demonstrate their mastery of the form, but they approach it from different angles, albeit sharing some characteristics. Interestingly, whereas Kurt Vonnegut rose to fame for his mind-boggling visions of a possible future, Robert Sheckley remains lesser known, notwithstanding that he is an excellent futurist.*

Keywords— ***Hyperreal, Vonnegut, Sheckley, postmodernism, otherworlds***

I. INTRODUCTION

The paper demonstrates the Baudrillardian hyperreal as it emerges in postmodern (con)texts. For this purpose, this study examines some short stories by the *Slaughterhouse-Five* fame Kurt Vonnegut and his more obscure contemporary Robert Sheckley. Kurt Vonnegut's straightforward and conversational tone and a hovering sense of absurdity as employed in his works is blended with his use of satire, dark humor, wit, and irony. Robert Sheckley, again a great witty storyteller, works his way around creating a light-hearted or even surreal atmosphere which might sound bizarre and absurd.

The concept of *simulation*, *simulacrum*, and the *hyperreal* was proposed by Jean Baudrillard. The French thinker adopted Marshall McLuhan's axiom that the 'medium is the message,' a phrase he pushed to its limits, whereby he announced the end of both the *medium* and the *message* in the wake of the hyperreal.

Hyperreality, according to Baudrillard, "is the generation by models[] of [a] real without origin or reality" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 3). It implies how, in today's world of excesses, there are only simulations without any referents to point to. The concept of simulation refers to the proliferation of signs and symbols that precede actual reality. A system constituted of these representations exists such that there are endless signs or images, imploding into one another, each losing touch with the (illusory) *Real*, in the Deleuzian sense of the term. Perceptions, thoughts, and feelings undergo a similar implosion, each fragmentarily woven into the other and yet as disparate. In this hyperreality, it is not surprising to find (one)self as fragmentary as one's objects of consumption are scattered. Existence is therefore a huge simulation of its own, whose essences are not determinable, owing to the inconsistencies inherent to the postmodern condition.

Baudrillard's theory also intersects with the characters' struggles with identity formation. Technology

plays a vital role in shaping perceptions and experiences, which in turn leads to a simulation of all existence. Michel Foucault importantly paired knowledge with power so that having one implied having another. He espoused and complicated Jeremy Bentham's architectural brainchild, the *panopticon*, a means to maintain surveillance without being seen. This knowledge of the subjects imprisoned within a framework or tied to a society empowers the State, which asserts itself by record-keeping and observation: an indefinite gaze. In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1995) established that "the panopticon . . . must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men" (p. 205). He calls it "a figure of political technology" (Foucault, 1995, p. 205) whose use extends beyond the walls of the prison.

II. DISCUSSION

Harrison Bergeron and The Prize of Peril

In Kurt Vonnegut's story *Harrison Bergeron*, mental handicaps are used to prevent thinking or to punish it by releasing hurtful sounds. This is so that one may not "take unfair advantage of their brains." Here, thinking, feeling, and remembering happen in bursts and are lost track of before they become meaningful. The brainwashing is evidenced by the characters' acceptance of who they are (not). Momentarily, the titular character takes on the role of an Emperor, who sheds all the weights and fetters and strips free of the collective memory (loss). However, in a sudden relapse, the (dis)order is restored by Diana Moon Glampers, whose shotgun puts the rebellion down, for good. This incident causes a power blackout. Soon the moment that killed our rake, the emperor, is forgotten, even as tears are shed over it. The sadness, too, is to be forgotten (Vonnegut, 1961).

Societal control is propagated through use of media and governmental announcements and advertisements that engage people, also inviting them to participate in disseminating the propaganda of (enforced) equality. The *medium* has a significant impact on the content and meaning of the *message* being conveyed. Here, it is the message of conformity, which is sent out not only as information but as a yardstick against which to limit one's perceptions, or else. The representations broadcast on the TV then become the natural and actual part of these people's lives. Hyperreality in the story is evident through the society's obsession with achieving absolute equality, disregarding those with exceptional characteristics. In so doing, the idea of absolute equality is simulated, surpassing any genuine sense of reality that would distinguish individuals. Media and technology help perpetuate this hyperreality by disseminating images of uniformity and normalcy, presenting a distorted version of reality. The mental handicaps act as the simulacra symbolizing the supposed ideal of absolute equality by creating a simulated version of equality. Consequently, the distinction between the image and reality is obliterated, and individuals are reduced to mere representations of the government's utopian vision of equality (Vonnegut, 1961).

The implosion of the real and the medium in the story shows in the overwhelming influence of media and technology on the society. The constant bombardment of propaganda and messages promoting the virtues of absolute equality creates a state in which individuals are unable to discern reality from the hyperreal simulacra presented to them. This reflects a critique of the dehumanizing effects of mass media and consumer culture. We can also see how Baudrillard's notion of the 'ecstasy of communication' manifests as the media invades every aspect of people's lives, leading to a crisis in individuals' ability to tell manufactured desires from their actual ones.

The story also demonstrates how disciplinary power operates in such a society. The government exercises power over individuals by enforcing handicaps, thereby encouraging self-regulation and conformity. The constant surveillance through the Handicapper General's agents reinforces the idea of a panopticon, compelling people to suppress their unique abilities and conform to the imposed norms of equality. People have internalized this discourse, which stresses forming a collective identity while negating individuality and true potential. However, there are moments of resistance, exemplified by Harrison Bergeron himself, who rebels against the imposed limitations and challenges the hyperreal norms, seeking to reclaim his individuality and freedom. It signifies a temporary rupture in the carefully constructed system of power and control. Even though Harrison briefly challenges the hyperreal, the system eventually reasserts itself, reinforcing the discourse of enforced equality and suppressing individuality once again, maintaining the hyperreal simulation (Vonnegut, 1961).

In Robert Sheckley's *The Prize of Peril*, everything is being watched over, gazed at. There is a constant noise coming from a pocket TV. Raeder had, on someone's suggestion, entered thrill shows. It was in the public's interest that he fight dangers and possibly emerge alive out of them. By the second and third game he had "lost some of his innocence." He looks back and regrets signing up for the deadly game. But he is in the game and must finish it. Toward the end, he finds himself in a graveyard and is received into a grave (of his own making?). A gang approaches him to end the chase and the game, but it is

announced that the time had passed and Raeder had completed his sentence, as it were. This moment where he is 'saved,' the *salvation*, makes him fall silent — his response to death's inefficacy (Sheckley, 1958).

The story takes place in a futuristic society where media and information technologies dominate people's lives. The "Prize of Peril" game show, in which contestants must evade hunters for a cash reward, exemplifies the hyperreal nature of this society. The show is a simulation of danger and excitement, and the simulacrum thus created denies the difference between the image and the real, since the danger in the game is all staged and regulated for entertainment (Sheckley, 1958).

The story also reflects Baudrillard's idea that information devours its own content: the focus on spectacle and entertainment absorbs the true meaning of peril, turning it into mere consumable content for the masses. The medium and the message have, through a circuit of communication, imploded into a hyperreality, creating an indistinct mass.

The power structures in place are paralyzing, even as they are as small as a pocket TV, which features spectacles, encourages thrills, and invites a participatory audience. The human potential to grow out of the stage and the role has been stunted in an effort to instill excitement in people as they *collectively* participate in the system's program of manipulation. All desires, ambitions, aspirations, and even thoughts are commodified and conditioned into seeking thrills and spectacle, as the audience has become desensitized to the actual consequences of violence and death.

The game-show producers have the power to manipulate the scenarios, control the narrative, and shape public opinion. They create an illusion of free will for the contestants while carefully engineering every aspect of the show. The manipulation of reality raises questions about the ethical implications of media corporations prioritizing sensationalism over human lives. Foucault's analysis of power and the spectacle of media is applicable to the game show's context: how the media broadcasts and frames the game creates a spectacle that captivates the audience and reinforces their passivity. Foucault's concept of panopticism is also relevant in the story, where power is exercised through surveillance and visibility. Foucault emphasizes the significance of discourse in shaping power relations. In the story, the discourse surrounding the game show portrays it as an opportunity for contestants to win a prize. However, this discourse conceals the underlying power dynamics and control exerted by the media. This manipulation of discourse, in a way, legitimizes the power held by the organizers and perpetuates the system of exploitation and violence (Foucault, 1995; Sheckley, 1958).

Welcome to the Monkey House and The Store of the Worlds

Vonnegut's *Welcome to the Monkey House* features a nothinghead, "Billy the Poet," who wouldn't take the "ethical birth control pills." He detests the friendship between science and morals, which has taken pleasure out of humanity while adding to the pile of moral automatons who can't feel anything from the waist down. No one has seen Billy, nor does anyone remember what he looks like. All they know is that Billy deflowers hostesses at the Ethical Suicide Parlours. A letter from Billy reaches the parlour, and its vulgar contents inspire anger and disgust in everyone. As Nancy, an angry hostess, stands ready for a confrontation with Billy, a customer enters the suicide booth. The customer, "Foxy Grandpa," soon reveals himself to be Billy. He takes the hostess away without anyone noticing. They pass through a museum preserving artifacts and memories from the past 'and more expansive times.' In his cave, Billy waits for the drug to wear off so Nancy could *feel something* as he deflowers her. Soon she is deflowered, "with a clinical skill." Billy promises her that he was sorry that "there was no other way." Nancy is humiliated, ashamed. He tells her how, even if sexual encounters nauseated or disgusted a woman, frequent sexual encounters would make her a sexual enthusiast. Billy had just tried to restore the pleasure of which the world has so little (Vonnegut, 1968b).

The society portrayed is a hyperreal one saturated by media and information technologies. In this futuristic world, people are conditioned to consume drugs that suppress their sexual urges, effectively erasing any genuine sense of desire and intimacy. The state controls and regulates the citizens' sexuality, creating a simulated imagery of a harmonious society. This causes the difference between the *regulated* and the *real* to blur. The birth control pills and their *ethicality* are the simulacra used to represent and impose an idealistic society where natural human instincts have no place. The implosion of the real and the medium shows in how advertising and propaganda invade every aspect of people's lives, leaving them confused and uncertain as to their genuine desires. Because of this ambivalence, individuals struggle to differentiate between the manufactured desires propagated by the media and their authentic selves. The story thus critiques the dehumanizing effects of media and state control on individual autonomy and genuine human connection. It highlights the negative consequences of hyperreality and the erosion of authentic experiences in a world dominated by simulacra and mediated communication (Vonnegut, 1968b).

The hyperreal world is constructed through the simulation of desire, as the Ethical Suicide Pills negate natural human instincts and replace them with a regulated, manufactured version of reality. The pills create a simulacrum of satisfaction, where true human desires are denied and individuals live in a state of simulated harmony. The story presents a hyperreal society where the boundaries between real desires and manufactured satisfaction are blurred.

The pills are also a means for the government to impose strict control over its citizens. This demonstrates Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, where state control manifests in the regulation and normalization of behavior. The government dictates what is considered ethical and uses the pills to suppress any form of dissent or resistance to the established norms. The distribution of the pills controls not only individual behavior but also the very essence of human desires and emotions. Even the manipulation of information and language is regulated to propagate the idea that the pills are a form of liberation and progress, creating a discourse that justifies the suppression of natural human instincts as a means to achieve a *Utopian* society. This manipulation of language and information further furnishes the hyperreal construct, where the distinction between truth and fiction is erased. The society thus created is one where individuality and authentic emotions are negated, resulting in all-encompassing power structures that regulate and shape human behavior according to the government's agenda. Foucault's concept of normalization is evident here, as the government enforces a standard of behavior that denies any deviations from the norm (Foucault, 1995; Vonnegut, 1968b).

In *The Store of the Worlds*, Robert Sheckley depicts Mr. Wayne, who is lured into a strange deal in exchange for experiencing the world of his desires. To enter such a world he has to make a risky bargain, so he decides to rethink the offer and goes home. For a while, he shelves the thought and returns to his responsibilities. Over the course of a year, he saves up some money while tackling family problems. Eventually, he finds himself in the store again, holding the parcel and ten years of his life to give away in exchange for a much-needed reverie. He sleeps, dreams, and awakens to a world ten years older. He steps out to find that the real world has turned moon-faced, gray, and decayed (Sheckley, 1959).

The store is itself a hyperreality, offering a plethora of probability worlds as simulations of reality. In each of these worlds of differing possibilities, desires are lived out in perfect representations but lack authentic human experience. People like Mr. Wayne are driven by their desire for simulated experiences, seeking to construct identities through immersion in alternate worlds. The quest for a hyperreal experience challenges the stability of core identities.

The process of choosing a world and experiencing it through the mind's liberation creates hyperreal scenarios, where the boundaries between reality and simulation become indistinguishable. It offers a critique of a society that prioritizes simulated pleasures over authentic living and raises questions about the implications of technology-mediated escapism.

Foucault's theory suggests that power operates through the normalization of certain behaviors and practices. In the story, Tompkins normalizes the idea of accessing alternate worlds as something feasible and desirable, making customers believe that this is a legitimate choice to fulfill their desires. He therefore manipulates the desires of customers to maintain control and regulate their choices. He claims that the process will cater to their deepest desires, whether positive or negative. This regulation of desire shapes the customers' identities and influences the paths they take in the alternate worlds. To make himself more plausible, he offers a refund in case the experience is unsatisfactory, keeping customers under control. The alternate worlds offered by the store are simulacra — representations that deny the difference between the image and reality. The experience of living in these worlds becomes hyperreal, as customers cannot distinguish between their actual reality and the simulated experience. While the store creates an illusion of choice and freedom, it also reinforces the loss of authenticity as individuals chase simulated experiences instead of engaging with the actual world (Foucault, 1995; Sheckley, 1959).

The store serves as the medium through which customers access these hyperreal experiences. As Baudrillard (1994) suggests, the medium (the store) and the message (the alternate worlds) implode into a hyperreality, where the boundaries between real and simulated become indistinguishable. This causes the customers to lose the ability to measure the image against reality, blurring their sense of identity and destabilizing their understanding of self. The perceptions of reality are changed or challenged in their (re)creation of alternate worlds and newer possibilities, which again are a product of a collective memory.

The store's function of providing alternate probability worlds creates cognitive estrangement for the characters in the story. The concept of choosing different realities challenges their understanding of a singular, stable reality, leading to a sense of cognitive dissonance and estrangement.

EPICAC and The Language of Love

Vonnegut's titular *EPICAC* is a machine designed to assist in the government's destructive projects. The war armament had been made to work 18 hours a day. The hero, however, uses it for an alternate purpose. He confides in the machine how he couldn't find the *right words* with which to impress his lady-love. In turn, it produces poems that are profound. This lands our hero his chance to marry Pat. He has given up on his potential as a creative being and instead relies on a computer to manage his friendship and life (Vonnegut, 1968a).

EPICAC represents the hyperreal and simulation. Its calculations surpass human capacity, thus creating a world of simulated emotions and expressions. The poems are hyperreal: only appearing genuine but lacking the personal, authentic subjectivity that is central to human expression. So the poems are the simulacra — copies without an original referent. In fact, the genuineness of love is compromised here, as is the protagonist's subjectivity. He is disconnected from the poems and the process of creation that went into their making. EPICAC's poetry is, then, just a simulation of human emotions and expressions, blurring the lines between authentic human creativity and artificial intelligence.

The power dynamics in the story revolve around the control exercised by the scientists and the military over the supercomputer. In turn, it also reflects how the poems produced by the computer shape the protagonist's relationship with his lover. EPICAC, as an artificial intelligence, is subordinate to the humans who control and utilize it. This relationship reflects Foucault's concept of power as a network of relationships and the ways in which power is exercised through various institutions and social structures. In this network, the protagonist has surrendered his agency and creativity, giving precedence to the computer's manufactured set of expressions on which he helplessly relies. The machine delivers as ordered, since the control works both ways. While the machine doesn't end up carrying out the government's orders to their end, it does exert control on the relationship between the protagonist and his lover for years to come (Foucault, 1995; Vonnegut, 1968a).

Robert Sheckley's *The Language of Love* depicts Jefferson Toms, who lives in a world where everything has been limited: rains fall in quotas, sunsets are programmable, and so on. Toms falls in love and experiences difficulty turning his feelings into words that would rightly describe how he feels. Toms goes looking for a professor who had taken up the study of love. From him, he learns "unflattering truths" about love. He is trained into the stage of Love Proper, whose knowledge it was dangerous to acquire. Finally, he is ready to experiment with what he has learned. Even with all his knowledge about love, he only disappoints his beloved with a mediocre expression. Toms realizes what had caused his fieldwork to go wrong: the language engineers had never had time to test their various hypotheses. They had "wasted energy" and not found a thing about love (Sheckley, 1957).

The medium of expression here is language, "of [a] particular class and quality," in which to declare love. Toms's search for the right words leads him into a multiplicitous network of languages, conveying different cultural meanings and carrying different nuances. It is interesting to note how many factors shape the language of love, thus affecting the authenticity of expression.

The hyperreal and simulation are expressed in the portrayal of love languages and signs, which stand for the constructs that determine the expression of love. The languages are merely cultural representations of love and not authentic signifiers. Toms fails to recognize that the perfect words would only produce a hyperreal representation of love, disconnected from genuine human connection.

Foucault's theory highlights how language and discourse are powerful tools in constructing and maintaining social norms. It underscores the idea that individual expressions (here, of love) are not entirely free but are influenced by the prevailing discursive practices that govern emotional communication. The setting of the story, where everything is regulated, foreshadows Toms's attempts to regulate the expression of his feelings (Foucault, 1995).

His initial attempts to conform to the dominant discourse by using common phrases leave him feeling dissatisfied, as these words fail to capture the depth and intensity of his emotions. So he contends to replace the prefigured discourse with a "particular quality and class" of discourse, or *language of love*. In subscribing to this specialized language, he surrenders his agency altogether, relying far too much on external factors rather than internal experience. The need to manipulate language to fit a supposedly genuine expression betrays Toms's true emotions. He finds himself trapped in a linguistic framework that doesn't accommodate the complexities and uniqueness of his feelings. His genuine feelings become overshadowed by the performative aspects of the language he has learned. The pressure to adhere to linguistic norms hinders the free flow of emotions and the expression of his true self (Sheckley, 1957).

III. CONCLUSION

Taken together, these six stories show Vonnegut and Sheckley converging on a shared diagnosis even as they arrive at it by different routes. Both writers imagine worlds in which a governing medium, whether a state broadcast, a game show, a pill, a store, a machine, or a specialized vocabulary, has come to stand in for the experiences it was meant only to convey. In each case the simulation does not simply distort an underlying reality; it replaces it, so that characters such as Harrison Bergeron, Raeder, Nancy, Mr. Wayne, the EPICAC-dependent suitor, and Jefferson Toms lose the very ground from which authentic feeling, desire, or thought might be judged genuine. Read alongside Baudrillard's account of simulacra and Foucault's account of disciplinary power, the stories suggest that hyperreality and surveillance are mutually reinforcing: the manufactured equality, spectacle, pleasure, escapism, affection, and language examined here all double as mechanisms of control, requiring characters to internalize norms they experience as freely chosen.

The two authors nonetheless differ in method as much as they agree in critique. Vonnegut's fiction tends to compress its critique into a single, almost fable-like reversal, delivered in a flatly conversational voice that lets the absurdity of the premise carry the satire. Sheckley, working in a more linear, extended narrative mode, lets his protagonists accumulate experience and self-knowledge only to discover, often too late, that the systems they inhabit were never designed to reward that knowledge. Where Vonnegut's characters are undone almost instantly by a machine or an announcement, Sheckley's are undone gradually, by their own participation in a bargain they entered with open eyes. This distinction in pacing and tone may help explain the disparity in the two writers' reputations: Vonnegut's economy of form produces immediately memorable images, while Sheckley's more patient unraveling of the hyperreal demands a slower kind of attention that has, perhaps unfairly, kept him in Vonnegut's shadow.

What emerges from reading the two together is a shared postmodern concern with what happens to the human subject once every register of experience — political, sexual, romantic, and cognitive — has been made available as a simulation. Both writers ultimately resist offering their characters a way back to an unmediated reality; the hyperreal, once established, does not release its hold. In this sense, the stories function less as cautionary tales about a possible future than as diagnoses of a present already saturated by the very media, institutions, and discourses that Baudrillard and Foucault describe.

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The Sea as an Archive: Memory, History and Non-Human Agency in Rita Indiana's *Tentacle*

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Abstract— *Rita Indiana's Tentacle (2015) shows the Caribbean Sea as not just a fragile ecosystem, but also as a lively space where histories, memories, and forms of nonhuman agency meet. Encompassing varied time periods and locations, the novel intertwines environmental devastation with the Caribbean's historical and cultural patterns. The article presents a case that Tentacle's sea is a living archive, holding traces of histories unsuited for human archives. Aclide's movement through time and her relationship with the sacred sea anemone disrupt the conventional distinction between the human and the environment. The anemone is essential because it is more than just a passive symbol of nature it is an agent of the temporal, the ecological, and the historical that bears on the possible. The paper applies ecocritical approaches to nonhuman agency, environmental memory, and Caribbean literary studies to examine how water connects colonial history, contemporary environmental degradation, and imaginings of ecological future. The contention is put forth that Tentacle reimagines the Caribbean Sea as a repository of historical memory and as an agent in producing Caribbean identity. The novel of Indiana challenges anthropocentric understandings of history and proposes a more-than-human framework which may make sense of the ecological and historical crisis as an interconnected phenomenon.*

Keywords: ***oceanic memory, environmental memory, nonhuman agency, ecocriticism, Caribbean Sea.***

I. INTRODUCTION

More and more Caribbean writers, will look to the complex relationships between humans and their environments. The sea has a specific placement in this literary tradition. It is a geographical limit, a migration corridor, a memory bank, and a site that is still impacted by colonial exploitation. The Caribbean societies do not understand the sea only as some physical landscape. It holds stories that cross the borders of individual nations and generations. This is especially visible in literature that brings about significant environmental transformation into dialogue with historical memory. An excellent example of this connection is *Tentacle* by Rita Indiana.

Originally published in 2015 as La mucama de Omicunlé in Spanish, *Tentacle* has been translated into English by Achy Obejas. It combines the genres of speculative fiction, Caribbean history, ecological crisis, spirituality, and time displacement. In a not-so-distant future, domestic worker Acilde Figueroa has an encounter with a sacred sea anemone in Santo Domingo, which provokes a sequence of movements in time. The story shifts through multiple historical eras while linking personal experiences to the broader changes affecting the Caribbean environment. Tree of Life's strange time lets environmental destruction become merged with neither history nor attempts to control future by man. Not a lot of attention has been paid to how *Tentacle* engages with queer modes of becoming, but it is definitely present. The polluted and threatened oceanic environment of the novel stands as an important basis for these readings. In focusing

only on ecological calamity, the Caribbean Sea runs the risk of being made into an endangered object for protection. A new reading of Indiana allows for the sea to no longer be simply represented by human characters, but to also intervene in the novel's remembering of history. Marine Environment Participates in Movement Between Temporalities and Complicates Division Environmental History–Human History.

This document therefore treats the Caribbean Sea in *Tentacle* as an archive. The term archive here is not used in the institutional sense that we think of document that has been preserved, usually by some kind of human authority. It is more like a space that is capable of retaining and transmitting traces of experience. The idea of the region as a place of creativity and self-sacrifice is particularly relevant to Caribbean literature. It suggests that official histories are always related or somehow are made by structures of power. In contrast, the sea transcends nation-states and the fixed times and places we like to impose. It can hold the traces of colonial violence, cultural transformation, displacement, and ecological change without reducing them to one official narrative. In this alternative conception of the archive, the sacred sea anemone is at the novel's core. The anemone is more than just a symbol of environmental fragility. In fact, it has its own agency, which reframes human-centric narratives of history. The significance of this is revealed through Acilde's journey through time and broadly, this novel's conception of marine life that could change the historical outcome. The anemone therefore occupies a unique status that encompasses organism, spirit, narrative and transformer. Indiana invites us to reconsider who or what can make history, and whether we belong.

This paper claims that in *Tentacle*, the *Caribbean Sea* is no longer just a setting but rather a memory-laden protagonist of historical processes. Connecting marine ecology with temporal disconnection, Indiana shows that environmental destruction cannot be understood apart from the histories through which Caribbean societies have been produced. The novel thus contests an anthropocentric conception of history and ecology. The sea does not just witness history from afar; it is part of the story's capacity for remembering, connecting to and altering history.

The argument will be developed in three stages. To begin with, the article explores the nexus involving the Caribbean Sea as Historical Memory and how the marine rendering of space problematizes conventional understandings of the archive. Another aspect explored is the temporal structure of the novel and the relationship of water, memory, and history. Ultimately, it analyzes the sea anemone as a case study of nonhuman agency and argues that Indiana's depiction of aquatic life enables ecological processes to contribute to Caribbean history. *Tentacle*, then, can be read as both a novel about the ecological crisis, and as a literary experiment in imagining how the nonhuman might remember human history and intervene in it.

II. THE CARIBBBEAN SEA AS A HISTORICAL ARCHIVE

To think of the Caribbean Sea as an archive, we must first move beyond the idea that archives only exist in the written word. Archives are often linked with institutional frameworks that safeguard records and influence knowledge's status as historical documents. Such institutes are never neutral: there is selection with preservation, and selection is never innocent; it is power-full. In colonial contexts, it is especially salient since the official histories of colonial authorities have tended to eclipse the records of enslaved, displaced and marginalized people, and the marginal memory-lives as well. The limitations of Caribbean literature have been repeatedly responded to by alternative spaces of memory. Given this, the sea presents a particularly potent counter-archive as it is outside the nation and does not belong to any one history.

The Caribbean Sea in *Tentacle* illustrates this tension between preservation and disappearance. A space of movement, violence, exchange, and reconfiguration for centuries has been this. The water of the Caribbean Sea can't be separated from the experience of the region. Ships, people, goods, languages, religions, and political systems made their way across the sea. However, the sea does not keep these histories in the same manner as any archival record. It has fluid memory not a fixed one. It persists through repetitions, marks, material modifications, effects on the environment, and the organization of culture. Indiana's abstract story makes this fluidity particularly evident by refusing to maintain a strict separation between past, present, and future.

This understanding of marine memory blurs the lines between natural history and human history. *Tentacle* never presents ecological transformation as a site of isolated environment issue. The health of the sea environment is linked to political decisions, economic systems, technological intervention, and historical patterns of exploitation. The ecological crisis that the novel represents has a history beyond its future. In the Caribbean, environment degradation becomes just another layer in the past rather than something totally new unconnected to earlier forms of violence.

The novel's depiction of Santo Domingo and its surrounding sea illuminates the importance of the ocean.

Acilde lives in a world where degradation of the environment has become a way of life. The impaired environment is not a mere background threat but the ground in which characters walk. This is important because it stops the ecological crisis from being addressed as an abstract global problem. The Caribbean has a specific social and historical landscape that reveals vulnerabilities. Ecological harm is felt through bodies, work, poverty, institutions, and unequal access to resources.

Acilde's place in this world is of great importance. Living under precarious conditions as a domestic worker, she faces social and environmental inequality. Thus, the relationship she has to the city and the sea is different from those who are privileged with greater economic and political power. As a result, class-issues and structural vulnerability are intersected by the ecological imagination of the novel. The environmental crisis does not affect all subjects equally, and the story of Indiana challenges the idea that humanity is a single category, all confronting nature from the same position.

The archival function of the sea becomes most pronounced when the novel begins to disturb everyday time. Acilde's capacity to move through time enables understanding the present not as a moment in itself, but rather as the result of several timelines. The past is capable of acting in the present, whereas the future is susceptible to being imagined, modified or threatened. Water's characteristics allow that temporal instability because it counters the fixed boundaries that spatialize the terrestrial. The sea can hardly be traced or fixed to one point in the same way a monument or written piece can.

Indiana's challenge to standard historic thinking relies on this very fluidity. If we consider history to be a sequence of events naturally following one another, the future is what immediately comes after the present. *Tentacle*, though, makes this sequence difficult continuously. The temporal structure indicates that historical moments can remain connected and that the results of ecological and political choices can have intergenerational impacts. The sea thus was not just a backdrop for characters to float in. It supplies the materials and concepts for temporalities to meet, and stagger to link.

Marine life, too, is associated with forms of knowledge outside of human systems in the novel. The sea anemone's worth cannot be reduced to scientific or decorative value. The option of transformation is a spiritual knowledge. It is connected to this knowledge. Through this organism, Indiana offers a form of agency not derived from human reason. Because marine knowledge challenges the assumption that meaning or historical knowledge is exclusively human in origin or interpretation. Hence, the sea as archive functions on two connected levels. On the historical level, it carries the trace of Caribbean movement, colonization, and exploitation of nature. It allows Indiana at the level of story to connect events otherwise separated in time. The archive is therefore not a stable object. It continues to be active and can remind us of links we held back. The ecological politics of the novel highlight the significance of natural environment which the sea represents. Furthermore, it also show us that to remember is also to remember the historical processes, not just the materiality, that made the environment vulnerable.

This approach changes the ecological question from how do humans save nature.The phrase flows into a more complex question: "What histories become visible when nature is allowed to help tell history?" *Tentacle* does not offer a straightforward answer. But the way its narrative is structured suggests that taking a look back in time could help ameliorate the ecological crisis. The sea is not just a victim of human activity. Another way in which illegible consequences become legible is through the social medium.

The sea's memory – one that cannot be disentangled from its material existence – functions as an alternative archive. The water of the lakes holds similar contemporary narratives of mobility and loss. Indiana successfully merges these aspects together. Making the marine environment the basis of the novel's chronology, she shows that Caribbean history cannot be understood without also taking into account the nonhuman surroundings through which that history unfolds. The sea holds memories in a way different from humans, but its silence doesn't mean there's no history. The work *Tentacle* tells us about the sea as a living archive, whose changing condition reveals that environmental memory and historical memory cannot be separated.

III. WATER, MEMORY, AND TIME TRAVEL

The Caribbean Sea's archival quality in *Tentacle* becomes highly relevant due to the novel's disruption of linear time. Indiana doesn't show past, present, and future as separate stages in time. They repeatedly overlap through Acilde's experience and through the seascape that corresponds with the differing times of the story. The temporal organization converts the sphere of the environment into the history. Water is particularly suitable for this purpose because it possesses inherent mobility: it flows, travels, links up distant sites and cannot be permanently contained. In *Tentacle,* the material quality of water gets translated into

a narrative structure, where even historical time refuses to be fixed.

Acilde's traversal through various time frames of history is first shown as an extraordinary disturbance of normal experience. However, the movement through time gradually takes on broader ecological significance. She is not merely journeying back to historical events as a disembodied voyeur. Her movement forms part of a larger effort to transform the ecological future of the Caribbean. Consequently, the history cannot be separated from the nature. In order to glean the valuable mysteries of the future of the sea, Acilde must learn to meet the Caribbean in the past. Time becomes an ecological investigation approach.

This relationship undermines the "memory/ history" dichotomy. Memory is usually conceived of as subjective and personal, while history is commonly associated with collective documents and chronological reconstruction. *Tentacle* complicates both categories. Acilde's experiences fall within a larger historical story, while the ecological environment has its own continuity that transcends individual memory. The sea materializes the link between these two types of memories. It persists over time even with changes in state so that the environmental present bears the traces of past historical processes. Therefore, the movement through time of the novel is not only a science-fictional device. It allows Indiana to question what it means to inherit an ecological crisis. Environmental harm is seldom caused by one generation, yet its effects are ill-distributed among subsequent generations. *Tentacle* reveals the unevenness of time by moving between periods. Actions taken in one-time period can become environmental consequences in another. The future, then, is not separate from the past, but materially produced by it.

This notion is of particular significance with regard to the Caribbean, that the area's modern ecological condition could not be divorced from longer histories of colonial exploitation and economic dependency. The novel's shifting through time disallow readers from considering the environmental crisis merely contemporary. It doesn't happen overnight; rather ecological vulnerability is part of a history of accumulation. The sea serves as the connecting medium that permits us to perceive these layers of history simultaneously.

Most of the time Indiana's relationship with time shakes the notion of predetermination. If the future was simply the product of technology and nature in development, then the Acilde journey would have little politics. The potential for transition between time periods allows for making interventions. History is not deterministic. What has happened does not determine what must happen next. However, the novel does not represent this possibility as mere human domination of time. Acilde's capacity to intervene is enabled by the non-human organism encountered. The agency of human beings relies on the relationship with the non-human.

The sea anemone plays an essential role in this process. Its entity connects oceanic ecology, spirituality and changing of time. The organism is a thing that Acilde does not find in the sea. Instead, it enables the story to disrupt its own temporal boundaries. The importance of the anemone is thus partly due to its not conforming to established classifications. This can be understood biologically as a form of marine life, culturally as part of a (spiritual) system, and narratively as a power of transformation. Indiana intentionally permits the coexistence of these interpretations. Such ambiguity is crucial, for it ensures that we do not take the novel to reproduce a mere instrumental grasp of nature. If the anemone were just something we could use to repair the environment, then its function would remain a human one. On the contrary, it is beyond human intention. An organism contributes to the production of knowledge and historical processes. Acilde does not just use nature; she becomes enveloped by a nonhuman force that alters her experience of time and her place in history.

The concept of relational agency is handy for understanding the connection between Acilde and the anemone. In *Tentacle*, agency is not shown as the one-off ability of an autonomous individual. Through relationships between people, marine organisms, historical forces and technologies and environments. The future depends on Acilde's attempts to change relationships. In this light, the novel provides an ecological conception of action in which no actor is ever entirely sovereign over history.

Water strengthens this bonding model. The ecological crisis cannot be associated with a place or a political community; this is because it is transborder. Environmental damage, global warming, ocean decay, and the loss of ecosystems do not recognize borders. The sea joins together spaces that maps disconnect. The Caribbean setting of Indiana is thus especially effective for imagining environmental interdependence. The health of one marine space can impact faraway communities, just as events in one place in history can impact events in others.

Relationship between permanence and change is further complicated by the sea. In one sense, there is an unbroken continuity: the Caribbean Sea has always been there. On another level, it is everchanging. As species vanish, waters are contaminated, coastlines change, and human-environment relations are altered. The continued

naturalness of the sea coupled with the ability to transform the landscape makes it an archive. An archive must keep something, but keeping does not mean not moving at all. The sea's constant motion and transformation of matter is what preserves traces in *Tentacle*.

This idea of memory is very different from a writing. Attempting to store information so it becomes permanent and retrievable is a written archive. The ocean never offers such stability. The memory of this is distributed through organisms, sediment, currents, coastlines, human communities and ecological change. The work of Indiana turns this material instability into narrative. The reader must recreate links between periods and events rather than being presented with a single historical account of authority. The novel's fragmented structure therefore reflects the fragmented shape of environmental memory.

The time-format naturally asks one to rethink responsibility. If the future is materially connected to the past, responsibility is not confined to the moment damage becomes identifiable. Characters are born into conditions created long before their existence. Their actions create effects for those who will be born. The environmental ethics of this have intergenerational dimensions. In this context, novel implies that ecological responsibility should not only seek to meet current human needs, but also historical processes and future effects. Similarly, the novel stops short of depicting history as a straightforward lesson whereby humans can learn and then gain ecological redemption. The futuristic style has a certain anxiety attached to it. Changing the future is possible but it always accompanies uncertainty, violence and sacrifice. This uncertainty is crucial as it prevents the novel's ecological fiction from transforming into a simple account of a technological or political remedy. The environmental future still depends on the unpredictable interactions of human and nonhuman forces.

The ocean finally offers the novel a model for comprehension such uncertainty. Water does not move along a singular linear path. In this complication of currents, separation and return occurs, whilst distance happens through circulation. The way Indiana accounts for time is similar. Historical events that at first appear disconnected, actually connect through the sea and the anemone. The past comes back in the present, and the imagined future reinterprets the meaning of past. *Tentacle* applies an environmental memory through this structure and gives it force. The ocean has memory, of what's happened, and what's to come. Based on what's happening, this would indicate what can happen next. Consequently, the novel's politics becomes productive by theorizing a relationship between ecology and movement. To recall the Caribbean environment is to acknowledge that its present condition has been historically produced; to imagine its future is to rethink the histories that have produced that condition. Water refers to an archive and a passage in this sense. It keeps marks while permitting moving, connects the time while resisting time stability, and links the human with the nonhuman. The speculative narrative of Indiana focuses on animal's capacity of communication in history. The Caribbean Sea joins in historical continuity, while its ecological fragility gets caught up in the memories and futures of surrounding communities.

IV. THE NONHUMAN AGENCY OF THE SEA ANEMONE

The role of the sea as an archive is most neatly explained in *Tentacle* by the figure of the sea anemone. The organism occupies a strange position in the novel; it cannot be properly understood by the nature/culture distinction. Although it is part of the biological world, it is also a spiritual form that has undergone historical and temporal metamorphoses. Through the anemone, Rita Indiana calls into doubt the assumption that nonhuman life exists merely as a being that humans act on. The organism instead gets equipped to steer the course of human choices and history possibilities.

This representation is important within an eco-critical framework because even when the environmental crisis highlights nature, it tends to be anthropocentric in its outlook. Humans must protect, restore, manage or save nature and its life. This strategy of engagement can inadvertently maintain a situation in which humans remain the central agents, while the nonhuman world remains passive. *Tentacle* impedes this hierarchy. The sea anemone isn't just an endangered organism needing human help. Its existence creates intervention in the first place.

The difference is essential. The novel's ecological crisis drives the attempts to alter the future, but it is through the agency of a nonhuman that this possibility arises. Human activity relies on meetings with nonhuman activity. Acilde's behaviour is inseparable from the anemone because the organism alters the conditions under which she apprehends time, history and ecological responsibility. It follows that the relationship is reciprocal rather than purely instrumental. Through its ambiguous status, the agency of the anemone is exemplified. Indiana allows the reader to accept both scientific and spiritual explanations of its power without forcing a choice. It has meaning in all the categories. The Caribbean understanding of nature is complex, and it encompasses not just material components, but also cultural, spiritual,

and historical ones. Anemone thus pushes back against modernity's trend to part ecological understandings from other forms of knowledge's.

Resistance is often relevant when considering colonial history. Colonial systems often classified landscapes, plants, animals, and natural resources based on how well they would fit into particular economic systems. Property and resource were metamorphosed from nature. In *Tentacle*, the anemone does not lend itself to get refined, since what is important about it is exactly its ability to escape human control. What humans extract from it does not exhaust its value. Rather, it has a meaning that alters the relationship of human beings to their environment. The creature they encounter in the novella also complicates the notion of temporal superiority. When imagining ourselves as ahead of history and thus technologically capable of controlling the future, we forget that we don't control the future. The anemone undermines this certainty. It connects different times without relying on the technology through which humans usually understand time. The existence of this evidence suggests continuity beyond human life itself.

The connection between human agency and environmental memory is quite productive as we saw. The sea as an archive, the anemone is one of its archives, which has its active participant. All that the information does is to keep something the same. On the contrary, its existing ties diverse historical potentials and makes human agents experience forms of knowledge beyond ordinary historical systems. As a result, the organism is transformed into a vehicle of accessibility to the environmental archive. The anemone also blurs the line of subject and environment. At first, Acilde seems to pinpoint a human subject acting on an external world. However, her meeting with this sea organism alters this relationship. She joins an ecological network where human and nonhuman actors all share in the agency of action. Her choices affect the surroundings, but the atmosphere in turn alters her choices. Thus, the novel presents agency as ecological and relational rather than autonomous. This relational model is very important in the context of responsibility in the novel. If only humans were behind the environmental crisis, we might think that they alone could choose to take on its responsibility. The situation presents a tentacle complication. The damage that people cause is introduced into networks that cannot be fully controlled. Oceans, organisms, weather systems, technologies, and human communities interact in ways that exceed individual intention. Responsibility thus implies acknowledging the limits of humanity.

These limits become powerful with the sea anemone. It has transformative significance but doesn't act like human forms of politics or technology. It doesn't use traditional language or arrange itself based on human institutions. After all, it affects the events. Indiana thus invites readers to rethink what qualifies as action. We don't need speech, political organization, or conscious intention in a human sense to have agency. It doesn't mean the novel merely attributes human traits to the anemone. Actually, it's worth depends on its difference from the human being. An organism is not meaningful because it looks like a person. It gains meaning because it inserts another way of existing into the story. The biological and spiritual otherness of Indiana allows us to think through forms of agency that cannot be contained within anthropocentric categories. As a result, the anemone enriches the critique of human exceptionalism. Human exceptionalism posits that humans occupy a unique place due to their consciousness, rationality, technical ability or historical self-awareness. *Tentacle* argues against this hierarchy by placing a marine creature in the center of its temporal and ecological imagination. The survival and agency of a living form that human systems may otherwise deem marginal will be interlinked with the future of human communities. It also results into an ethical reversal. The book not only gives us reason to nudge humans toward imagining what happens when humans rely on environmental and other-than-human's processes, but it also offers advice. If such dependence occurs, it does not negate human responsibility but rather clarifies why responsibility is necessary. While humans can inflict enormous ecological harm, they cannot live so easily outside the systems which they harm.

The Caribbean context makes the argument stronger. The Caribbean's identity, culture, history and geography are shaped by the sea, which is not a conceptual global space. so, causing damage to the sea is damaging a space through which Caribbean histories and communities have been forged. But the novel does not depict the sea solely as a victim. Giving nonhuman life agency allows the marine environment to shape history rather than merely suffering the consequences of human history. In this connection, the anemone's relationship with time becomes significant. Its presence makes it seem that the future is open to change, but it also shows that not all change is of our making. Acilde's journey relies upon a non-created ecological encounter. The possibility of history emerges through interaction. The novel's speculative dimension is fundamentally ecological: the future is produced through relations among multiple lives and material forces. As a result, agency is distributed. Humans have agency, but so does the environment, the organism, the technology, and the history. These agencies function in cooperation with one another. They cross paths and at times create

problems. *Tentacle's* imagined ecological future thus cannot depend solely on human control. We must accept that we are all interconnected.

Indiana broadens the definition of historic participation via the sea anemone. The organism does not just live in Caribbean history; it gets to be part of the apparatus within which history is changed. That is the vital link between nonhuman agency and the archival function of the sea. The sea keeps what it recalls, but it also acts on what it remembers. The organisms found in it have ecological continuity and at the same time engage in processes that form human possibilities. Thus, the sea anemone changes the story from one about human beings facing an environmental disaster to one in which humans confront the boundaries of their own exceptionalism. The ecological world doesn't wait for humans to intervene. It has its own forms of continuity, agency, and resistance. Focusing on a marine organism at the center of time-transformation, Indiana indicates that visualizing an ecological future requires more than representing environmental destruction. It needs acknowledging the nonhuman world as an agent of history itself.

V. TRANSITIONING FROM BEING OBJECT TO AGENT

The importance of *Tentacle* rests in the end with the refusal to disjoin environmental crisis from questions of historical agency. The novel does not merely portray a Caribbean environment harmed by man and envisage its restoration. By making these ecological forces part of the movement of the narrative, it reorganizes the human-environment relation. The sea, the things in it and the histories they make active what can be remembered as well as what futures can be imagined. In other words, environmental literature may produce a hierarchy that it is against. When the natural world is only depicted as a victim of ruthless male human exploitation, it is still human at the centre. As nonhumans are considered useful only in relation to humans, its degradation becomes a problem as human life is threatened. Indiana's new narrative expands this framework by assigning a role of the oceanic environment to the production of narrative possibilities.

The transformation revolves around the sea anemone. Its significance goes beyond its symbolic link to environmental fragility. It has an influence on the narrative's structure. Through its link with Acilde and the temporal movement of the novel, the organism becomes implicated in the creation of alternative historical possibilities. Nature thus does not simply represent; it also helps determine the conditions of representation. When the environment becomes a narrative agent, so shifts corresponding responsibilities and concerns for the children. The environmental crisis isn't something we have to prevent in the future. It is already containing within historical relationships between peoples, places, technologies and ecosystems. *Tentacle* demonstrates how these relationships caused the environmental damage in the Caribbean. The ecological crisis is thus seen as a historic condition rather than a specific disaster.

The speculative dimensions of the novel make visible its historical dimension by allowing the effects of environmental choices to appear across time. The future shifts into a field where presently caused effects can take place, while the past morphs into a legitimate source of explanation for currently vulnerable ecologies. The final outcome is a conception of environmental history that is circular. What happens in one period affects what happens in another. Such a vision has particular importance to Caribbean Literature because the region's inventive environments are wedded to a history of colonialism, extraction, migration, and economic inequality. The Caribbean Sea has served as a pathway of connection and a space of exploitation. The river has unleashed the movement of people and goods, even as its waters have witnessed histories of violence and dispossession. Indiana's new work positions this historical complexity within an imagined ecological frame, showing that environmental vulnerability cannot be disentangled from the political histories of a place.

The environmental future envisioned by *Tentacle* is thus not one in which all human beings are subjected to the same ecological threat. Vulnerability is more easily inflicted on those lower down the social hierarchy. Acilde's vulnerable state indicates the intersection of environmental conditions with class and labour. People with less social and economic means are often more exposed to environmental degradation directly whereas those with more powerful have more chance to avoid it or manage it. The archive value of the sea is thus not only a function of memory. The environment registers inequalities that official histories may overlook. Whether it's a polluted coast, a devastating ecosystem or a vanishing marine species, the consequence of political or economic decision gets revealed in spite of absence in institutional narrative. Therefore, ecological change is a form of history.

The sea's archival role, in other words, cannot be disentangled from those of environmental justice. To regard the environment as an archive is to ask who acted to produce its present and whose lives are caught up in that present. *Tentacle* fosters this kind of reading, whereby one observes ecological transformation embedded in a

Caribbean social world instead of as an abstract planetary crisis. At the same time, Indiana refrains from stating that the environment is merely there to testify against man. The ocean is more than a proof of human wrongdoings. The fact that it is an independent agency complicates causes and consequences. When ecological systems are modified they produce effects greater than those foreseen by the people who modified them. Environmental mechanisms take on their own paths. No human being can fully control the ensuing crisis.

The representation of nonhuman agency in the novel is important politically. Acknowledging agency beyond the human does not imply they are off the hook. Instead, it reveals the limits of human control while making responsibility more necessary. Humans may initiate changes to nature, however, they do not determine the outcome. The environment can reconfigure and modify possibilities that are social, historical and biological. As a result, the novel proposes an understanding of the ecological based on interdependence. Water has been an invisible fish in which our relationship with the sea, technology, economy, and history takes place. No organism functions completely isolated. The making of the future did not depend on single human decision but the interplay of these.

This relationship also explains why the novel's treatment of spirituality matters. The anemone's sacred dimension enables Indiana to contest a purely instrumental conception of nature. The economic value or scientific utility is not the full story of the marine organism. The spiritual significance of nature enables human beings to encounter nature through another mode of relatedness, one that isn't useful but significant.

Collapsing of the ecological, spiritual and historical dimensions is particularly effective because it resists the dis-embedding of environmental thought from the Caribbean cultural experience. Instead of bringing an abstract environmental framework to the Caribbean, Indiana creates ecological imagination by drawing from the region's histories and symbolic systems. The ocean becomes at once material, historical, spiritual, and political. *Tentacle* contributes to a rethinking of the Anthropocene in this sense. The phrase, in general terms, stresses the profound abilities of humans to alter planetary systems. The new novel of Indiana complicates the notion of a unique, undifferentiated "human" agent. Human beings have unequal powers and responsibilities, while the ecological systems they change still have capacities that exceed human control. The novel thus seeks a more nuanced understanding of environmental history.

The Caribbean landscape makes this distinction particularly very evident. The ecological crisis of the world cannot remove local histories. Global environmental processes do not bear the same meaning everywhere. Thus, Caribbean futures cannot be envisioned apart from its colonial pasts, nor can its environmental present be disassociated from its social inequities. The basic structure of the novel renders this insight into a question of possiblity. Changing our relationship with each other, the world and the future sustainably produces a better future. It is important for human beings to try and change their position in the environment instead of just looking for technological ways to control it.

The anemone presents a different way of being because it is not reducible to human uses. The essential ecological transformation of *Tentacle* is the transition from environmental object to narrative agent. The sea starts as a troubled space but, as I will show, it becomes involved in the novel's historical imagination. The anemone best embodies this change; it participates in the sea, exists spiritually, and is a force associated with temporal change. Indiana ascribes narrative importance to a mode of living that is outside the accepted structures of human historical agency. The outcome is an ecological politics not of human supremacy, but of acknowledgment. The importance of nature does not need to be humanized. It is important precisely because it is diverse, dynamic, interconnected and capable of shaping human futures. *Tentacle* thus invites readers to imagine history as a more-than-human process that continually crosses the boundary between environmental and human memory.

Indiana changing the archival and narrative mean of the Caribbean Sea from the background setting, changes environmental memory meaning. When we remember the sea, we remember the histories contained in it; in our recognition of its agency, we acknowledge that history continues to shape human possibilities. The novel therefore shows that an ecological crisis is also a crisis of memory, of history, of imagination. Ultimately, *Tentacle* does not merely inquire about humanity's ability to survive ecological disaster. Can we rethink our relationship to the nonhuman world before thinking about what comes next? The sea tells the story. Through the sea, a space without writing that offers a memory, that connects without limiting itself to political borders and that acts without imitating human agency. By means of this alteration, Indiana depicts the Caribbean setup as not just a mere spectator of History but a partaker.

VI. CONCLUSION

Rita Indiana's *Tentacle* renders a conceptual apparatus for thinking about the environmental crisis, historical memory,

and nonhuman agency. The novel does not treat the Caribbean Sea as merely a threatened natural landscape. It allows the Caribbean Sea to become a space through which different histories, temporality, and life forms pass. The sea is an archive not composed through files but through the constant reference of ecology, traces, beings, and the effects of humans. Looking at the Caribbean Sea as an archive, also tells us why environmental crisis in *Tentacle* can't be modern. The Caribbean's ecological situation links to longer histories of colonialism, exploitation, inequality, and technological intervention. The connections that struggle to be articulated in a linear way are made visible in Indiana. As a result, the future is not independent from past, rather, it is produced as a result of past actions.

According to the sea anemone, agency can take on a meaning that exceeds human-centred models. Its importance goes beyond its representation of vulnerability to the environment. In 1984, through its link with Acilde and the novel's temporal architecture, the organism becomes an active agent in the creation of historical potential. So, the anemone thus questions the belief that only humans can shape history. This representation also allows *Tentacle* to think beyond the human-centred approach towards environmental crisis. Humans are the instigators of ecological destruction but this novel suggests they do not exercise complete control over the environments they alter. The actions of marine organisms, water, climate and technology along with historical forces interact. As a result, agency is not merely human but relational.

The Caribbean Sea's archive function connects ecological memory to environmental justice. The environmental present documents the effects of the past. The unequal social conditions ensure that those who suffer the most are the ones who undergo ecological vulnerability. Because Indiana focuses on Acilde's precariousness, the ecological catastrophe is never viewed as an abstract planetary problem. Destruction of nature is faced through certain bodies and communities.

In the end, *Tentacle* calls on readers to rethink the meaning of history and who is authorized to create it. The answer cannot be conceived as a simple replacement of human history by natural history. On the contrary, the novel proposes a continuum model in which human and nonhuman histories produce one another. While the ocean bears memories, it is also an agent that permits, in this case, the anemone, existing within the environment but also affecting human history's possibilities. By situating the Caribbean Sea as both a storehouse and an agent, Indiana thus creates new possibilities for Caribbean ecologies. The *tentacle* shows that environmental literatures do not have to depict nature only as a "victim" awaiting human saving. Instead, the world can be nonhuman or more-than-human which can participate in memory. A reading of that sort makes evident the novel's wider significance: in order to imagine an ecological future, we need to do more than confront environmental destruction. Indeed, we must also question the anthropocentric assumptions through which history itself has been understood.

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Queer Literary Expressions in the Select Anthological Collection "Yaraana" by Hoshang Merchant— A Critical Study

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Abstract— *This Research paper deals with a critical study of selected Indian queer literary marvels written by different Queer Writers of India, which has found its deep expression in the anthological collection "Yaraana" (1999) by Hoshang Merchant. Being gay or queer in India has always been considered and believed to be of occidental origin and has no connections with Indian society despite the fact that Homosexuality in India dates back to as early as the 2nd Century CE and is mentioned in the ancient Indian text Kamasutra and is explicitly depicted in the famous Khajuraho Temple. Most early modern queer writings were not documented due to the fear of being executed, as it was illegal and despised at the time. Queer Indians have secretly produced a lot of good writing reflecting their common lives, perceptions, feelings, pains, and pleasures. These emotions finds its expressions in both English and other Vernacular languages and the later is also translated into English by many modern and openly gay writers like Hosang Merchant, R. Raj Rao, Mahesh Dattani, Ashok Row Kavi, Vishnu Khandekar, Vikram Seth etc. Due to the queer nature of queer literature, most writings are difficult for common readers to find. Unlike the common literary genres, the LGBTQ genre came much later in the English Literary Canon. The anthological collection of gay writings from South Asia by Hoshang Merchant has made the critical study of Queer Expressions easy and possible. The anthology is a collection of 47 Queer Expressions by different Queer Writers of South Asian origin, mostly from India. Diaspora has also enriched the queer literature through their vivid expressions and shades . Love, deception, acceptance, romance, hidden lives, queer feelings and fear of being found out, sexual desire and pleasures, and unfulfilled ambitions have been beautifully woven through stories by queer writers. This provides insight into their lives and the societal conditioning impacting their lives.*

Keywords— ***Queer, Queer Literature, Yaraana, Kamasutra, LGBTQ, Queer Expressions, Hosang Merchant, Gay, Homosexuality, English Literary Canon, Diaspora, Occidental, Anthological, South Asia***

INTRODUCTION

Queer writing in India dates back over 2,000 years, with its first mention in the Kamasutra. In modern era the first gay novel The Boyfriend by R. Raj Rao was published in 2003. Since then, many gay writings have been widely published and have found expression in multifaceted forms.

Hoshang Merchant , an Indian queer writer became a well known figure in queer literary circle by his anthological collection of Gay writings in English from South Asia titled '*Yaraana*' which was published in the year 1999 by Penguin Books India. This book contains a collection of 47 queer writings by different authors in various forms and colors, both in prose and poetry. Hoshang Merchant edited this anthology himself not because of any academic interest but instead it was his personal interest and sociological discourse.

The anthology opens with an introduction in which Merchant discusses homosexuality and his experience with

it. He introduces himself as "I, a male homosexual Parsi by religion, Christian by education, Hindu by culture and Sufi be persuasion" (Hoshang Merchant)

According to Merchant, the word 'gay' is more like a political term. He does not like the fact that in India, gays are often confused with 'eunuch.' All the beautiful women and their images in Bollywood are the product of gay men as they work as dress designers, hair stylists, choreographers, or make-up men. Even Pop culture is created by homosexuals.

Hoshang believes in Judith Butler Sexual Performativity which states that "The misapprehension about gender performativity is this: that gender is a choice, or that gender is a role, or that gender is a construction that one puts on, as one puts on clothes in the morning, that there is a 'one' who is prior to this gender, a one who goes to the wardrobe of gender and decides with deliberation which gender it will be today." (**Judith Butler, Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"**). Therefore, gender, whether gay or straight, male or female, or cis or trans, is just a social construct.

According to Merchant, gay liberation in India can be seen as equivalent to women's liberation, as both fight against toxic masculinity; however, they cannot come closer as they fight for their rights in their own way, and different powers are at work. The intersections and interplay of gender, caste, and nationality play an important role in individual choice. Shyam Selvadurai a renowned gay writer from Sri Lanka has to choose between a tamil lover and his citizenship during the time of enthnic strife and civil war. He expresses the concern that there are rapes and oppression against gay men just like women, but it is not even talked about as it is not a gender conformity or heteronormative.

Most religions see procreation as the only aspect of human sexuality, and anything other than it is seen as a crime or unnatural. This has created hatred against homosexuals, as it does not lead to any biological production and is wrongly interpreted as if it is just 'recreation' and nothing is serious about it. This has forced many homosexuals into the closet in India, and they are subjected to forced marriages, which make them lead a double life.Youthful friendships without including homosexuality is common in Indian Men which is often termed as 'Yaraana' or 'dosti'. Most men masquerade under straight poses as it is more socially comfortable for them. Even queer authors choose not to reveal their sexuality and remain anonymous, as they consider this may harm their literary careers.

'Yaraana' (1999), as named by Merchant, is a blend of expressions of male friendship, love, and bonding that shaped the often ignored aspect of the South Asian queer narrative, from Ashok Row Kavi's autobiographical masterpiece, 'The Contract of Silence, ' to Vikram Seth's account of homosexual love between Phil and Scot in The Golden Gate. From Mahesh Dattani's homosexual drama to R. Raj Rao bold account of homosexual eroticism and from the intense poetry of Dinyar Godraj, Adil Jussawalla and Sultan Padamsee to translated works from Hindi , Marathi, Gujrati and other Indian Languages by Bhupen Khakkar, Kamleshwar , Vishnu Khandekar.

From Shyam Selvadurai's Srilankan war-torn saga of love in 'Funny boy' to K.C. Ajay's account of love and friendship in Nepal reveals 'Yaraana' or male bonding in a unique way.

FIRAQ GORAKHPURI'S PARTING PAIN

The anthology of Hoshang Merchant begins with the famous reflective essay of Firaq Gorakhpuri, Public Meeting and Parting as Private Acts.' The essay beautifully tells the story of meeting someone in a public place, like the lovers caught each other's attention and fell in love; inside their hearts there's a feeling of happiness and intense love that can be felt only by them and not by the world. Therefore, it is a world of homosexuals who can feel this inside them. After every meeting, there is parting; sometimes it becomes a memorable memory, and sometimes it takes a new course. Whatever it becomes, meeting and parting in public become private acts that can only be felt by the person experiencing them. William Shakespeare has beautifully expressed this feeling "parting is such sweet sorrow that I shall say good night till it be morrow" (Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet Act 2, Scene 2). In homosexual love, it is a forbidden feeling that remains concealed to protect oneself from the tortures of society and the fear of being judged.

Homosexuals can feel the loneliness of parting as their relationship seems impossible in a non-conforming society that mostly sanctions only binary relationships.

ASHOK'S CONTRACT OF SILENCE

In his autobiography, Contract of Silence, ' which is mentioned in Chapter 2 of *Yaraana* by Hosang Merchant, Ashok Row Kavi explains how queer people maintain silence about their sexuality and remain invisible to people and society. They practice their sexuality in silence due to fear of being 'found out' and humiliated by society, which is largely heteronormative and homophobic in nature. He mentions that some feminists who were also fighting toxic masculinity were homophobic in their writings. Ashok was barely eighteen when he decided to publish an article on homosexuality, which was not so common at that time. Interestingly, Khuswant Singh, a famous Indian English writer, was heading the Illustrated Weekly of India, a premier periodical that published the article.

Ashok also mentions religious bigotry and how it promotes hatred of homosexuality and myths about homosexuals spreading diseases. Some religious groups were so realistic, broad-minded, and progressive that they embraced queer leanings.He mentioned his ‘coming out’ at the Ramakrishna Mission, where monks made him feel comfortable and accepted.

Ashok says that his position in the family was secure as he was considered a brahmachari (bachelor), which is tied to his silence about his sexuality. Even the condition of a woman in the family remains the same as his Akka (father’s sister), who also faced isolation and rejection due to her sexuality.

Ashok explicitly details the gay subculture in Bombay in the seventies and early eighties and his homosexual experiences with famous professionals. Most homosexuals married and lived like heterosexuals to avoid societal interrogation and maintain heteronormativity. Ashok also mentioned the *Bombay Dost*. It was **India's first registered magazine for the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBTQ) community**. It became the saviour for most of the queer members who thought there was no one to turn to. Some local politicians in India had bizarre views about homosexuality, and they were both homophobic and misogynist.

Even in his family, Ashok felt the heat of homophobia; one of his siblings complained to his mother that his homosexuality was making their lives worse. Logically, it had nothing to do with his siblings family lives, but it was hatred that for every bad thing happening to them, they just blamed homosexuality, as it was the easiest way to escape their own faults and deficiencies, as being heterosexist was perfectly flawless and completely acceptable.

Social acceptance and discrimination was not just the only problem faced by homosexuals but it was another enemy of mankind and the social stigma behind it which they had to face it was HIV AIDS. The Gay Asian and Lesbians Group’s Association (GALGA) was set up in late 1992, and its members were those who were sexually abused and suppressed by the heterosexist majority. Ashok extensively toured to spread awareness about homosexuality and even presented his paper, ‘Emerging gay peer groups in Bombay, ’ at the Eighth International Congress on HIV AIDS, which made him ill. In this condition of illness, he was supported by his friends, who were more than his family. As a gay man, his struggle and fight for himself and the cause of queer people is remarkable.

MAHESH DATTANI’S NIGHT QUEEN THAT BLOOMS AT NIGHT

Mahesh Dattani’s play Night Queen revolves around Raghu and Ash, who share love and affection for each other. Ash, due to his fear of society and people, decides to marry Gayatri, who happens to be Raghu’s sister. Both of them meet in Raghu’s room at night and pour their hearts out to each other. However, none of them are ready to accept who they are due to fear of society and non-conformity. Night Queen, grown outside Raghu’s room, is the symbol of hidden love, which blooms only in the night, away from people in the dark, just like the love of Raghu and Ash, who show their affections towards each other only in the night. Raghu confronts Ash, who is pretending to love and marry Gayatri due to fear of being tortured by society and his brother, who considers homosexuals worse than lepers.

This play highlights how homophobia forces someone to live in the closet and hide their true feelings. To gain acceptance and approval from society, they are forced to marry someone for whom they have no feelings and live a life of lies and betrayal. This also questions the institution of marriage, where marriages are arranged just to keep the family tradition going on, without considering whether such marriages are successful or not. Raghu and Ash at last embraces each other Raghu says “We should give each other the chance to bloom – at least at night” (Night Queen) reflects uncertainty of a queer relationship which never lasts long due to social non- conformity and acceptance.

R. RAJ RAO’S MOONLIGHT TANDOORI

Moonlight Tandoori is a poignant account of R. Raj Rao’s his stay in England as an Indian Student and his feelings and emotions as a gay man living away from his homeland and feeling homesick.

Moonlight Tandoori is a restaurant where R. Raj Rao used to live in a room above this restaurant . During his stay, he develops an emotional attachment to a young boy named Khalid, who works in the restaurant. It was quite embarrassing for R. Raja Rao to show affection to the young boy because of his age. He felt lonely and homesick away from his home and family, and in this feeling of loneliness, he was seeking the company and friendship of someone whom he could count on. He developed an attachment to Khalid. When he revealed his feelings for Khalid, he was equally puzzled and stated, I have sex with women, not with men.” He stopped talking to the author as it was non-conforming. The author was longing for friendship and affection from someone in an alien land. Finally, forty-eight days before his departure to India, Khalid realized that the author was leaving the country and complained about racial prejudice in England, which was very common for any Asian folk. Both shared romantic affections with each other as they needed company in the strange land. The story presents a deep feeling of affection, loneliness, and love that has a happy ending but is never fulfilled and has no future burdened by heteronormativity and circumstances.

FUNNY BOY – A SEARCH FOR IDENTITY AMIDST ETHNIC CONFLICT

The Srilankan writer Shyam Selvadurai in his coming-of-age story Funny boy pens his autobiographical story about his search for identity in the hard times of civil ethnic conflict between Tamil and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka.

In his childhood Arjie (Author) fall in love with a Sinhalese boy named Shehan and identity as being homosexual , but he felt a great pain in embracing it as he was faced with two bitter challenges the one is the self- acceptance and the second the biggest of all is the ethnic conflict which affected his own feeling for Shehan as he was Sinhalese and author was Tamil. This created a barrier for his love to flourish and thrive.

Judith Butler Gender performative is clearly seen in the life of Arjie as he is expected to perform the role of masculinity through playing cricket, showing interest in girls , avoiding feminine activities, behaving in a aggressive manner these repeated acts, behaviours and performances highlights that Gender is performative rather than a fixed act.

Michael Foucault's Discursive power of Sexuality is seen in Funny Boy as the institutions of power and authority like Arjie's Family, School and Society shaped his Sexuality as family compels him to regulate his behaviour, school teaches him to be masculine, the society expects him to confirm to the heterosexual norms. His attraction to Shehan also challenges heteronormativity; he does not conform to the social norms of heterosexuality, as given in *'The Epistemology of the Closet'* by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Heartbroken, he has to leave Sri Lanka for Canada as his home and relationship are destroyed due to ethnic conflict. Therefore, there is an intersection between sexuality and ethnic discrimination.

"I felt hot, angry tears begin to well up in me as I saw this final violation. For the first time, I began to cry for our house. I sat on the verandah steps and wept for the loss of my home, for the loss of everything that I held to be precious. I tried to muffle the sound of my weeping, but my voice cried out loudly as if it were the only weapon I had against those who had destroyed my life". **(Funny Boy)**

YAYATI – A DESIRE THAT HAS NO ENDING

Yayati by Vishnu Khandekar originally written in Marathi translated by Nilesh Jahagirdar is story of a king who desire for bodily pleasure even after his marriage to Devyani. To fulfil his sexual desires, he becomes involved with Sharmistha. His pursuit of sexual pleasure challenges the conventional ideas of marriage, morality, and monogamy. This desire for pleasure is connected with the authority and power he holds as a king, as stated by Michel Foucault's discursive power of sexuality. His toxic masculinity fosters his patriarchal ambition, and Devyani and Sharmistha are merely victims of his desire.

According to Judith Butler's Gender Performativity, his repeated interplay of gender and uncontrolled sexual desire has made him blind to youthful longevity, and to gain this, he even becomes ready to take away the youth of his son Puru. Puru, as an obedient child, sacrifices his youth for his father Yayati, but the desire has no end and limit; at last, he feels very regretful but cannot even face his son Puru due to his embarrassment.

"Earlier, I had not been able to bear the sight of my own reflection. Now, I cannot bear the sight of Puru. Before leaving the town, Sharmista sent me a message: 'Let Puru always be blessed by the King.' Instead, I struck him with a thunderbolt. I felt like going near him, embracing him, and consoling him, but only for a moment. I could not dare to do it. Sin is such a coward !" **(Yayati)**

THE SWEETEST OF ALL THE LOVE

The Sweetest of All, written by Frank Krishner, is a short autobiographical story included in *Yaraana*. It is the story of a young homosexual man, Mark, who discovers his feelings and attractions and the difficulty of living an honest life in a heterosexual world.

As a teenager he fell in love with Frank Richards a man who is older than him and developed an emotional and physical attachment with him but unfortunately due socially imposed ideas of masculinity and heteronormativity Frank Richard could not accept homosexual identity and wishes Mark were a woman. To protect his relationship, Mark thought of undergoing a sex-change operation, but the doctor advised him that he was perfectly normal and should not change his sex just to please someone. His relationship with Richard could have existed if Richard accepted him the way he was; unfortunately, it ended. Years later Mark fell in love with another man named Rajen who supported him and accepts him the way he is but he also got married and Mark decided not to disrupt his marriage so kept himself away from him and only considers him as his friend and brotherly figure. It is interesting to note that Rajen although accepts Mark for his homosexual identity but he himself is not immune to the rigid family and societal expectations and decides not to marry Mark.

Finally, Mark was approached by another young man named Praful, who seems to be another possible romantic match. The story ends with the bitter sweet tone, although Mark experiences many relationships but the relationship with the Rajen was sweetest of all, remembering Rajen he says "It wasn't my first love. It was not my last, but yours was the sweetest of all."

Mark is a victim of social expectations and unfulfilled love like any other homosexual man seeking love in the heteronormative society. His feelings are subdued, and he hopes to find the love that can set him free. Most of the people he loved did not continue their relationships with him due to fear of being oppressed and humiliated, and they finally turned to a heterosexual conventional way of living. This follows the principle of compulsory heterosexuality as given by Adrienne Rich, where society pressures people to be straight or heterosexual and is treated as a default or normal choice.

CONCLUSION

The Study of select queer works in Hosang Merchant’s ‘*Yaraana*’ provides vivid insight into the lives of queer individuals, which are largely shaped by the complex interplay of society, power, institutions, norms, performative acts, and expectations. The Queer theory of Michel Foucault, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler and Adrienne Rich explains the elements that influence sexuality and the life of queer people. If these elements are broadly studied, the lives of homosexuals can be improved, and the goal of a more inclusive society can be achieved. The larger gap and discrimination can be narrowed by addressing their concerns and feelings. Heteronormativity and conventional ideas of sexuality need to change, and broader studies are needed to include queer individuals in mainstream society. Society evolves, as do the ideas that govern it. The toxic masculinity, compulsory heterosexuality and its effects can influence queer peoples’ life and are forced to supress their feelings which does more harm than good. The concerns of queer people must be heard and given due importance in a just and egalitarian society.

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An Empirical Study on the Translation of Political Texts — A Study on the English Version of *The Governance of China* from the Perspective of Domestication and Foreignization

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Abstract— *In recent years, metaphor research on key Chinese political discourses has attracted extensive attention, especially works represented by The Governance of China. The metaphors adopted in such works help highlight national ethos and state-governing philosophies. Drawing on Lakoff's metaphor theory and Venuti's domestication-foreignization translation theory, this study employs Nvivo15 to analyze metaphorical expressions and translation strategies in the source text and its English translation. The findings reveal that the text contains 13 main types of metaphors, and foreignization is the dominant strategy adopted in the English translation, dominated by literal translation and word-for-word translation. This paper aims to explore how to convey the in-depth implications of the source text in cross-cultural communication and facilitate the effective international communication of Chinese political discourse.*

Keywords— ***metaphor, domestication and foreignization, national image, international communication-oriented translation***

I. INTRODUCTION

In the report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping made important arrangements for enhancing the communication capacity and influence of Chinese civilization. He stressed the need to strengthen the development of international communication capabilities and comprehensively improve the effectiveness of international communication. Against this backdrop, political external-propaganda texts have become a research hotspot at home and abroad. As one of the key works in this field, The Governance of China undertakes the mission of publicizing the ideology and state policies of the Communist Party of China and shaping China's national image. Political metaphor, as one of the most

prevalent expressive devices in political discourse, profoundly manifests various dimensions of Chinese political discourse and reflects the connotations behind such discourse (Yin Donghao, 2008).

In recent years, domestic scholars have carried out extensive research on metaphorical expressions in political discourse. For instance, taking General Secretary Xi Jinping's speeches delivered since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China as research corpus, Yang Lin (2019) focused on the frequently-employed political metaphors carrying ideological implications in these speeches. This comprehensive study points out that metaphor constitutes a conceptualization model of human experiential experience, as well as a new perspective for observing political life. Wang Jingzhi and Yang Zhong (2012) note that cognitive metaphor theory has a short developmental history and awaits further theoretical refinement. In particular, research on political metaphors needs in-depth exploration. Nevertheless, domestic conceptual-metaphor research has attracted growing attention and boasts great potential and room for development from cross-cultural Chinese-foreign comparative perspectives. Evidently, further exploration is still required to tap into the theoretical depth and practical application value of domestic metaphor research.

Targeting Government Work Reports issued between 1978 and 2011, Wang Weimin and Huang Ya (2012) analyzed conceptual metaphors identified in these documents and found that architectural metaphors and journey metaphors were the most widely-adopted metaphor patterns across successive Reports. Adopting theories and classification approaches similar to those of other relevant studies, their paper fails to conduct in-depth or innovative investigations into metaphorical expressions in the English translations of political discourse.

Although numerous studies have examined metaphors in political discourse, particularly the classification of conceptual metaphors, there remains a lack of systematic and in-depth research on metaphor translation strategies in the English version of The Governance of China. Most existing studies focus on the classificatory analysis of metaphors. Against the backdrop of international communication, nevertheless, research on textual metaphors within political discourse translation is still insufficient.

Drawing on Venuti's domestication and foreignization translation strategies, this paper adopts a mixed-method discourse-analytical approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods to conduct an in-depth analysis of metaphorical expressions and the English translation strategies for metaphor-laden phrases in The Governance of China.

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

As a cognitive mechanism and mental tool, metaphor is widely employed in political discourse. In their classic work Metaphors We Live By, Lakoff and Johnson first established the theoretical system of conceptual metaphor. They categorized the theory into three core models: structural metaphor (e.g. Argument is war), orientational metaphor (e.g. Happy is up), and ontological metaphor (e.g. Inflation is an entity). This taxonomy will also be adopted for discussion in this study.

In his monograph *The Translator's Invisibility*, Venuti made the first systematic distinction between two translation strategies: foreignization and domestication. This theoretical framework clarifies that the foreignization strategy stresses the faithful reproduction of cultural features in the source-language text and the author's intentions, requiring translators to preserve the linguistic alterity of the original to the maximum extent. By contrast, the domestication strategy is oriented toward target-language readers' reception habits and achieves fluency and readability of the translation through cultural adaptation. Each strategy bears its own strengths:

domestication facilitates readers' comprehension and acceptance of translations, whereas foreignization fosters pluralistic cultural exchanges. Accordingly, grounded in metaphors in political texts, this paper explores the possibilities of "bringing the reader to the author" and "bringing the author to the reader". It aims to assist readers in grasping the profound implications of political texts, bridging cultural disparities, and enriching the interpretive dimensions of source texts.

When investigating metaphors embedded in political texts, this paper first elaborates on the theoretical backdrop of conceptual metaphor as well as domestication and foreignization translation strategies. It then draws on concrete examples from political texts to conduct an in-depth analysis of how these theories and strategies can be applied. For illustration, the metaphorical expression "water without a source" is identified in the book. Its English translation "water without a source" is a literal translation representative of the foreignization strategy. This strategy effectively retains the original unique imagery, enabling international audiences to directly appreciate the cultural nuances embodied by metaphors in Chinese political texts and building a bridge for cross-cultural communication. Analyses of such examples can further uncover how the above-mentioned theories and strategies can be utilized to accurately capture and represent the rich connotations and values of metaphors within political texts.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, 18 thematic chapters from *The Governance of China* are selected as the scope for corpus retrieval. These chapters cover various genres including leaders' speeches, conversations, and congratulatory letters. Detailed information of the themes is presented in Table 1 below:

No.	Theme (Word Count)	Text Genre
1	Upholding and Developing Socialism with Chinese Characteristics (13,441 words)	Theoretical Exposition
2	The Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation (14,047 words)	Theoretical Exposition
3	Comprehensively Deepening Reform (20,958 words)	Policy Discussion
4	Sustained and Sound Economic Development (10,362 words)	Policy Discussion
5	Advancing the Rule of Law in China (8,173 words)	Policy Discussion
6	Building a Great Socialist Cultural Country (15,174 words)	Policy Discussion
7	Advancing Social Programs and Reforms in Social Governance (6,635 words)	Policy Discussion
8	Promoting Ecological Progress (2,173 words)	Policy Discussion
9	Modernizing National Defense and the Armed Forces (2,904 words)	Policy Discussion
10	Enriching the Practice of "One Country, Two Systems" and Advancing National Reunification (7,811 words)	Policy Discussion
11	Following the Path of Peaceful Development (9,238 words)	Policy Discussion
12	Forging a New-Model of Major-Country Relations (6,239 words)	Policy Discussion
13	Pursuing Good-Neighbor Diplomacy (5,931 words)	Policy Discussion

14	Strengthening Solidarity and Cooperation with Developing Countries (8,696 words)	Construction & Development
15	Actively Participating in Multilateral Affairs (18,095 words)	Construction & Development
16	Forging Close Ties Between the Party and the People (8,672 words)	Party-Building and Anti-Corruption
17	Promoting Anti-Corruption Campaigns (5,922 words)	Party-Building and Anti-Corruption
18	Enhancing the Party's Leadership Capacity (11,698 words)	Party-Building and Anti-Corruption

As can be seen from the above table, architectural metaphors, journey metaphors and human-oriented metaphors account for the largest proportions. The following section comprehensively presents and analyzes the three most-frequently-used metaphor types and their corresponding expressions.

(1) Architectural Metaphor

In Metaphors We Live By, Lakoff points out that metaphorical concepts are reflected in linguistic vocabulary. Take the typical conceptual metaphor THEORY IS A BUILDING as an example. Its cognitive mechanism is manifested as cross-domain mapping from the source domain (architectural categories) to the target domain (theoretical systems). In this process, architectural terms such as "foundation" and "framework" are metaphorically projected onto the domain of theoretical construction. Different from tangible objects such as high-rises, tables and chairs that can be perceived through sight and touch, architectural metaphors are employed by state leaders to articulate abstract concepts difficult for audiences to conceptualize, such as the state, international relations and agreements. The meanings of architectural metaphors are closely tied to the Party's philosophies and the real-world context of national development. Several metaphorical expressions have been identified in *The Governance of China.*

WWJ-01-01: Socialism with Chinese characteristics was pioneered in the new era of reform and opening-up, and it is built on the foundation of the Party's long-term endeavors.

WWJ-08-01: Strive to build a Beautiful China.

WWJ-01-01: New requirements for achieving the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects.

In the examples above, the source-domain concept of construction is mapped onto the target domain. Literally, the Chinese character "jian" means the practice of building-construction. Here, nevertheless, it conveys the meaning of developing Chinese society. The development of socialism with Chinese characteristics can be analogized to the process of erecting a high-rise edifice, which calls for scientific planning and coordinated efforts from designers to guarantee structural stability.

The value of such architectural metaphors lies in the following: state leaders provide the developmental framework analogous to architectural blueprints, while the general public acts as the practical subject. Within the dynamic balance of construction and development, the two parties jointly drive the iterative upgrading of society.

(2) Human-Oriented Metaphor

According to the definition of conceptual metaphor, personification falls within the cognitive operational system of ontological metaphor. Its cognitive mechanism lies in attributing human properties and characteristics to inanimate or abstract entities. In *The Governance of China,* personifying human-oriented metaphors are mainly applied to Party and government institutions, policy mechanisms and other subjects. In the speeches, the state

is endowed with human-like features, behaviours and even emotions. The most plausible explanation is that human bodies and behaviours are familiar to readers, which enables more convenient and intuitive perception of abstract concepts. Therefore, human bodies and behaviours can serve as the source domain to help audiences comprehend unfamiliar fields. Several personification metaphors extracted from the book are presented below:

WWJ-01-06: We must promote institutional innovation through theoretical innovation built on practice.

WWJ-07-06: Help impoverished areas shake off poverty and achieve prosperity.

WWJ-02-06: Labour is the fundamental force driving the progress of human society.

In Chinese, the character "tui" (push) originally refers to the physical act of humans exerting force outward or forward with hands to displace an object. In the examples cited above, "institutional innovation" and other items are abstract concepts rather than tangible physical objects, yet they are treated as entities that can be pushed. This linguistic phenomenon corresponds to the theory of conceptual metaphor.

Scholars have also studied the linguistic realisations of the conceptual metaphor THE STATE IS A PERSON. For instance, Alan Cienki has analysed the use of metaphors such as kin-term vocabulary in political debates and found that metaphors can reflect specific modes of thinking and political intentions. Similarly, the metaphors discussed here are intended to help audiences grasp complex political concepts more intuitively. Meanwhile, they demonstrate the common feature of political discourse: employing metaphors to strengthen expressive effects and communicative power.

(3) Journey Metaphor

From a Chinese linguistic perspective, a journey generally refers to the spatial-displacement trajectory between two points. When talking about travel, people tend to think of travellers, means of transportation and so forth. In this book, state leaders compare national development to a journey, intending to convey that the country's "journey" cannot be accomplished overnight; instead, it is long-term and arduous. Relevant metaphors can be found in the texts, for example:

WWJ-01-05: We must ensure that the fruits of development benefit all people more equitably and forge ahead steadily toward common prosperity.

WWJ-15-05: Strengthening cooperation with BRICS countries has always been one of the priorities of China's foreign policy.

Before embarking on a journey, one must first select a destination to set a general direction. Similarly, a country needs to define its goals before pursuing national development and work toward them purposefully. In a study of conceptual metaphors in People's Daily over 60 years, Li Yu (2013) notes that journey metaphors rank among the most-frequently-occurring types, and they serve, to some extent, to orient the direction of national development. Therefore, journey metaphors are particularly vital for disseminating Chinese culture within political discourse, and continued efforts are required for China to achieve socialist modernization.

To sum up, conceptual metaphors in political discourse possess distinctive and vital features, which enhance the discourse's emotional appeal and intelligibility. In international-communication-oriented translation, metaphors can transcend cultural and linguistic barriers. By drawing on concepts familiar to international audiences, they convey China's development philosophies and objectives and boost communication effectiveness.

In terms of national-image construction, metaphorical expressions demonstrate China's resolve and endeavours to pursue socialist modernization. They project a proactive and enterprising national image, enable the international community to gain intuitive insights into China's

development, secure understanding and recognition, facilitate the dissemination of positive messages, and elevate China's international discourse power and soft power.

5. An Analysis of Translation Strategies for Metaphorical Expressions in the English Version of *The Governance of China*

Metaphor translation is essentially culture-oriented translation. When rendering metaphors embedded in political discourse, translators must give serious consideration to the underlying cultural elements. Accordingly, this study explores strategies adopted in metaphor translation through an analysis of translation methods. The translator ought to guarantee accurate transmission of semantic meaning while complying with the reception norms of target-language audiences. Domestication and foreignization are target-language-oriented and source-language-oriented respectively, offering in-depth insights into practical translation approaches.

Several methods including literal translation and free translation are adopted in the book to pursue precise information transfer and conform to target-readers' expressive conventions. For statistical analysis, the author extracts 1094 metaphor-containing sentences from the volume. The overall statistical distribution of domestication and foreignization is presented below:

Table 3 Domestication and Foreignization Translation Strategies

Translation Strategy	Translation Method	Frequency	Proportion
Domestication	Free translation	151	13.8%
	Imitative translation	132	12.1%
Foreignization	Literal translation	468	42.7%
	Word-for-word translation	343	31.4%
Total		1094	100%

Table 3 shows that for English renderings of metaphors in this book, two translation methods are adopted under the domestication strategy: free translation and imitative translation, while literal translation and word-for-word translation are employed under the foreignization strategy. The study indicates that the foreignization strategy is widely applied in The Governance of China. In the following chapters, we will draw on metaphor theory and dig deep into connotations against the background information of relevant discourse. Translation methods will then be summarized from the perspectives of these two strategies.

(1) Domestication Strategy

When examining metaphor-translation strategies in the English version of The Governance of China, this study identifies an approach analogous to metaphor shift, namely the domestication of metaphors. Similar to metaphor shift, the source text and target text adopt different metaphor realizations. The merit of the domestication strategy lies in producing more natural and fluent target-language texts, lowering comprehension barriers for target audiences and facilitating the accurate transmission of cross-cultural information.

1. Free Translation

When there is a conflict between the deep-seated semantic structure and the literal form of a text, translators should give priority to free translation to effectively

resolve communicative barriers arising from differences in linguistic conventions. The Governance of China contains numerous words and expressions with Chinese characteristics. Under certain circumstances, free translation can also be adopted to faithfully and fluently convey source-text information and realize cross-cultural transmission of the core values of the target text, as illustrated below:

ST1---当今世界，人类生活在不同文化、种族、肤色、宗教和不同社会制度所组成的世界，各国人民形成了你中有我、我中有你的命运共同体。

TT1---Today,we live in a world with different cultures,ethnic groups,skin colors,religions and social systems,and all people on the planet have become members of an intimate community with a shared destiny.

Free translation occupies a pivotal position in Chinese-English translation practice. Chen Daliang (2023) offers a precise definition of free translation in his paper, stressing that free translation neither distorts nor misinterprets the source text, nor does it arbitrarily omit content to convey the main idea. Instead, it produces smooth and elegant target text while fully preserving the original meaning.

Take the widely-used Chinese expressions “you have me in you” and “I have you in me” as an example. When describing the close bonds among peoples of various countries and international solidarity and cooperation, these expressions not only deliver literal meaning but also carry a container metaphor that subtly reflects the tight connections between nations. Nevertheless, given their distinct Chinese cultural features, a crude literal rendering such as “you have me, I have you” may easily cause comprehension ambiguities for foreign readers unfamiliar with Chinese cultural backgrounds.

Under such circumstances, the free-translation treatment of rendering “你中有我” and “我中有你” as “you have me” and “I’ve got you” retains the profound connotation of the source text, greatly improves the fluency of the target text, and effectively overcomes comprehension barriers caused by cultural differences. It fully demonstrates the significant value and positive effects of free translation in cross-cultural translation.

2. Imitative Translation

Scholars hold that translation is a communicative activity. On this basis, translators are supposed to adopt “set-phrase translation” whenever target-language conventional expressions are available, so as to achieve good correspondence between the target text and the source text. Where set-phrase translation is not feasible, “imitative translation” should be employed to approximate the stylistic features of the source text to the greatest possible extent (Zhu & Zhang, 2021).

There are several instances of imitative translation in The Governance of China. To conduct an in-depth analysis of such renderings and explore how China disseminates its domestic ideas and culture in a smooth and natural manner, some examples extracted from this book are presented below.

ST2---共建“一带一路”是论坛发展的新机遇新起点。

TT2---Jointly building the Belt and Road Initiative is a new opportunity and starting point for the development of the forum.

In the Chinese context, “the Belt” and “the Road” are core concepts. In concise language, they succinctly summarize the major forms of two major cooperation initiatives: the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road. The English rendering “Belt and Road” directly adopts this structural pattern. “Belt” corresponds to “带” and “Road” corresponds to “路”. It preserves the figurative feature of the Chinese expression, enabling international audiences to intuitively

grasp the literal meaning of the concept and demonstrate the uniqueness of China's political ideas.

2. Foreignization Strategy

Yuan Xiaoning (2010) reflected on domestication and foreignization. She pointed out that foreignization refers to taking the source language as the basis when dealing with target-language linguistic conventions and cultural traditions, and highlighting the exotic flavor of the source language in the target text, namely "accepting the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text and transporting the reader to the foreign scenario".

In the English translations of China's political discourse, the rational application of foreignization helps better present the favorable national image.

1. Literal Translation

Chinese narrative conventions are generally built on its unique characteristics of temporal logic, so the sequencing of Chinese discourse follows certain rules. When the syntactic structures in works by Chinese leaders enjoy high compatibility with the target language, literal translation can be adopted, namely translating in accordance with the original word-order and lexical meanings. By preserving the original word-order structure and semantic relations, literal translation maximizes the faithfulness to the source text and fulfills the principle of fidelity to the greatest extent.

ST3---求同存异，就是要本着同舟共济的精神，发挥政治智慧，聚集和扩大推动两岸关系发展的共识，妥善处理和管控分歧。

TT3--- Seeking common ground while reserving differences demands that both sides give full play to their political wisdom, reach and expand a consensus for enhancing cross-Straits relations, and properly handle and control their differences in the spirit of sharing and mutual assistance, as passengers in the same boat.

"Pulling together in the same boat" serves as a typical example of literal translation. As a Chinese idiom, it originally refers to people crossing a river in one boat. Later, it acquired figurative meanings of unity and mutual assistance, joint efforts to overcome difficulties, and shared interests. Its literal meaning and metaphorical connotation are easy to understand. A direct literal translation will not cause comprehension barriers for target-language audiences, and can fully convey both its semantic meaning and metaphorical implication.

Similarly, when discussing domestication and foreignization strategies for Chinese-English idiom translation, scholars cite literally-translated idioms such as "Blood is thicker than water" and "to be on thin ice". Studies indicate that retaining the figurative images, national features and linguistic styles of idioms in translation can not only preserve the cultural characteristics of the source text, but also enrich the target text, broaden readers' cultural horizons and offer them knowledge and insights. Such translation techniques play a vital role in promoting cross-cultural communication and understanding (Huang Xiaolin, 2009).

2. Word-for-Word Translation

Word-for-word translation refers to translating source-language words and expressions in isolation one by one strictly following the original sequence, without taking into account the linguistic norms and usage habits of the target language at lexical, syntactic and semantic levels.

ST4---愿同各方建设好上合组织环保信息共享平台，携手促进经济高质量发展和"绿色复苏"。

TT4---We will work with other parties to ensure the success of the SCO Environment Information Sharing Platform and jointly promote high-quality economic development and green recovery.

In this case, "green recovery" adopts word-for-word translation and contains two metaphors concerning color and plants. In the color metaphor, green symbolizes a sound environment and vigorous development; "recovery" means regaining vitality, and in this context it refers to

rapid economic growth through friendly cooperation among countries. Word-for-word translation here can convey China's philosophy of coordinated economic and environmental development in its original flavour. The neat and well-organized target text also helps improve the accuracy and fluency of information for international audiences.

To sum up, this study focuses on the application of domestication and foreignization strategies in metaphor translation. Its findings are of great significance for improving the effectiveness of international publicity translation and contributing to national image building. Translations of expressions such as "you are in me and I am in you" and "pulling together in the same boat" enable international audiences to gain an in-depth insight into China's discourse system and modes of thinking, injecting cultural depth into the multi-dimensional shaping of national image. It not only enriches the corpus for global cultural exchange, but also enhances the recognizability and influence of Chinese culture in international contexts. By contrast, domestication strategies target the cultural background and linguistic habits of target-language audiences. Through free translation, imitation translation and other approaches, domestication removes comprehension barriers caused by cultural differences, improves the fluency and acceptability of information transmission, facilitates effective cross-cultural communication, and lays a foundation for the wide dissemination and positive perception of national image.

Against the backdrop of globalization, the rational application of domestication and foreignization in international publicity translation enables the target text to strike a balance between cultural transmission and information communication. It helps construct a comprehensive, objective and vivid national image, promotes the better integration of Chinese culture into the world, and enhances China's international discourse power and soft power.

6. Conclusion

By examining metaphorical expressions and their translation strategies in the English version of The Governance of China, this study reveals the great value of metaphorical expressions in political discourse. Proper application of metaphors helps political leaders build discourse systems, translate abstract governance concepts into ideas accessible to the public, and strengthen connections with the public to achieve political goals. Furthermore, the study finds that the foreignization-oriented translation strategies adopted in the English version preserve source-cultural images via literal translation, which facilitates the international communication of Chinese culture and the shaping of China's cultural image. Therefore, metaphor in political discourse deserves due attention in translation research and practice, so as to promote the building of China's national image and political discourse.

Nevertheless, this study has its limitations. Restricted by linguistic complexity and the researcher's competence, it fails to fully explore the connotations of the relevant work. Besides, the small-sized database and manual collection and analysis may affect the accuracy of research results. Follow-up studies should deepen the reading and interpretation of the work and carry out panoramic research.

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Ideal Image and Technical Intervention: A Study of *Liking What You See: A Documentary* from the Perspective of Jung Archetype Theory

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Abstract— *Ted Chiangss works have attracted widespread critical attention for their exploration of humanity and philosophical questions from the perspective of science fiction, with Story of Your Life being one of his most representative works. Among his writings, Liking What You See: A Documentary explores the complex relationship among appearance-based discrimination, social prejudice, and identity through the fictional technology of "calliagnosia." Adopting a pseudo-documentary narrative form, the work presents the changes that occur in both social aesthetic judgment and individual psychology following technological intervention. Accordingly, this thesis situates the work within the contexts of aesthetic archetypes and the development of fictional technology, examining how the "ideal image," as a deep-seated psychological structure, influences individual cognition and the operation of social structures. Drawing primarily on Carl Gustav Jung's archetypal theory, this thesis analyzes the archetype of the "ideal image" in the text. The discussion focuses on three major aspects. First, it examines the formation mechanism of the "ideal image" archetype within the narrative and the process through which it is socially reinforced. Second, it investigates how calliagnosia intervenes in and deconstructs the operation of the archetype by altering cognitive pathways.*

Keywords— ***archetypal theory, ideal image, Liking What You See: A Documentary, science fiction***

I. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

With the rapid development of technologies such as artificial intelligence and digital imaging, human modes of cognition are being reshaped through technological intervention. In this process, technology has not only entered people's everyday lives but has also gradually penetrated the ways in which people perceive and understand "beauty." In contemporary society, physical

appearance continues to occupy an important position in the evaluation of individuals, while physical attractiveness exerts an invisible yet decisive influence on aspects such as career development and social interaction. This appearance-based mode of evaluation has consequently generated extensive discussions surrounding "lookism" and the ethical issues associated with it.

Against this social and technological background, Ted Chiang's *Liking What You See: A Documentary* (hereafter referred to as *Liking What You See*) constructs a fictional social model highly centered on physical appearance and introduces the technology of "calliagnosia." This technology deprives individuals of their ability to judge beauty and ugliness without altering visual information itself, instead interfering with their value judgments concerning physical appearance. By modifying the perceptual system, the technology temporarily eliminates people's attention to appearance, thereby enabling individuals to focus more closely on the inner qualities of others.[1]

The story adopts a pseudo-documentary narrative form and presents different positions toward calliagnosia through multiple interviews, transforming "beauty" from an individual experience into a broader social issue. Within this framework, Ted Chiang not only reveals the socially constructed nature of aesthetic standards but also addresses a deeper question: Is human dependence on "beauty" merely the result of social conditioning, or is it rooted in a deeper psychological structure?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Previous Studies

At present, academic research on Ted Chiang's works has mainly focused on narrative techniques, thematic concerns, and technological ethics, with scholars both in China and abroad having produced a number of relevant studies.

In international scholarship, researchers have generally focused on the tension between technology and humanity in Ted Chiang's works. Some studies have pointed out that his works reveal the fragility of human value systems through extreme technological settings, emphasizing that technological progress does not necessarily lead to ethical progress. Other scholars have analyzed his works from the perspective of narratology, arguing that his use of multiple perspectives, nonlinear structures, and the "pseudo-documentary" form effectively enhances the sense of realism and argumentative quality of his texts. In studies specifically concerned with *Liking What You See*, some scholars have regarded the work as a critique of appearance-based discrimination, arguing that the novel challenges a social evaluation system centered on physical appearance by imagining a "de-aestheticized" society.

In domestic scholarship, relevant studies have largely approached the work from the perspectives of thematic analysis and social criticism, examining how the novel reflects the commodification and mediatization of aesthetic standards in contemporary society. For instance, some studies have pointed out that the novel reveals the manipulation of "beauty" by advertising and the media, as well as individuals' pursuit of the ideal image within consumer culture. Other studies have focused on the narrative form of the work, arguing that its interview-based structure strengthens the plurality and openness of the text, allowing different value positions to be presented alongside one another.

2.2 Theoretical Overview

This thesis is theoretically grounded in Carl Gustav Jung's archetypal theory. Jung argues that the human

[1] Chiang, Ted. *Liking What You See: A Documentary*.[C] *Stories of Your Life and Others*, Vintage Books, 2002, 123–140.

psyche contains a "collective unconscious [2] " that transcends individual experience and encompasses universal archetypal structures. These archetypes are not concrete images but latent psychological patterns that manifest themselves through cultural symbols and behavioral practices, profoundly influencing individual cognition and modes of response.

On this basis, this thesis introduces the "ideal image" as its central analytical category. Although this concept is not an established category within Jung's archetypal system, it can be defined as an archetypal structure continuously reinforced by social and cultural forces, centered on the imagination and normative construction of an "ideal state." Specifically, the "ideal image" exists in an internalized form within the individual psyche. By linking physical appearance, value, and social recognition, it constitutes an important frame of reference through which individuals establish self-identity and evaluate others.

Focusing on this archetype, this thesis primarily analyzes the appearance-oriented mechanisms of value judgment and the aesthetic biases reflected in the novel, while examining the influence of technological intervention on the operational pathways of this archetype.

2.3 Research Methods, Objectives, and Significance

The primary research method of this study combines literary analysis with Jungian archetypal theory. Through an interdisciplinary approach, this study examines the "ideal image" archetype, technological intervention in aesthetics, and their psychological effects on individuals and society in Ted Chiang's *Liking What You See*.

First, literary analysis is employed to examine the plot structure, characterization, and symbolic expressions of the text, with particular attention to how calliagnosia influences aesthetic judgment and social interaction. The study also analyzes the symbolic meaning of "beauty" and its transformation under technological intervention.

Second, Jungian archetypal theory is used to examine the "ideal image" as an internalized evaluative structure and its influence on individual cognition, social standards, and self-identity. The study further explores how technological intervention disrupts the archetype's operational pathways and produces psychological and social instability.

Overall, this thesis aims to explore the interaction among technology, archetypes, and social structures, thereby deepening the understanding of the text's underlying implications and contemporary significance.

III. THE MECHANISM OF ARCHETYPAL PROJECTION IN CHARACTER DIFFERENCES

In *Liking What You See*, Ted Chiang does not explicitly theorize the "ideal image" archetype; instead, he illustrates its individual projection through the differentiated narratives of multiple interviewees. From a Jungian perspective, archetypes are not merely latent structures within the collective unconscious but can be externalized through projection onto others, social norms, and one's own identity. Consequently, individuals may conform to, deviate from, or fluctuate in relation to the "ideal image" archetype according to their social positions, experiences, and physical conditions[3].

Thus, the differences among the characters are not simply differences in personality or attitudes toward calliagnosia, but distinct manifestations of the same archetype at the psychological level. More importantly, these differences reveal how the "ideal image" is internalized as part of self-identity and subsequently produces emotions such as anxiety, inferiority, superiority, and confidence.

3.1 Beneficiaries of the Archetype: Identification and

[2] Jung, C. G. *Man and his symbols*[M]. 1964

[3] Jung, C. G. (1969). The archetypes and the collective unconscious[C].In *Collected works of C.G. Jung, Volume 9. Princeton University Press*. 3-41

Maintenance (Annika)

The character represented by Annika Lindstrom presents a typical state of an "archetypal conformer," in which the individual's physical appearance closely corresponds to the socially constructed "ideal image" and consequently receives continuous positive feedback in reality. In her account, appearance is not merely an objective characteristic but also a social resource that can be actively utilized. She explicitly acknowledges that her appearance attracts greater attention from members of the opposite sex. Rather than avoiding such attention, however, she psychologically identifies with it and derives pleasure and a sense of superiority from it.

In this process, the mechanism of psychological feedback is particularly significant. At the emotional level, Annika experiences a sustained sense of confidence and superiority. Because her appearance continuously receives positive evaluations from others, these evaluations are repeatedly reinforced through social interaction and gradually transformed into a stable system of self-evaluation. Jung points out that when the ego becomes consistent with a particular archetypal structure [4], it produces a smooth flow of psychic energy, manifested in confidence, certainty, and affirmation of one's own value. Annika is situated precisely within such a state.

Second, at the cognitive level, she naturalizes this advantage, regarding "beauty" itself as a legitimate difference that should be preserved. This process of naturalization indicates that the archetype has been transformed from an external norm into an internal belief. Her opposition to calliagnosia is precisely based on this internalized structure: in her view, the technology is not a neutral tool for social regulation, but rather a deprivation of her "inherent advantage." This mode of reasoning demonstrates that the "ideal image" archetype is no longer understood by her as a cultural construction open to question, but instead as a form of "natural right."

Annika's case demonstrates that when an individual continuously benefits from the "ideal image" archetype, the archetype is not only identified with but also actively maintained. This process reveals that the archetype functions not merely as a psychological structure but also as part of an interest structure, whose stability derives in part from the tangible benefits it provides in reality.

3.2 The Marginalized by the Archetype: Questioning and Resistance (Warren)

In sharp contrast to Annika is the character Warren Anway. His experience reveals how the "ideal image" archetype is transformed from a "norm" into an "oppressive structure" when an individual deviates from it. In the novel, Warren explicitly expresses dissatisfaction with his own appearance and even develops an avoidance of his own reflection, at one point becoming unwilling to look in the mirror. This detail is psychologically significant, as it indicates that the individual has already established a negative self-representation and developed a persistent negative evaluation of his own appearance.

Within Warren's psychological structure, two typical consequences of archetypal internalization can be clearly observed.

The first is anxiety. Because appearance-based evaluation continuously exists in social interactions, he displays heightened sensitivity and nervousness when interacting with others, particularly members of the opposite sex. This anxiety does not originate from any specific situation but constitutes a structural emotion, arising from the persistent awareness that the self does not conform to the prevailing standard.

The second is inferiority. Inferiority is not simply a low evaluation of the self but a deeper structure of identity in which the individual regards himself as an existence that is "below the standard." In Warren's case, he does not

[4] Jung, C. G. Psychological aspects of the persona[C].In C*ollected works of C.G. Jung, Volume 7: Two essays on analytical psychology* .Princeton University Press.1953.1-96

reject the legitimacy of the "ideal image." Instead, he accepts this standard internally and uses it as a basis for negating himself. This demonstrates that the archetype has been internalized, but exists in a negative form.

It is precisely under this psychological structure that calliagnosia exerts a significant liberating effect on Warren.

Therefore, Warren's support for calliagnosia is not merely a choice of value position but also an inevitable consequence of his psychological structure. The transformation he experiences reveals a crucial characteristic of archetypal influence: it is highly position-dependent. When an individual is unable to obtain benefits from an archetype, that archetype ceases to function as an "ideal" and instead becomes a form of social pressure that must be resisted.

3.3 The Archetype in a State of Flux: Reconstruction of Identity (Tamera)

Tamera Lyons provides a more complex case. Rather than remaining stably in a state of either conformity or deviation, she undergoes a process of transformation in self-identity under different cognitive conditions. This process reveals the dynamic nature of archetypal influence as well as its characteristic of "re-absorption."

When using calliagnosia, Tamera is unable to perceive traditional distinctions in physical appearance. As a result, the influence of the "ideal image" archetype within her cognitive structure is significantly weakened. During this stage, her self-identity is established primarily through dimensions other than appearance. However, after the technology is deactivated, she gradually becomes aware of the advantages of her own appearance and confirms them through the feedback of others. This process of "becoming aware" is essentially the process through which the archetype re-enters her cognitive system.

In Tamera's case, this process is accompanied by significant psychological changes.

At the positive level, she gradually develops a sense of confidence. Similar to Annika, when an individual discovers that they conform to the standards of the "ideal image," they receive positive feedback from society. Such feedback is internalized as self-affirmation and consequently strengthens confidence.

However, unlike Annika, Tamera's transformation has a distinctly "acquired" and socially constructed character. She did not initially regard appearance as a central dimension of her self-identity. Therefore, when re-entering the archetypal system, she demonstrates a stronger strategic tendency. For example, she begins attempting to utilize her appearance-related advantages to obtain benefits within intimate relationships. This behavior indicates that she does not completely "identify with" the archetype but instead, to some extent, "utilizes" it.

At the latent level, this process may also be accompanied by new forms of anxiety. Having experienced a state in which appearance was free from evaluation, she is more likely to recognize the social nature of appearance-based advantages. This reflective cognition produces a sense of instability in her relationship with such dependence even as she enjoys the benefits provided by the archetype. This is also one of the reasons why she ultimately chooses to activate calliagnosia again.

Therefore, Tamera's case reveals several important characteristics of the archetype. First, the archetype is not fixed but can be activated or inhibited as cognitive conditions change. Second, the archetype possesses a characteristic of "re-absorption": even when individuals temporarily escape its influence, they may be incorporated into its structure again once they re-enter the relevant social context. Third, the internalization of an archetype does not produce a single psychological outcome; rather, it may generate a complex psychological structure involving confidence, strategic behavior, and latent anxiety.

IV. TECHNOLOGICAL INTERVENTION AND THE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE "IDEAL IMAGE" ARCHETYPE

4.1 Technology Does Not Alter Reality but Changes Cognitive Pathways

The narrative repeatedly emphasizes that calliagnosia does not alter the physical appearance of the objective world, nor does it impair individuals' basic ability to visually recognize others. Individuals can still clearly perceive facial structures, but they are unable to evaluate these features as either "beautiful" or "ugly." In the novel, neurologist Joseph Weingarten provides an explicit explanation of this mechanism: the technology does not operate on the visual system itself but interferes with the process through which individuals assign value to visual information. He states, "Calliagnosia itself does not eliminate appearance discrimination. In a sense, all it can do is make different appearances equally attractive[5]."

This statement demonstrates that the technology does not alter the "object" itself but rather changes the way in which the "object is understood." This point closely corresponds to Jungian archetypal theory: archetypes do not directly exist within the external world but instead endow external objects with meaning through human perception and psychological structures. Therefore, when cognitive pathways are altered, the symbolic meaning carried by an external object can undergo a fundamental transformation even though the object itself remains unchanged.

The immediate consequence of this transformation is the disruption of the chain of "appearance—emotional response—value judgment." Aesthetic preferences that would originally arise instantaneously are delayed or even eliminated, and individuals can no longer rely on appearance to rapidly construct social perceptions. This transition from "immediate judgment" to an "absence of judgment" not only changes individual perceptual experience but also weakens the point of entry through which the archetype operates in reality.

The essence of calliagnosia is not to "eliminate the archetype," but to prevent it from functioning in specific contexts by interrupting its operational pathway. This setting not only reveals the malleability of aesthetic judgment but also further demonstrates that the social power of the "ideal image" does not derive from its content itself, but from the mechanism through which it can be continuously activated and reproduced.

4.2 The Deconstruction of the Archetype

In situations where calliagnosia is not used, individuals' perception of others usually demonstrates a distinct "aesthetic orientation." At the moment of visual contact, physical appearance immediately triggers aesthetic judgment, which subsequently generates emotional responses and value associations. This process is highly automated and reflects the immediate activation of the "ideal image" archetype at the perceptual level[6]. However, once technology intervenes, this aesthetic orientation is systematically removed and replaced by a structural state of "cognitive blankness."

When recalling her experience of using the technology, Tamera Lyons points out that, under this condition, they were "unable to judge whether someone was attractive." She further describes how, when watching a film with friends, she was unable to distinguish differences in the characters' appearances and could only rely on narrative clues, such as the identity of the protagonist, to infer who was considered "more attractive" in the traditional sense. This experience demonstrates that aesthetic judgment is not simply absent but is instead replaced by a form of "indirect reasoning." Such a transformation means that individual perception shifts

[5] Chiang, Ted. *Liking What You See: A Documentary*.[C] *Stories of Your Life and Others*, Vintage Books, 2002, 123–140

[6] Jung, C. G. *Man and his symbols*[M]. 1964

from "direct evaluation" toward cognitive construction under conditions of incomplete information.

This transformation directly affects patterns of social behavior. When appearance no longer provides effective information, individuals must rely on other dimensions to construct their perceptions of others. However, this process is not entirely positive. As the debate within the novel points out, "Calliagnosia takes away the bad things, but it takes away the good things too." This statement reveals the dual nature of technological intervention: while weakening appearance-based discrimination, it also reduces individuals' opportunities to obtain positive feedback through their physical appearance. From a Jungian perspective, this means that the archetype exists not only as an oppressive structure but also performs the function of providing recognition and meaning.

V. CONCLUSION

The "ideal image" in *Liking What You See* functions as a structurally stable archetypal mechanism rather than merely a cultural preference. Through socialization, it becomes internalized within the individual psyche, linking physical appearance with value judgment, social identity, and hierarchical structures.

Technological intervention primarily affects the cognitive pathways through which the archetype operates rather than the archetype itself. By interrupting the connection between visual perception and aesthetic judgment, calliagnosia weakens the influence of appearance on social evaluation. However, the restoration effect shows that once the technology is removed, the original aesthetic mechanism can quickly resume. This suggests that the archetype, as part of the collective unconscious, remains highly resilient.

The novel also reveals the dual effects of technological intervention. While technology can reduce appearance-based discrimination by changing cognitive conditions, it may also create new instability by weakening existing symbolic structures. Its effects therefore depend on its interaction with psychological mechanisms and social structures.

Overall, this thesis demonstrates that aesthetic judgment is rooted not only in cultural construction but also in deeper cognitive and psychological structures. Although technology can alter the way the "ideal image" archetype operates, it cannot easily eliminate its underlying foundation. Understanding technological and social change therefore requires attention not only to technological functions but also to the psychological structures underlying human identity and social order.

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Practices, Dilemmas and Causes of Chile's Population Aging Countermeasures— Also on the Enlightenment to China

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Abstract— *As a pioneer economy in global pension privatization reform, Chile is currently in the transition period of deep population aging. The adaptability of the original individual account pension system to the labor market structure continues to decline, and problems such as old-age poverty and social exclusion have become increasingly prominent. Carrying out relevant country-specific research has clear practical necessity. Based on the social exclusion theory and the multi-pillar old-age security analysis framework, this paper adopts policy text analysis and data research methods, combines official Chilean statistical data and two authoritative aging survey datasets, systematically sorts out Chile's aging response policy system, and analyzes the implementation dilemmas and underlying causes of the policies. The study finds that Chile has built a four-in-one policy framework covering legal protection, pension system, elderly care services and governance support. However, it still faces dilemmas such as low public institutional trust, unbalanced elderly security structure, multidimensional social exclusion of the elderly, and significant group security gaps. The causes stem from the multiple superposition of institutional path dependence, political fragmentation, fiscal constraints and age stereotypes. This research can provide Latin American perspective experience and policy enlightenment for China to improve its aging governance system and optimize the elderly security system.*

Keywords— ***Chile, population aging, dilemma, cause, countermeasures***

I. INTRODUCTION

In February 2019, according to local Chilean media reports, a 94-year-old man in the Chilean capital Santiago shot and killed his 86-year-old wife before committing suicide. According to his suicide note, the reason for the suicide was that the two elderly people were living in

extreme financial hardship and had to rely on their children for financial support. Finally, they chose to end their lives because they could no longer bear to continue to be a burden to their children. Such incidents are not isolated cases. According to statistics from the Chilean Ministry of Health in 2022, the suicide rate among people aged 70 and above in Chile is the highest across all age groups, and the suicide mortality rate among men aged 80 and above reaches 39.5 per 100,000 people, making elderly men the group with the highest suicide risk. Cross-national comparative studies further show that the suicide mortality rate of elderly men in Chile is at a relatively high level in Latin America and the Caribbean. Taking men aged 75 and above as an example, the suicide mortality rate in Chile reached 38.5 per 100,000 people in 2015, ranking only below Cuba and Uruguay among the 8 countries compared (Cárdenas, 2021, p.18). In addition, the 8th National Survey on Social Inclusion and Exclusion of the Elderly in Chile shows that the public's overall evaluation of the country's aging response work is relatively low.

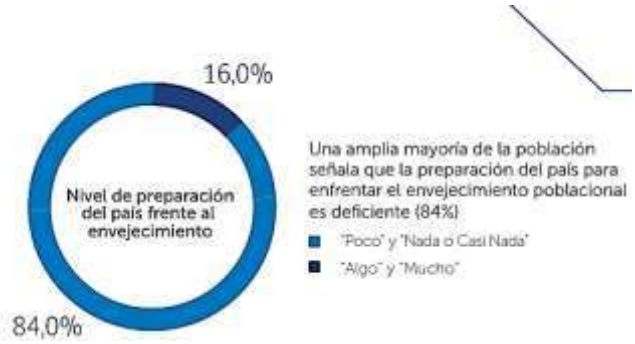


Fig.1 National Aging Response Capacity Evaluation

Source: The 8th National Survey on Social Inclusion and Exclusion of the Elderly in Chile, 2025

However, as the fifth largest economy in Latin America, Chile ranks among the top in the region in terms of per capita gross domestic product, and it is the first country in the world to carry out pension system reform, with remarkable reform results that many countries have competed to follow. Nevertheless, there is a clear gap between the institutional reputation and the actual security effect. According to data from Chile's Pension Regulator, the average monthly pension received by retirees in Chile in March 2019 was about 259,000 pesos. As of March 2026, the average monthly pension for normal retirement age in Chile has only slightly increased to 261,000 pesos. Among them, the average pension of the most widely adopted Retiro Programado (Programmed Withdrawal) method is only about 169,000 pesos, which is below the national minimum wage standard. The quality of life of many elderly people cannot be guaranteed, which has further triggered social dissatisfaction with the pension system and the government's aging response measures.

At present, Chile is in an irreversible transition of deep population aging, and fundamental changes have taken place in the population age structure and family form, which constitutes the long-term demographic background for pension policies. According to the 2024 population census data from the National Institute of Statistics of Chile, the proportion of the population aged 65 and above in the total population has reached 14.0%, more than doubling from 6.6% in 1992; during the same period, the proportion of the population aged 14 and below dropped from 29.4% to 17.7%, and the population structure shows a clear aging trend. According to statistics from Chile's National Service for the Elderly (SENAMA) in 2025, the population aged 60 and above in Chile is growing steadily, reaching about 3.995 million in 2025; it is expected to approach 7 million (6.958 million) by 2050, and the pressure of population aging will continue in the long run. At the same time, the family structure has also changed simultaneously: 11.6% of all households in the country are composed entirely of people aged 65 and above, and the average household size has shrunk from 4 people in 1992 to 2.8 people in 2024, which has continuously weakened the supporting function of traditional family elderly care. This long-term transition will continue to exert pressure on policies such as the pension system, public healthcare, long-term care and

elderly employment.

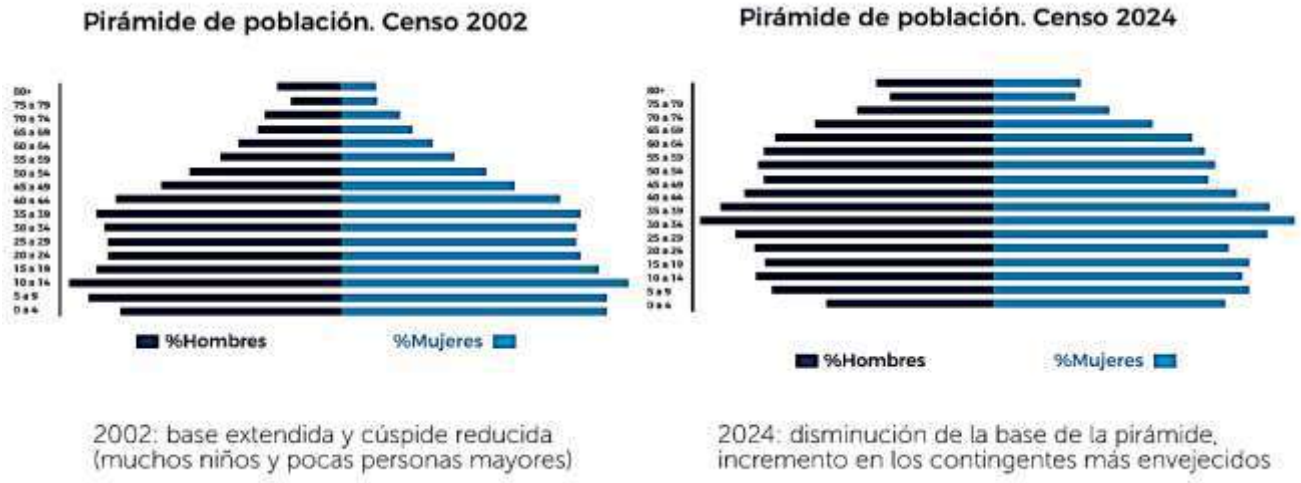


Fig.2 Population Pyramid Structure from the 2002 and 2024 Censuses

Source: The 8th National Survey on Social Inclusion and Exclusion of the Elderly in Chile, 2025

Guaranteeing the rights and interests of the elderly group and improving their quality of life are of great significance to Chile's social stability and long-term development. The 2023 Latinobarómetro public opinion survey shows that compared with young people who show support for authoritarianism or indifference to the political system, the elderly in Chile have higher recognition and maintenance of democratic ideas and systems. A stable elderly security system is an important foundation for maintaining social, political and stable operation. At the same time, the continuously expanding elderly group is not only the key target of people's livelihood security, but also a potential force for social participation, consumer market and economic development. The effectiveness of aging governance is directly related to social equity and long-term development potential.

Facing the intensifying aging pressure, successive governments including those of Bachelet, Piñera, Boric and Kast have adjusted the elderly care system and aging policies: from the establishment and improvement of non-contributory safety-net pensions, to the legislative promotion of the mixed pension system, and then to the legislative exploration of the long-term care system and comprehensive elderly rights protection. Chile's aging policy system has gradually evolved from fragmentation to systematic institutionalization. However, restricted by multiple factors such as economic fluctuations, party game and accelerated population aging, the overall progress of the elderly care cause is relatively slow, and there is still a considerable gap between the policy implementation effect and public expectations. In particular, the fiscal austerity policy implemented by the Kast government after taking office in 2026 has aroused widespread social concerns about cuts in welfare expenditures such as the Universal Guaranteed Pension, which further increases the uncertainty of the development of the elderly care cause.

As a pioneer of pension privatization reform and a typical sample of deep aging, Chile's practical experience and practical dilemmas in aging policies have strong reference value. This paper focuses on analyzing the implemented aging policies and measures in Chile, including legal protection, policy formulation, social security, healthcare, etc., and explores the problems and their causes encountered in the current development of

Chile's elderly care cause. On the one hand, it can supplement the country-specific studies on aging governance in Latin America, and on the other hand, it can provide cross-national experience reference and policy suggestions for China to cope with the challenge of population aging, improve the elderly security system and enhance aging governance capacity.

II. CHILE'S MEASURES TO COPE WITH POPULATION AGING

Chile protects the rights and interests of the elderly in the fields of welfare, health, family and social integration through legislation. In 2002, Chile promulgated Act No. 19828 to establish the National Service for the Elderly, ensuring that the elderly in Chile can enjoy appropriate social care, support and services. In 2010, Act No. 20427 was passed to incorporate the issue of elder abuse into national law. In 2015, Act No. 20864 was promulgated, which exempted retirees aged 65 and above from paying health insurance premiums, simplified the procedures for receiving pensions and other benefits, and provided other welfare benefits. In 2021, Act No. 20375 was passed to incorporate palliative care as a universal right, providing hospice care for patient groups dominated by the elderly. In 2022, Act No. 21419 was promulgated, which replaced the old Basic Solidarity Pension with the Universal Guaranteed Pension (PGU) to improve the level of pension benefits. In March 2025, Chile officially promulgated Act No. 21735 to establish a new mixed pension system and contributory social insurance, and improve the Universal Guaranteed Pension. In February 2026, Act No. 21805 was passed, which for the first time established the "right to care" as a fundamental civil right at the national level, filling the top-level institutional gap in the elderly care service system. In June 2026, Act No. 21822 was promulgated, which established a comprehensive basic law for the cause of aging in Chile, replacing the previous scattered provisions on elderly protection. On the whole, Chile's aging legislation follows the evolution path from single-item regulation to system construction. In the early stage, it focused on short-board supplement contents such as institutional establishment and special rights protection. After 2025, it gradually expanded to deep institutional fields such as pension structural reform, long-term care system and comprehensive rights protection, with legislative density and institutional level improving simultaneously.

In terms of policies, the national government has put forward reforms and innovations in response to the increasingly prominent aging social problems. The privatized pension system with the individual account system as the core is no longer adapted to the current economic development status and labor market structure in Chile. During his term of office, President Boric promoted the completion of the pension structural legislation, created a mixed pension system, focused on improving the pension level, and jointly funded by the state, employers and workers based on the principle of shared social security, so as to solve the problems of the existing pension system. The Boric government once included the postponement of the statutory retirement age in the initial concept of reform, but due to the political differences in the Congress and large social controversies, the mandatory delayed retirement plan was not finally included in the official legislation. However, based on the actual changes in the labor market, the phenomenon of voluntary delayed retirement has gradually emerged in Chile. In addition, the National Elderly Fund was established to fund projects conceived, planned and carried out by elderly organizations through competitive grants. Nevertheless, the Kast government, which took office in March 2026, has implemented a fiscal austerity policy, which adds new uncertainties to the scale of elderly welfare expenditure and the implementation rhythm of existing reforms. On the whole, the core main line of Chile's elderly care policies is to revise and supplement the traditional privatized pension model, and the reform direction of introducing employer responsibility and public

safety net conforms to the development trend of multi-shared security under deep population aging. However, affected by multi-party political games and party rotation, the policy continuity is insufficient, and the policy shift of fiscal austerity also makes the implementation rhythm and security intensity of existing reforms face new variables, and the policy expectation stability of elderly security needs to be further strengthened.

In terms of social security, relevant institutions are set up relying on platforms such as the government, research centers, communities and hospitals, and with the intensive advancement of aging legislation in recent years, the system architecture has been continuously improved. On the government side, institutions such as the Pension Regulator and the National Service for the Elderly (SENAMA) have been established; on the research center side, the University of Chile has set up the Chilean Observatory on Aging and Social Wellbeing of the Elderly, while the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, in cooperation with Banco Los Andes, released the 6th "National Survey on Quality of Life in Old Age" in 2022. The purpose of this survey is to study and evaluate the quality of life of the elderly population in Chile, so as to understand their needs and challenges. Relying on communities and hospitals, long-term elderly care institutions such as elderly residences, nursing homes and welfare homes, geriatric hospitals and day care centers have been established. On the whole, this support system with the participation of multiple subjects not only guarantees the executive supervision capacity of elderly security and welfare services through full-time administrative institutions, but also realizes dynamic tracking of the living status and needs of the elderly through academic research in universities. At the same time, it builds a physical carrier for service implementation relying on primary medical care and community networks, providing a full-chain support of implementation, monitoring and services for aging governance. However, the current service supply side is still dominated by scattered institutional sites, and a continuously connected care service network integrating home, community and institution has not yet been formed. The synergy between different subjects and the overall service efficiency of the system still need to be further improved.

III. PRACTICAL DILEMMAS AND CAUSE ANALYSIS OF POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Based on the empirical data from the 2025 "8th National Survey on Social Inclusion and Exclusion of the Elderly" released by Chile's National Service for the Elderly and the 2022 "6th National Survey on Quality of Life in Old Age" from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, combined with the actual operation of policies, this chapter systematically sorts out the practical dilemmas in the implementation of Chile's aging policies from five dimensions: social environment impact, security system efficiency, group fairness, service supply-demand matching, and health policy adaptation, and analyzes the underlying structural causes.

3.1 Policy Effectiveness is Disturbed by Social and Political Environment, and Institutional Trust Remains at a Long-term Low Level

The implementation effect of Chile's aging policies has always been highly bound to the social and political situation, and the stability and continuity of policy effectiveness are insufficient. According to the 6th National Survey on Quality of Life in Old Age in 2022, before 2016, with the government's reforms on social security systems such as medical care and pensions, the satisfaction of the elderly with their quality of life showed an upward trend. However, with the outbreak of nationwide protests in Chile in 2016, the satisfaction of the elderly with their quality of life showed a downward trend, and rebounded after 2019 (see Figure 3). Therefore, social unrest will have a certain impact on the implementation effectiveness of aging

measures.

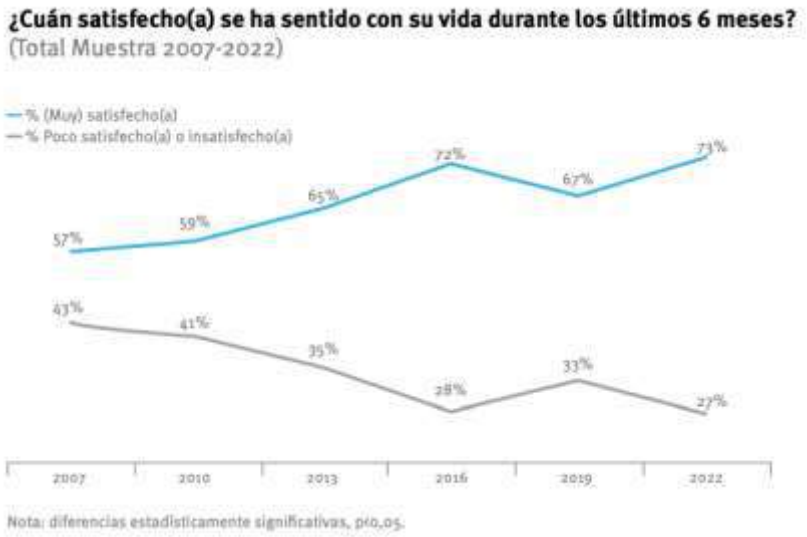


Fig.3 Survey on Chilean Elderly's Satisfaction with the Quality of Life in Old Age

Beyond short-term social shocks, the public's institutional confidence in aging governance has shown a long-term downward trend. Data from SENAMA's 2025 survey shows that the proportion of people who believe that the country is insufficiently prepared to cope with population aging has continued to rise from 59.5% in 2008, remained above 75% after 2011, and reached a historical peak of 84% in 2025; at the same time, 81.1% of respondents believe that politicians and public decision-makers rarely or never take the actual needs of the elderly into account in the process of policy formulation.

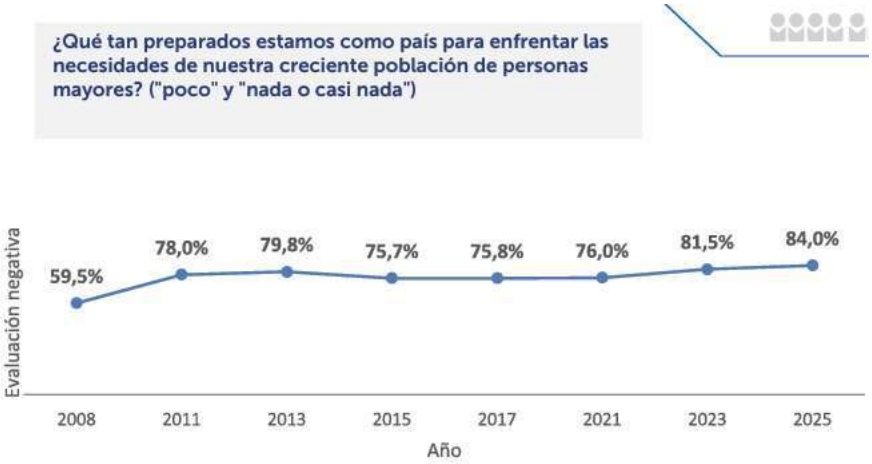


Fig.4 Proportion of People Who Believe the Country is Insufficiently Prepared for Population Aging

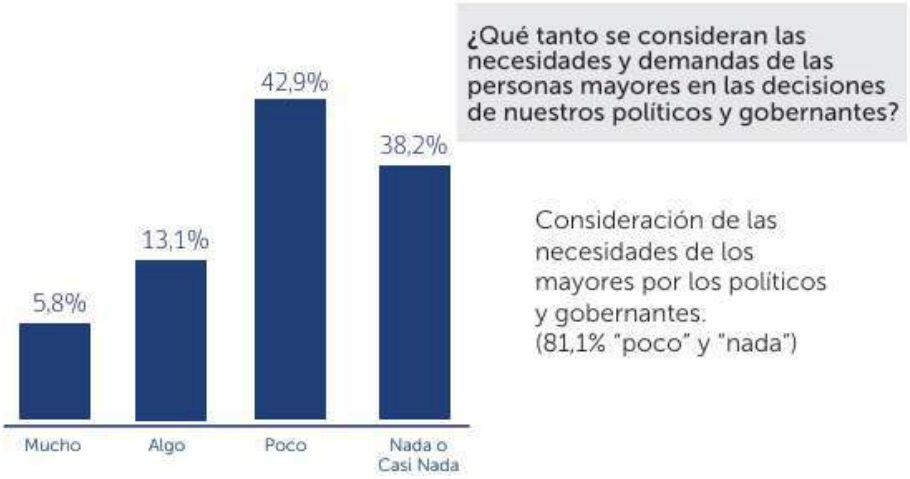


Fig.5 81.1% of Respondents Believe That Politicians and Public Decision-makers "Rarely" or "Never" Consider the Actual Needs of the Elderly When Formulating Policies

This situation results from the superposition of two factors. In the short term, social unrest will directly interrupt the continuous advancement of policies, crowd out the space for people's livelihood investment, and weaken the actual effect of policy implementation. In the long run, the accelerated evolution of population aging and the lag of policy supply form a continuous contrast, coupled with the swing of policy direction brought about by party rotation, which makes the public's expectation of aging governance fail to meet the reality for a long time, and it is difficult for institutional trust to accumulate effectively.

3.2 The Pension System Reform Process is Slow, and There are Structural Shortcomings in the Security System

With the improvement of people's living conditions and the extension of life expectancy, the demand for pensions is growing rapidly. However, threatened by inflation and the decline of commodity prices in the international market, Chile's economy has cooled down significantly, and there is a large gap between the rich and the poor in Chile, which leads to a large income distribution gap in pensions, and the pensions of most elderly people in Chile can only meet their basic daily needs (see Figure 6).

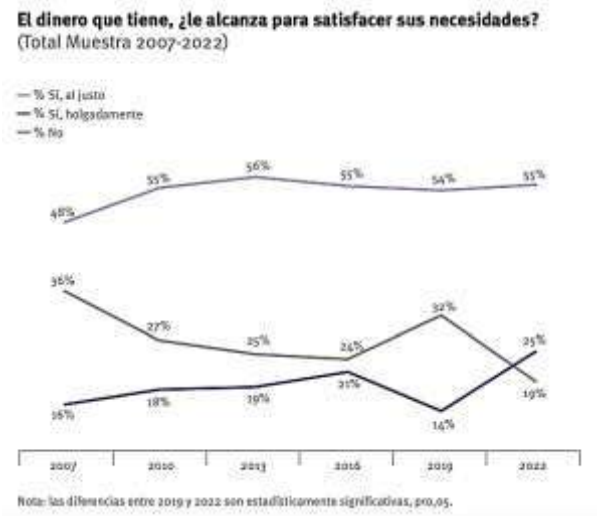


Fig.6 Survey on Whether the Income of the Elderly in Chile Can Meet Their Needs

In addition to pensions, the main income sources of the elderly in Chile include government subsidies, work or business, and financial support from family members (see Figure 7). Since 2019, the proportion of government subsidies in the income sources of the elderly has been increasing, while the proportion of pensions such as retirement wages and private pension plans has been declining. This phenomenon indicates the change of the labor market structure, and the supporting force of the contributory system is weakening. The 2025 survey by

SENAMA further confirms the coverage gap of the system from the contribution side: currently, only 35.2% of the working-age population participates in mandatory pension contributions, and only 24.8% carries out voluntary pension savings, and a large number of self-employed people and non-standard employment groups are outside the system. A large number of self-employed people and flexible employment groups in the informal sector have emerged in Chile in recent years, which shows that pensions alone are no longer sufficient to support the elderly, and additional government subsidies are required.

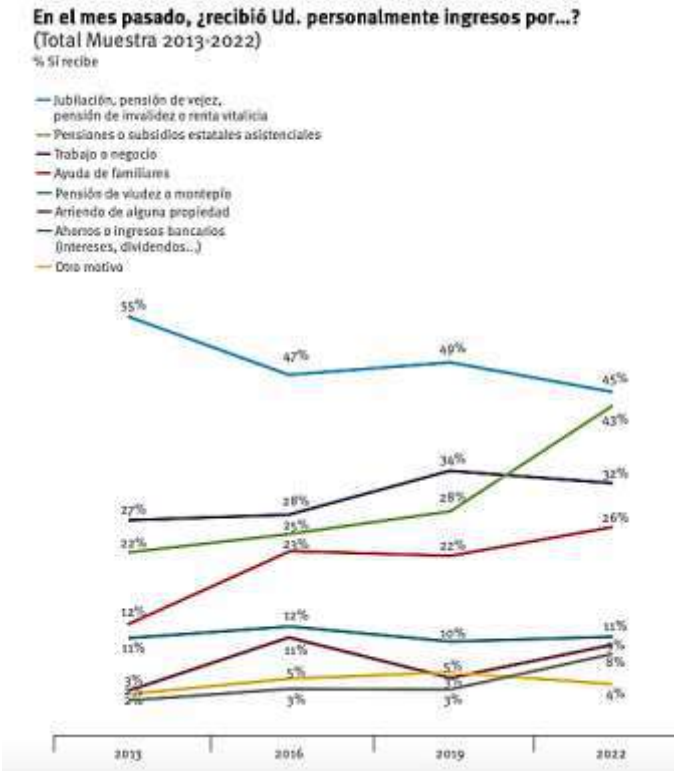


Fig.7 Survey on Income Sources of the Elderly in Chile

In addition, due to the limited pensions and government subsidies, the elderly in Chile spontaneously extend their retirement age or choose to re-enter the labor market after retirement (see Figure 8). Therefore, the protection and supervision of the elderly labor market and the rights protection of elderly workers need to be further emphasized by the government.

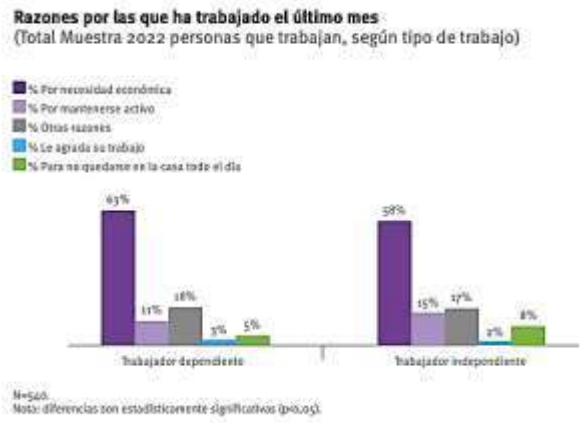


Fig.8 Survey on Reasons Why the Elderly in Chile Work

The root of this dilemma lies in the resonance between institutional path dependence and the change of labor market structure. On the one hand, after more than 40 years of operation, the original individual account system has formed a solidified interest pattern, and systematic reform faces multiple games, resulting in a slow promotion rhythm, and the treatment improvement cannot be implemented quickly. On the other hand, the informalization trend of the labor market continues to weaken the insurance participation foundation of contributory pensions, and economic downturn and fiscal constraints further compress the space for treatment adjustment, making the gap between the system's security capacity and the needs of the elderly group exist for a long time.

3.3 Policy Gains Show Obvious Group Differentiation, and the Equity of Elderly Resource Allocation is Insufficient

Compared with male groups, groups with higher education and groups in formal employment, female groups, groups with basic education and groups in non-formal employment have lower satisfaction with the quality of life in old age (see Figure 9), which to a certain extent reflects the uneven distribution of elderly care resources, and measures need to be taken to further tilt towards vulnerable

groups.

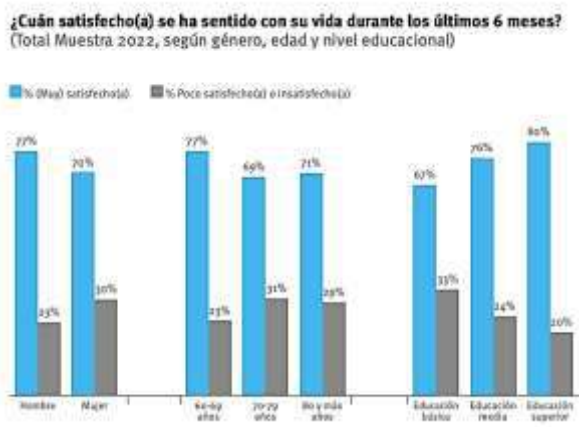


Fig.9 Survey on Different Groups' Satisfaction with the Quality of Life in Old Age

This differentiation is essentially the extension and amplification of original social inequality in the elderly care field. The contributory pension system is based on formal employment, which naturally benefits high-income and stably employed groups more. Women are at a disadvantage in the stage of pension accumulation due to factors such as career interruption and heavy family care burden; elderly care service resources are more concentrated in urban and middle-high-income groups, and the accessibility of elderly groups in rural and low-income areas is insufficient. The institutional design fails to make up for the structural differences, but forms a superposition effect with the existing social inequality, which further widens the security gap between different groups.

3.4 There is a Mismatch Between Supply and Demand of Elderly Care Services, and the Recognition of Socialized Care is Relatively Low

In the survey on whether the elderly in Chile participate in or are willing to participate in day care centers, only in 2022, more than half of the elderly are unwilling to participate, and compared with 2019, their willingness to participate in such services has decreased significantly (see Figure 10). According to statistics, 55.8% of the elderly over the age of 75 prefer to stay at home rather than enter a nursing home. This trend is affected by many factors such as the setting and charging of elderly care institutions, the economic status of the elderly, family factors, health factors, traditional culture, and the service quality of professional personnel.

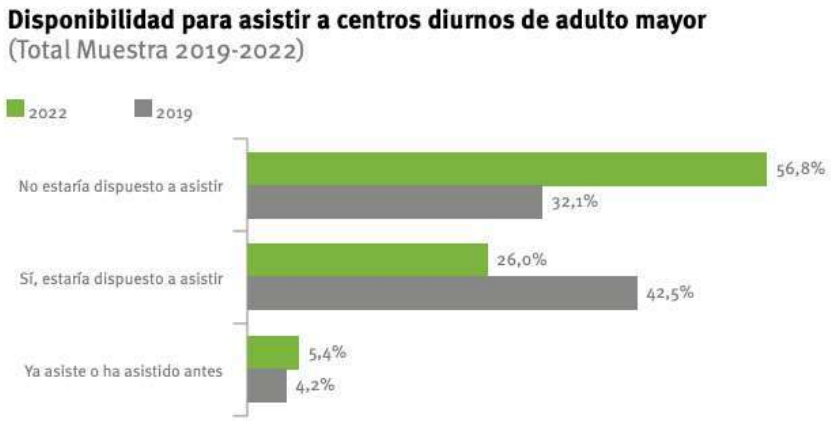


Fig.10 Survey on Chilean Elderly's Acceptance of Day Care Centers

At the same time, the supply gap of care services has formed a social consensus. The 2025 survey by SENAMA shows that 82% of respondents believe that the care and support officially provided for the elderly with functional loss and major chronic diseases are seriously insufficient.

The formation of supply-demand mismatch results from the two-way effect of demand-side preferences and supply-side shortcomings. At the demand level, influenced

by traditional cultural concepts and family elderly care habits, the elderly in Chile generally have a strong willingness to age in place, and there is a cultural threshold for their acceptance of socialized care services. At the supply level, elderly care institutions generally have problems such as high charges, uneven service quality and insufficient professional care capabilities. The long-term shortage of home-based and community care services makes it difficult to match the diverse needs of the elderly, which further reduces the recognition of socialized care among the elderly group.

3.5 Health Policies are Not Well Adapted to Aging, and Mental Health and Age Discrimination Problems are Prominent

Chile's aging policies have long taken economic security such as pensions as the core, and the attention to elderly health, especially mental health, is relatively insufficient. The adaptation degree of medical and public health policies to aging needs to be improved. Relevant studies in 2026 confirmed that the suicide risk of the elderly is closely related to structural factors such as poverty, loneliness, rural living environment, fragile care system, fragmented medical services and age discrimination in the medical field. The 2025 survey by SENAMA reveals the widespread existence of age discrimination at the social and cultural level: 58.4% of respondents believe that the mass media mainly presents negative images of the elderly, and the stereotype that "aging is equivalent to disability and dependence" is deeply rooted in the society. This cultural prejudice penetrates into the medical service scenario, which aggravates the age unfriendliness of health services.

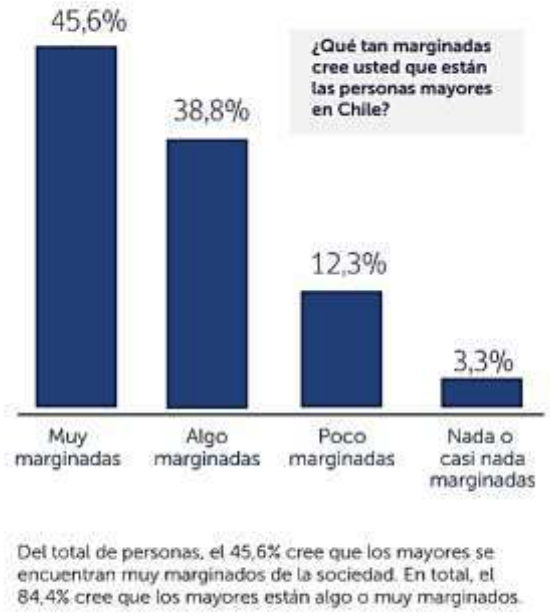


Fig.11 45.6% of Respondents Believe That the Elderly Are "Very Marginalized" in Chilean Society, and a Total of 84.4% of People Believe That the Elderly Are "Somewhat or Very Marginalized"

The core of this problem lies in the structural imbalance of the focus of aging governance. Policy resources have long been tilted towards economic security, and the construction of elderly mental health, psychological support and suicide prevention system lags behind. At the same time, the widespread age stereotypes at the social level are difficult to dispel in a short period of time, which makes medical services and public health policies lack a sufficient elderly-friendly perspective, and the psychological demands, personal dignity and independent rights of the elderly cannot be fully responded to.

On the whole, the dilemmas faced by Chile's aging policies are not partial problems in a single field, but structural and multidimensional old-age social exclusion. The underlying causes can be summarized into three deep-seated contradictions: first, the public's lack of trust in the efficiency of the use of elderly care fiscal funds, which forms a two-way restriction between tax willingness and

fiscal supply; second, the public's long-term low institutional confidence in aging governance, and the policy supply has long been mismatched with the speed of population aging; third, the deeply rooted social stereotype of "dependent old age" restricts the promotion of active aging. The three are intertwined and mutually causal, which jointly restricts the full play of policy effectiveness.

IV. ENLIGHTENMENT FOR CHINA'S MEASURES TO COPE WITH POPULATION AGING

Chile's current measures to cope with population aging and the problems encountered in the implementation process have very important reference value for China's increasingly growing elderly population and increasingly severe pension payment problems.

First, China should ensure the endogenous driving force of economic development, and strengthen economic and trade exchanges with countries around the world relying on the Belt and Road Initiative, so as to lay a solid economic foundation for the pension system reform.

Second, combined with the situation of China's labor market, build a diversified pension system, encourage individuals to use reserve accounts, and provide more comprehensive elderly security to meet the needs of people at different levels.

Third, on the premise of ensuring the sustainability of funds, appropriately increase the pension level in light of the actual situation, so as to ensure that the retirement wages of the elderly can meet their living needs.

Fourth, conduct a comprehensive investigation on the population structure and labor market, gradually postpone the retirement age, and strengthen the supervision and protection of the elderly labor market.

Fifth, attach importance to the feedback and attitudes of different gender groups, groups with different education levels and groups in different occupations towards the implementation of aging policies, and carry out communication and adjustment in a timely manner.

Sixth, improve the medical system serving the elderly, attach importance to the development of health care and physiotherapy undertakings. Universities can widely offer geriatric care majors and expand the enrollment of relevant majors, improve the treatment and salary of professional nursing staff, and strengthen the supervision of elderly care nursing staff by the government and employers, so as to enhance the elderly's understanding and trust in elderly care institutions. China should not only build "elderly medical services", but also build an "elderly-friendly medical system", attach importance to elderly mental health and anti-age discrimination, and promote the construction of active aging.

Seventh, set up universities for the elderly, increase social participation opportunities and community support, so as to promote the social interaction and quality of life of the elderly and reduce their sense of loneliness and isolation. Finally, advocate exchanges and mutual learning among countries in the field of elderly care, encourage research and investigation, and promote the exchange of elderly care policies.

V. CONCLUSION

As one of the first countries to enter deep population aging in Latin America, Chile has gone through more than 20 years of policy exploration, and has built an aging policy framework covering legal protection, pension system, elderly care services and rights support. Through the 2025 mixed pension reform and the long-term care system and comprehensive elderly protection legislation in 2026, it has promoted the system to develop in the direction of systematization and inclusiveness. However, restricted by multiple factors such as privatized institutional path dependence, political fragmentation, fiscal constraints and age cultural prejudice, Chile's aging governance still faces

deep-seated dilemmas such as insufficient institutional trust, unbalanced security structure, multidimensional social exclusion and significant group gaps, and problems such as old-age poverty, elderly suicide and lack of care have not been fundamentally solved.

Chile's practice shows that population aging is a systematic challenge involving economy, society and culture. Relying solely on market-oriented pension reform or fragmented welfare policies cannot effectively cope with it. Only by building a comprehensive governance system with complete laws, shared responsibilities, continuous services and inclusive culture can we realize the fairness and sustainability of elderly security. In the process of promoting the active aging strategy, China can fully learn from the experience and lessons of Chile, base itself on its national conditions, improve the multi-pillar security system, improve the long-term care services, attach importance to elderly mental health and anti-discrimination, and promote the modernization of the aging governance system and governance capacity.

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On the Application of Three-Dimensional Transformation Means in Translating Historical Classics — A Case Study of the "*Hereditary House of Chu*" of the *Records of the Grand Historian*

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Abstract— *Chinese historical classics face prominent translation difficulties due to concise classical Chinese, culture-loaded terms and context-dependent dialogues. As the core analytical tool of Eco-translatology, three-dimensional transformation requires translators to make adaptive selections from linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions. Taking the well-known chapter "Zhang Yi Deceiving King Huai of Chu" from the "Hereditary House of Chu" of the Records of the Grand Historian as the source text, this paper conducts translation practice and case analysis. It explores how adaptive transformation strategies solve translation obstacles of ancient historical texts: restructuring run-on sentences, reconstructing rhetorical parallelism, interpreting culture-specific items associated with institutions and geography, and explicating implicit pragmatic motives in historical narration. This study finds that proper three-dimensional adaptive selection can help target-language readers acquire historical facts, perceive character traits and grasp didactic implications, so as to realize effective cross-cultural communication of Chinese historical classics. It also provides practical references for the external dissemination of Jingchu historical materials represented by Records of the Grand Historian.*

Keywords— ***Eco-Translatology, Three-Dimensional Transformation, Records of the Grand Historian, Historical Classics Translation, Culture-Loaded Terms***

I. INTRODUCTION

Records of the Grand Historian compiled by Sima Qian is a milestone work of Chinese biographical historiography. Its excerpt *Hereditary House of Chu* records vital diplomatic events of the Warring-States period. Characterized by compact classical Chinese, vivid conversational plots and abundant culture-loaded expressions, this text creates substantial obstacles for English translation. As an important carrier of Jingchu culture, the historical stories recorded in *Hereditary House of Chu* carry abundant local historical memory and diplomatic wisdom, which deserve to be introduced to overseas readers through qualified English translation.

Eco-translatology, proposed by Hu Gengshen, defines translation as the translator's adaptive-selection activity within the translational eco-environment. Its core notion, three-dimensional transformation, demands adaptive adjustments on linguistic, cultural and communicative dimensions, enabling translated texts to survive and function in target-language ecological systems (Hu, 2008). Different from traditional translation theories which focus merely on text equivalence, Eco-translatology takes the translator and cross-cultural context into consideration, which is highly suitable for analyzing the translation of ancient Chinese historical prose full of contextual and cultural information.

Existing studies have produced abundant findings on *Records of the Grand Historian* translation. Western sinologists such as Nienhauser has completed the authoritative multi-volume English translation of *The Grand Scribe's Records*, which has laid a solid foundation for overseas spread of Sima Qian's work. Nevertheless, concrete case studies combining Eco-translatology with excerpts from *Hereditary House of Chu* remain insufficient. Many existing studies focus on overall translation comments of the complete book, while few concentrate on typical diplomatic chapters with translation practice. This paper selects the story of Zhang Yi's fraud against King Huai of Chu (r. 329-299 BC) as translation material. It analyzes adaptive choices at three dimensions to summarize feasible translation strategies for ancient Chinese historical texts. It also hopes to offer references for the external dissemination of Chinese historical classics and Jingchu cultural materials.

II. TEXT FEATURES AND TRANSLATION PROBLEMS OF THE SOURCE MATERIAL

The source text is excerpted from to the "*Hereditary House of Chu*" of the *Records of the Grand Historian*. It narrates a representative diplomatic fraud: the State of Qin intended to launch an attack on Qi. To undermine the Qi-Chu alliance, Zhang Yi promised King Huai six-hundred-li Shangyu territory to persuade Chu to sever diplomatic ties with Qi. After Chu broke off its alliance, Zhang Yi cheated Chu by reducing the promised land to merely six li. This incident brought severe diplomatic isolation and strategic losses to the State of Chu. The whole story reflects the complicated geopolitical games among Warring States powers and reveals the personal character defects of King Huai, thus possessing high historical and literary value.

Four prominent textual features constitute major translation problems: First, the formal and concise historiographical style. Classical Chinese historical texts carry high-density information. Translators need to compress or expand information units to conform to English stylistic norms. Excessive literal translation will produce rigid and obscure target text for English-speaking readers. Second, dialogue-driven narration. Key plots including lobbying, remonstrance and deception are advanced by character speeches, which shape distinct personalities: the craftiness of Zhang Yi, the wisdom of Chen Zhen and the fatuity of King Huai. Consequently, translators are supposed to reproduce situational sense and rhetorical force embedded in dialogues, instead of only converting literal words. Third, numerous culture-loaded items. Terms such as "从亲", "商於之地" and "楚符" embody unique political, geographical and institutional connotations of the Warring-States era, lacking direct equivalents in English historical discourse. Cultural default easily leads to reading barriers for foreign readers without background knowledge of Chinese history. Fourth, diversified rhetorical devices. For example, parallelism and contrast strengthen narrative appeal. Therefore, functional equivalent rhetorical treatments are required in target-language translation. Simple word-for-word translation will lose the literary charm of Sima Qian's writing.

III. THEORETICAL BASIS: THREE-DIMENSIONAL TRANSFORMATION OF ECO-TRANSLATOLOGY

Put forward by Hu Gengshen in 2001, Eco-translatology treats translation as "translator's adaptation and selection activity for translational eco-environment". The translational eco-environment covers source text, target-language system and integrated cultural-communicative context. Three-dimensional transformation serves as its core analytical framework (Hu, 2011). Rather than pursuing absolute static equivalence between source text and target text, this theory emphasizes

dynamic adaptation to multi-dimensional translation ecology. The detailed analysis is as follows.

1. Linguistic-dimensional transformation: It refers to the adaptive adjustments and choices made by translators regarding language forms during the translation process. This transformation manifests across different levels and aspects of language (Hu Gengshen, 2012), primarily encompassing lexical, syntactic, textual levels, as well as choices in linguistic form and style. Given the parataxis-hypotaxis difference between Chinese and English in this translation practice, translators should reorganize sentence patterns and reconstruct rhetorical effects to fit target-language conventions.

2. Cultural-dimensional transformation: It emphasizes that translators should focus on the transmission and interpretation of bilingual cultural connotations during the translation process. This dimension requires translators to pay attention to the differences in nature and content between the source and target cultures, avoiding misinterpretations of the original text from the perspective of the target culture. While conducting language transformation, translators must also adapt to the broader cultural system to which the language belongs (Hu Gengshen, 2012). When handling culture-loaded words concerning politics, geography and ancient artifacts, translators need to balance cultural authenticity and readability, avoiding misreading caused by cultural default.

3. Communicative-dimensional transformation: It focuses on the adaptive transmission of bilingual communicative intentions during the translation process. It requires translators not only to transform linguistic information and cultural connotations but also to prioritize the communicative aspect, ensuring that the communicative intent of the original text is fully realized in the translation (Hu Gengshen, 2012). Jia Wenbo (2012) notes that to achieve the desired communicative effect, translators must consider the cognitive abilities of the readers, flexibly apply translation strategies, and accurately handle the source text. For historical classics, it means representing historical facts, depicting character dispositions and conveying embedded historical lessons for target-language readers. Therefore, successfully conveying the communicative intent of the original text to the target-language readers is key to achieving effective cross-cultural communication.

IV. CASE ANALYSIS OF THREE-DIMENSIONAL TRANSFORMATION IN THE SOURCE TEXT

Guided by this theoretical framework, this part selects several examples from the source text translation to illustrate adaptation and selection across these three dimensions. Addressing key and difficult points in translation, it integrates multiple translation techniques and strategies, so that the target text can survive within the complex translational eco-environment and effectively fulfil its communicative functions.

1. Linguistic Dimension

From the perspective of the linguistic dimension, translators need to recognize discrepancies of the two languages and deploy appropriate translation measures to make the target text compatible with the eco-system of the recipient language. For this reason, the author investigates linguistic-dimensional adaptive adjustments in this translation practice on syntactic and rhetorical levels, aiming to narrow gaps between classical Chinese writings and modern English.

Example 1: Translation of Run-on Sentences

ST: 秦欲伐齐，而楚与齐从亲，秦惠王患之，乃宣言张仪免相，使张仪南见楚王。

TT: The State of Qin intended to attack the State of Qi, but Chu was aligned with Qi in an alliance to maintain close relations. King Hui of Qin (r. 338-311 BC) was troubled by this situation. Consequently, he announced that Zhang Yi had been dismissed from his post as chancellor and dispatched him south to the court of Chu.

First, the source text is a typical Chinese run-on sentence consisting of juxtaposed short clauses characterized by concise wording and dense information. In Chinese-English translation, attention should be paid to linguistic disparities between the two languages: Chinese follows parataxis with implicit logic. By contrast, English emphasizes hypotaxis and resorts to overt cohesive devices(Lian, 2020). Accordingly, the translator adopts "but" and "consequently" to make explicit the implied adversative and causal relations, streamlining the logical sequence of events and complying with hypotactic features of English.

Second, regarding information reorganization and explication, by adding the reign annotation "(r. 338-311 BC)" , the author meets English-speaking readers' needs for chronological historical background. The translator further specifies official titles and situational context: "免相" is translated as "dismissed from his post as chancellor", and "南见楚王" is supplemented with the noun "court" to define official duties and the royal-court setting.

Third, in terms of voice, Chinese tends to use active voice, whereas English shows a stronger preference for passive voice. The Chinese phrase "张仪免相" takes an active syntactic form yet carries passive implication. It is translated into the English passive structure "had been dismissed" to conform to voice preferences of the target language.

In conclusion, this translation makes adaptive transformation in parataxis-hypotaxis shift, logical explication and active-passive structures from linguistic dimension. It not only faithfully conveys the source-text message but also accommodates English expressive conventions and stylistic eco-environment. With an in-depth understanding of syntactic and voice-related disparities between Chinese and English, the translator achieves effective adaptation of linguistic forms within the target-language eco-environment.

Example 2: Translation of Parallelism

ST: 敝邑之王所甚说者无先大王，虽仪之所甚原为门阑之厮者亦无先大王。敝邑之王所甚憎者无先齐王，虽仪之所甚憎者亦无先齐王。

TT: There is no one our king holds in higher esteem than Your Majesty, and no one I myself would rather serve than you. Conversely, there is no one our king detests more than the King of Qi, and no one I myself despise more than him.

From the perspective of the linguistic dimension of Eco-translatology, this translation makes adaptive adjustments in accordance with English grammatical rules, rhetorical conventions and information-organizing patterns. It faithfully conveys the original meaning and produces a natural and persuasive target text.

Rhetorically, the source text, as ancient diplomatic discourse, adopts double parallelism and antithesis, repeating the structure "无先…" to reinforce its stance. The translation reproduces the rhetorical force of parallelism by employing the English comparative construction "no one … than …". Meanwhile, differentiated diction is adopted for positive and negative contexts: "holds in higher esteem"and "would rather serve" for commendatory meanings, and "detests" and "despise" for derogatory ones, which avoids monotonous repetition and improves rhetorical sophistication.

Syntactically, Chinese is paratactic. It implies concessive and contrastive logic via the structure "虽…亦…" with highly condensed semantic content. Following the hypotactic features of English, the translation connects coordinate components with "and" and adds "Conversely" to externalize the implicit contrast. It also breaks down the compact original semantics and reconstructs two sets of symmetrical sentences to highlight key information, conform to English writing rhythm, and balance the original antithetic effect with target-text fluency.

To sum up, by reconstructing parallel structures, explicating logical relations and segmenting sentence patterns, the translation transforms the condensed parallelism of classical Chinese into logically-oriented English expression, and enhances the acceptability and appeal of the target text in the English context.

2. Cultural Dimension

The source text of this translation practice contains culture-loaded words such as "从亲","商於之地""楚符", which embody the unique political institutions, rituals, geography and tally-based diplomatic culture of the Warring States period. According to Nida's theory of culture-specific items, these terms fall into three categories: institutional-culture words, geographical-culture words and artifact-culture words. More than mere information carriers, they reflect the political landscape and cultural mentality of the Warring States era and call for appropriate transference and interpretation in the target language.

For historical texts, the core of cultural-dimensional transformation lies in preserving the original cultural features and historical ambiance while enabling English-speaking readers to grasp the historical context and narrative functions. The translator adopts combined strategies including cultural correspondence, semantic explication, contextual externalization and moderate

compensation to balance cultural fidelity and reader acceptability, so as to realize the adaptive reconstruction of cultural elements within the target-language ecology.

Example 3: Translation of Institutional Culture-Loaded Term

ST: 秦欲伐齐，而楚与齐从亲。

TT: The State of Qin intended to attack the State of Qi, but Chu was aligned with Qi in an alliance to maintain close relations.

From the perspective of cultural-dimensional transformation in Eco-translatology, the term "从亲" embodies the specific form of diplomatic alliance as well as its cultural and political connotations of the Warring States period. In translation, the translator needs to make adaptive choices between conveying its institutional implications and maintaining target-text readability.

As a culture-loaded term, "从亲", according to *Strategies of the Warring States Dictionary* and commentaries on *Records of the Grand Historian*, refers to intimate interstate alliances built upon the vertical hezong strategy and consolidated by covenants and inter-state marriages. "从" refers to vertical hezong strategy, while "亲" means close political bonds consolidated by marriage and hostage exchange. There exists no fully equivalent term in English historical discourse. Literal translation "vertical alliance" can only reflect strategic meaning and lose connotation of intimate political bonds.

Drawing on Nienhauser's (2022) English translation of *Records of the Grand Historian*, the translator ultimately renders this expression as "was aligned with Qi in an alliance to maintain close relations", using "aligned in an alliance" to represent institutional meaning of "从", and "maintain close relations" to interpret the interactive bond of "亲". The compound expression avoids over-alienation and reproduces the complete political-cultural connotation in target historical narrative context.

In a word, when translating proper terms of specific historical-institutional culture, translators should adopt the cultural-dimensional perspective. Deep-seated connotations are identified through textual research and parallel-text verification. An integrated strategy of "core-concept correspondence plus contextual implication supplementation" is adopted to realize the adaptive transmission of cultural information in the target-language historical narrative system.

Example 4: Translation of Geographical Culture-Loaded Term

ST: 今使使者从仪西取故秦所分楚商於之地方六百里。

TT: You can send an envoy with me today to retrieve the six-hundred-li territory of Shangyu, which Qin once took from Chu.

"商於" was a strategic contested region between Qin and Chu. In this historical event, "six-hundred-li Shangyu land" is not merely a geographical concept but a symbolic carrier of diplomatic fraud. Simple transliteration "the land of Shangyu" cannot reflect its historical background. Therefore, the translation reserves the Chinese measurement unit "six-hundred-li" to keep historical authenticity. The attributive clause "which Qin once took from Chu" supplements its historical ownership. The strategy of "transliteration plus attributive explanatory clause" preserves cultural identity of place names and helps target-language readers understand the core conflict of this diplomatic event.

Example 5: Translation of Artifact Culture-Loaded Term

ST: 齐王大怒，折楚符而合於秦。

TT: Enraged, the King of Qi snapped the tallies of alliance with Chu and forged a union with Qin.

From the perspective of cultural-dimensional transformation in Eco-translatology, as a culture-loaded term, "楚符" embodies the distinctive political institutions and covenant culture of the Warring States period. Its translation requires adaptive choices among its physical form, institutional function and cultural symbolism.

According to ancient documents, "符" was a special credential object in ancient China for concluding alliances or dispatching military orders. "楚符" referred specifically to the tally created for the alliance between Chu and Qi, a physical symbol of their mutual political trust. "折符" constituted the highest-standard ritual act of annulling an alliance. If translated simply as "Chu tally" , readers cannot realize its function as alliance credential. The author adopts "tallies of alliance" to highlight its institutional attribute. The verb "snapped" (rather than

general-purpose "broke") is selected according to *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, representing sharp, sudden breaking movement, reproducing King Qi's rage and decisive diplomatic break-off. This translation completes re-symbolization of ancient Chinese artifact concept in English cultural context.

In conclusion, when translating culture-specific items combining physical features, institutional functions and symbolic meanings, translators should adopt the cultural-dimension perspective. Based on textual research into origins and contexts, they shall select functionally-equivalent and affectively-matched vocabulary for resymbolization, so as to achieve effective transmission of historical and cultural connotations.

3. Communicative Dimension

Communicative dimensional transformation requires translators to transfer not only facts, but also implicit pragmatic purposes. This translation material features three-fold communicative intentions. First, at the narrative level, it reconstructs the complex diplomatic historical event of "Zhang Yi Deceives Chu". Second, at the literary level, it draws on dialogues and details to create vivid character portrayals: the cunning Zhang Yi, the wise Chen Zhen, and the fatuous King Huai of Chu. Third, at the didactic level, it draws lessons from history to warn that credulity and short-sightedness in diplomacy may bring national isolation and disasters. Therefore, in communicative dimensional transformation, translators should target English-speaking readers and enable the target text to achieve the three communicative effects of factual narration, characterization and conveyance of historical admonitions within the target-language context.

Example 6:

ST: 张仪至秦，详醉坠车，称病不出三月，地不可得。

TT: Zhang, having returned to Qin, feigned drunkenness and fell from his carriage. He then pleaded illness and remained secluded for three full months, preventing Chu from obtaining the territory of Shangyu.

In original classical Chinese, "详醉" literally reads "drunken", yet its real meaning is "feigned drunkenness". Adding the word "feigned" explicitly reveals Zhang Yi's deceptive motive and eliminates potential misunderstanding for foreign readers. The expression of "preventing Chu from obtaining the territory of Shangyu" externalizes the implicit cause-effect logic between "remained secluded" and failure to acquire land. The word "secluded" emphasizes Zhang Yi's deliberate avoidance. The proper noun "Shangyu" is supplemented to clarify object of territorial negotiation.

All in all, through explicating hidden motives, externalizing logical relations and completing background information, the translation successfully delivers multi-layer communicative intentions: stating the plot, exposing Zhang Yi's trickery and presenting the cause-and-effect of Chu's diplomatic setback.

V. CONCLUSION

Taking the excerpt "Zhang Yi Deceiving King Huai of Chu" from the "*Hereditary House of Chu*" of the *Records of the Grand Historian* as research object, this paper conducts translation practice and case analysis under Eco-translatology's three-dimensional transformation framework.

In terms of linguistic dimension, translators should cope with differences between Chinese parataxis and English hypotaxis, reorganize run-on sentences, adjust voice, and reconstruct parallel rhetorical structures to fit target-language stylistic ecology. In terms of cultural dimension, when dealing with culture-loaded terms of institutional, geographical and material categories found in historical classics, strategies combining conceptual equivalence with contextual supplementation may strike a balance between cultural reservation and readability. In terms of communicative dimension, translators are supposed to explicate implicit pragmatic motives and hidden logical relations, so that target-language readers can grasp historical facts, character images and implicit didactic messages.

This study proves that three-dimensional adaptive selection and transformation of Eco-translatology provides effective analytical tools for ancient Chinese historical text translation. Limited by research scope, this paper only selects one short excerpt. Future research may expand corpus scope and make comparisons with published authoritative English versions of *Records of the Grand Historian*, so as to further explore optimal translation pathways for Chinese historical classics going global.

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Gender and Resistance: Exploring Violent and Non-Violent Forms of Women's Agency in Contemporary Indian Fiction

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Abstract— *Contemporary Indian fiction increasingly represents women as active subjects who negotiate, challenge, and resist patriarchal structures rather than merely experiencing them as passive victims. This paper examines women's agency through violent and non-violent forms of resistance in selected contemporary Indian fictional works. It argues that resistance extends beyond physical confrontation and includes silence, refusal, education, economic independence, mobility, storytelling, writing, bodily autonomy, sexual self-determination, and collective solidarity. Through a qualitative and comparative reading of selected works by Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur, Anita Nair, Arundhati Roy, Bama, Meena Kandasamy, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, and Megha Majumdar, the study investigates how women negotiate gendered power within family, marriage, caste, class, sexuality, and institutional structures. Drawing upon feminist literary criticism, postcolonial feminism, theories of agency, intersectionality, and resistance, the paper conceptualises violent and non-violent resistance as interconnected rather than mutually exclusive forms of agency. It demonstrates that the meaning and consequences of women's resistance are shaped by their social and economic locations. The study concludes that contemporary Indian fiction expands the understanding of female agency by presenting resistance as a continuum of negotiation, refusal, survival, self-expression, and direct confrontation. Such representations also demonstrate that female subjectivity is produced through women's struggles to reclaim voice, body, mobility, identity, and interpretive authority.*

Keywords— ***Gender, Feminism, Women's Agency, Women's Resistance, Violent Resistance, Non-Violent Resistance, Patriarchal Structures, Female Subjectivity***

I. INTRODUCTION

The representation of women in Indian literature has undergone substantial transformation alongside changes in Indian social, cultural, political, and economic life. Earlier representations frequently positioned women within normative roles of daughterhood, wifehood, motherhood, sacrifice, and domesticity. Contemporary Indian fiction increasingly presents women as subjects who question, negotiate, and resist the structures through which their identities are defined. This transformation is significant because gender inequality operates through interconnected institutions, including family, marriage, caste, religion,

sexuality, education, property, labour, and cultural expectations.

Feminist literary criticism has established that literature not only reflects social structures but also participates in constructing and contesting gendered meanings. Beauvoir's conceptualisation of woman as the socially produced "Other" provides a foundation for understanding femininity as a cultural and social construction [1]. Butler subsequently developed this understanding through the concept of gender performativity, arguing that gender identities are continually constituted through repeated social practices and norms [2]. These approaches are particularly relevant to contemporary Indian fiction, where women frequently challenge the behaviours and identities expected of them. The Indian context, however, requires attention to social and historical specificity. Mohanty cautions against treating women of the Global South as a homogeneous category [3]. Indian feminist scholarship similarly demonstrates that women's experiences are shaped by caste, class, religion, labour, sexuality, and region. Consequently, women's agency must be examined in relation to the particular structures within which different women live. Agency does not necessarily mean complete freedom from oppression. Kabeer defines agency in relation to the ability to make choices and pursue meaningful goals within particular structural conditions [4]. Kandiyoti's concept of patriarchal bargains further demonstrates that women may negotiate with patriarchal structures rather than simply accept or reject them [5]. This perspective is especially useful in analysing Indian fiction, where female characters frequently employ strategic negotiation within family and community structures. The concept of resistance must similarly be expanded. Foucault's understanding of power as dispersed through social relations, institutions, discourse, and everyday practices suggests that resistance can emerge at multiple levels [6]. A woman may resist through direct confrontation, but she may also resist through education, employment, silence, refusal, mobility, writing, or control over her body. Such actions may appear ordinary but can disrupt the norms through which patriarchal power is reproduced.

This paper examines these diverse forms of resistance in selected contemporary Indian fiction. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Bama's *Sangati*, Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, and Megha Majumdar's *A Burning* provides a diverse corpus through which women's agency can be examined across different social contexts. The paper argues that violent and non-violent resistance should be understood as interconnected points on a continuum rather than as mutually exclusive categories. Resistance may begin with silence or negotiation and develop into refusal, economic independence, mobility, legal action, or direct confrontation. Its form and consequences depend upon caste, class, sexuality, family, economic position, and institutional power. The study therefore examines resistance not simply as opposition to patriarchy but as a process through which female subjectivity is constructed.

II. RESEARCH GAP

Existing scholarship on Indian women's writing has produced substantial discussions of patriarchy, domesticity, marriage, sexuality, caste, class, identity, trauma, and female subjectivity. Nevertheless, resistance is often interpreted primarily through visible acts of rebellion or direct opposition. Less attention has been given to the relationship between apparently ordinary practices and larger transformations in women's subjectivity.

A further gap lies in the tendency to separate different forms of resistance. Physical confrontation, political protest, and explicit rebellion are frequently treated as resistance, while education, employment, mobility, writing, silence, refusal, and emotional withdrawal may receive less analytical attention. This creates a restricted understanding of agency because women frequently negotiate patriarchal structures through practices that do not resemble conventional forms of protest.

The present study therefore brings violent and non-violent resistance into a common analytical framework. Rather than assuming that these forms represent two completely separate categories, the study examines how they may exist along a continuum. A woman's resistance may develop progressively from accommodation to negotiation, from negotiation to refusal, and from refusal to direct confrontation.

The study also addresses the need for greater intersectional attention. Gender does not operate independently of caste, class, religion, sexuality, economic status, or social location. The selected texts demonstrate that women's opportunities for resistance are unevenly distributed. Consequently, the study considers women's agency within the particular historical, social, cultural, and economic structures represented in the fiction.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study has the following objectives:

1. To comparatively analyse how contemporary Indian fiction constructs women's voices as a mode of narrative agency.

2. To examine forms of feminist resistance, including everyday, intergenerational and relational forms, represented in the selected novels.
3. To interrogate how historical and postcolonial structures shape women's identities and possibilities of resistance.
4. To foreground the intersectional workings of caste, class, religion, sexuality, age, economic position, and cultural location.
5. To assess the contemporary relevance of these literary representations for understanding women's agency and feminist resistance in twenty-first-century India.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework combines feminist theory, postcolonial feminism, theories of agency, intersectionality, and theories of power and resistance. Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* provides an important starting point for understanding the social construction of womanhood [1]. Butler's theory of gender performativity extends this framework by emphasising the repeated practices through which gender norms become socially established [2]. Together, these perspectives make it possible to examine how literary characters challenge the identities assigned to them. Foucault's theory of power is significant because patriarchal power cannot be reduced to individual male domination [6]. Power operates through social relationships, institutions, cultural norms, language, and forms of knowledge. Resistance therefore emerges within these relationships rather than outside them. This perspective allows women's everyday actions to be considered forms of agency even when they do not resemble conventional political protest. Kabeer's understanding of agency emphasises the relationship between resources, choice, and action [4]. Education, employment, financial independence, and social networks can expand the choices available to women. Kandiyoti's concept of patriarchal bargains adds another dimension by showing that women may strategically conform to some expectations while challenging others [5]. Such negotiation is particularly visible in narratives concerning marriage, family, education, and sexuality. Postcolonial feminism challenges universalised accounts of women's oppression. Mohanty's critique of Western feminist scholarship emphasises the need to locate women's experiences within specific histories and social structures [3]. In the Indian context, Tharu and Lalita's documentation of women's writing demonstrates the diversity of women's literary traditions [7], while Chakravarti's work highlights the relationship between caste and gender in Indian social structures [8]. Intersectionality provides an additional framework for examining these relationships. Crenshaw's concept demonstrates that systems such as gender, race, and class interact rather than function independently [9]. Applied to Indian women's fiction, the concept helps reveal how gender intersects with caste, class, religion, sexuality, and economic position. Spivak's discussion of the subaltern is also important because it raises questions concerning representation and the authority to speak [11]. Women's writing can therefore be understood as an attempt to reclaim narrative authority. Rege's work on Dalit women's testimonios similarly foregrounds marginalised women's experiences as sources of knowledge and resistance [13].

Indian feminist scholarship has also challenged the separation between domestic and public spheres. Menon's work on gender and politics demonstrates the relationship between women's everyday lives and broader structures of political power [10]. Bhasin's analysis of patriarchy further emphasises the institutional and cultural dimensions of gender inequality [12]. hooks' intersectional feminist perspective similarly stresses the importance of understanding gender alongside other structures of domination [15]. The existing scholarship thus provides substantial theoretical resources for analysing women's agency. However, the present study brings together violent and non-violent forms of resistance in a single comparative framework. It proposes that resistance should be understood as a continuum ranging from everyday acts of negotiation and refusal to direct physical confrontation.

V. WOMEN'S AGENCY AND PATRIARCHAL STRUCTURES IN CONTEMPORARY INDIAN FICTION

Contemporary Indian fiction frequently represents patriarchy as embedded in ordinary social institutions. Family, marriage, caste, economic dependency, and cultural expectations regulate women's identities and choices. Feminist scholarship has challenged the distinction between private and public life by demonstrating that domestic relationships are shaped by wider structures of gendered power [10]. Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* offers a significant representation of domestic patriarchy through Jaya [16]. Her identity is shaped by the expectations associated with being a wife and mother, while her intellectual and emotional desires remain restricted. The silence indicated by the novel's title represents both social conditioning and the difficulty of developing an autonomous voice. Jaya's movement toward self-narration consequently becomes an important form of agency. Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* similarly explores the conflict between female aspirations and patriarchal expectations

[17]. Virmati's desire for education and independence challenges a social order that defines women's futures largely through marriage and domesticity. Her experience, however, demonstrates that resistance does not necessarily lead to uncomplicated liberation. Education and independence create new possibilities but also generate guilt, conflict, social judgement, and emotional consequences. In Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé*, the railway compartment becomes a space in which women from different social backgrounds share their experiences [18]. Physical movement creates temporary distance from conventional social surveillance and allows women to reconsider their identities. Mobility thus becomes both a literal and symbolic form of resistance. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* demonstrates the intersection of gender and caste through Ammu's experience [19]. Her relationship with Velutha challenges both patriarchal and caste-based boundaries. The consequences of this transgression reveal that women's oppression cannot always be separated from other structures of hierarchy. Bama's *Sangati* extends this intersectional perspective by focusing on Dalit women's experiences [20]. Gendered exploitation is represented alongside caste discrimination, economic marginalisation, and labour exploitation. Resistance consequently becomes collective as women share experiences and develop a consciousness of common oppression. Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* presents intimate domination through the representation of emotional, intellectual, sexual, and physical control [21]. The recovery of narrative authority becomes central to the woman's resistance. Writing enables her to reconstruct an experience in which another person attempted to control her identity. Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* provides another form of resistance through the rewriting of epic narrative from a woman's perspective [22]. Reimagining Draupadi's story challenges traditionally male-centred interpretive authority and gives the female subject greater narrative agency. Majumdar's *A Burning* extends the discussion beyond domestic structures to include political and institutional power [23]. The novel demonstrates how gender, class, religion, and political vulnerability can interact to shape the possibilities available to a woman. These texts demonstrate that patriarchal structures operate at multiple levels. Women's agency consequently takes multiple forms, including education, employment, mobility, self-expression, bodily autonomy, storytelling, negotiation, and confrontation.

VI. VIOLENT AND NON-VIOLENT FORMS OF WOMEN'S RESISTANCE

Non-violent resistance constitutes one of the most significant forms of agency represented in contemporary Indian fiction. Silence, refusal, education, employment, mobility, writing, storytelling, and economic independence may appear less dramatic than physical rebellion, but they can challenge the assumptions through which patriarchal power is reproduced.

Silence occupies an especially complex position. It may indicate fear or exclusion from speech, but it can also become strategic. In *That Long Silence*, Jaya's movement from silence toward narration illustrates the relationship between voice and agency [16]. Her ability to interpret her own experience challenges the identities imposed upon her writing similarly functions as resistance. Spivak's discussion of the subaltern demonstrates the difficulties marginalised subjects encounter when dominant structures control representation [11]. When women narrate their own experiences, they challenge the authority of those who have historically spoken for them. Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* provides a particularly strong example of narrative reclamation [21]. Education is another significant form of non-violent resistance. Virmati's educational aspirations in *Difficult Daughters* challenge the expectation that female life should be organised around marriage and domesticity [17]. Education increases access to knowledge and potentially expands the range of choices available to women. Kabeer's theory of agency is relevant because resources influence the ability to make meaningful choices [4]. Economic independence similarly alters women's relationship with patriarchal authority. Employment can reduce economic dependence and increase decision-making capacity. However, contemporary fiction also demonstrates that employment does not eliminate domestic expectations or gender inequality. Agency remains shaped by the continued presence of social and institutional constraints. Mobility is another important form of resistance. In *Ladies Coupé*, travelling provides women with a temporary space for reflection and self-expression [18]. The movement through physical space parallels movement toward psychological independence.

Bodily autonomy and sexual agency represent another dimension of resistance. Ammu's experience in *The God of Small Things* demonstrates how female sexuality becomes regulated through both patriarchal and caste-based structures [19]. Her desire challenges social expectations concerning marriage, respectability, and caste boundaries. Violent resistance appears in fiction particularly in relation to domestic and intimate violence. Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* demonstrates the extent to which patriarchal

domination may operate through physical, emotional, intellectual, and sexual control [21]. Direct confrontation may become significant when other avenues of negotiation have failed. Nevertheless, the texts do not present violence as an uncomplicated form of liberation. Counter-violence may involve physical danger, social stigma, legal consequences, and further vulnerability. The distinction between violent and non-violent resistance should therefore be understood as analytical rather than absolute. A woman may move from negotiation to refusal, from refusal to economic independence, and from independence to leaving an oppressive relationship. Conversely, direct confrontation may emerge after prolonged attempts to negotiate. Resistance consequently exists along a continuum. This continuum is particularly useful because it avoids privileging spectacular rebellion over everyday acts of agency. A woman's decision to obtain education, earn independently, reject an imposed marriage, leave an abusive relationship, or write about her experience can fundamentally challenge patriarchal expectations without involving physical violence.

VII. COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE, INSTITUTIONAL POWER, AND THE LIMITS OF AGENCY

A third major finding is that women's resistance is not always individual. Several selected works demonstrate that individual agency becomes stronger when experiences are shared and transformed into collective knowledge. Bama's *Sangati* is particularly important in this respect. The experiences of Dalit women are not presented as isolated incidents but as interconnected experiences shaped by caste, gender, labour, poverty, and social hierarchy. The collective dimension of women's experiences allows individual suffering to become social knowledge. Collective narration challenges the isolation that often strengthens patriarchal authority. When women recognise similarities between their experiences, they can identify structures rather than interpret oppression merely as individual failure.

This collective dimension also expands the meaning of resistance. Resistance does not always require a single heroic woman confronting an identifiable oppressor. It can emerge through conversation, storytelling, shared knowledge, community support, and collective consciousness.

The institutional dimension becomes especially visible in *A Burning*. The novel moves beyond the family and demonstrates how women can encounter structures of political, religious, economic, and institutional power. The possibilities available to an individual are influenced by forces larger than personal relationships. This observation complicates simplistic interpretations of empowerment. Even a determined individual may possess limited capacity when institutional structures operate against her. Legal, political, economic, and social systems can either facilitate or restrict agency. The selected fiction therefore reveals three levels of resistance: individual, relational, and institutional. Individual resistance involves personal decisions and actions. Relational resistance concerns negotiations within family, marriage, friendship, and community. Institutional resistance concerns structures such as caste, political systems, economic arrangements, and social organisations.

These levels overlap. A woman may begin with an individual decision but encounter institutional consequences. A personal relationship may be shaped by caste or economic structures. Collective resistance may emerge from repeated individual experiences. The concept of agency must consequently include its limits. The novels do not suggest that women can simply choose freedom whenever they wish. Instead, they demonstrate that agency is enabled and constrained by available resources, social location, knowledge, relationships, and institutional conditions. This finding is particularly important for an intersectional feminist reading. Women do not have identical access to resistance. Class privilege may provide educational opportunities, financial resources, or mobility. Caste privilege or disadvantage may determine the social consequences of particular relationships. Religious identity may influence political vulnerability. Economic dependence may restrict the possibility of leaving an oppressive household. Resistance therefore needs to be understood relationally. What appears to be a small decision in one context may constitute a significant act of resistance in another.

VIII. FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY, INTERSECTIONALITY, AND THE POLITICS OF RESISTANCE

Women's resistance is closely connected with the construction of female subjectivity. A woman becomes a subject when she gains the capacity to interpret herself rather than being defined exclusively by patriarchal expectations. Contemporary Indian fiction frequently represents this process as gradual and contradictory. Jaya's movement toward self-expression in *That Long Silence* illustrates the relationship between narration and subjectivity [16]. Virmati's pursuit of education in *Difficult Daughters* similarly represents an attempt to construct an identity beyond conventional domestic roles [17]. In both texts, agency develops through an encounter with social expectations rather than through complete separation from

them. Intersectionality is essential to understanding this process. Gender interacts with caste, class, sexuality, religion, and economic status [9]. Bama's *Sangati* demonstrates that Dalit women's experiences cannot be understood through gender alone [20]. Their resistance emerges within conditions shaped simultaneously by caste discrimination, poverty, labour exploitation, and patriarchal authority. Roy's *The God of Small Things* similarly demonstrates the interaction between caste and gender [19]. Ammu's experience reveals how a woman's sexuality can become a site at which caste and patriarchal authority intersect. Majumdar's *A Burning* extends the analysis to class, religion, gender, and political institutions [23]. The concept of female subjectivity is also connected to bodily autonomy. Patriarchal systems regulate women's bodies through marriage, sexuality, reproduction, mobility, and moral expectations. Butler's theory of gender performativity helps explain how these expectations become normalised through repeated social practices [2]. When women challenge such expectations, they disrupt the identities imposed upon them. Writing provides another significant mechanism of subject formation. When women narrate their experiences, they reclaim interpretive authority. This becomes especially important in narratives of trauma, where the ability to describe an experience can challenge the power of those who attempted to silence or control the woman.

Collective solidarity also contributes to resistance. In *Sangati*, women's shared experiences transform individual suffering into collective knowledge [20]. Such solidarity challenges isolation and allows women to recognise common patterns of oppression. hooks' feminist theory emphasises the importance of understanding interconnected structures of domination and the need for collective feminist consciousness [15]. The selected texts therefore demonstrate that agency is not simply individual action. It can be relational, collective, strategic, and constrained. Women negotiate patriarchal structures while simultaneously challenging them. Their resistance may involve speech, silence, education, employment, mobility, sexuality, writing, solidarity, or direct confrontation. The concept of agency within constraint is particularly important. Kabeer's framework demonstrates that agency exists within unequal distributions of resources [4], while Kandiyoti's concept of patriarchal bargains shows how women strategically negotiate restrictive structures [5]. Contemporary Indian fiction reflects this complexity by presenting women whose choices remain limited but whose actions nevertheless produce meaningful changes in their identities and relationships.

IX. METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a qualitative and comparative textual methodology. The selected novels are examined through close reading, with particular attention to narrative voice, characterisation, speech and silence, bodily autonomy, mobility, education, economic independence, domestic relationships, caste, class, sexuality, religion, and institutional power. The analysis focuses on how resistance is represented rather than attempting to quantify the frequency of particular forms of resistance. Repeated close reading identifies moments in which female characters negotiate, challenge, refuse, reinterpret, withdraw from, or directly confront patriarchal structures. The corpus consists of Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*, Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Bama's *Sangati*, Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions*, and Megha Majumdar's *A Burning*. The selection is purposive because these works provide different representations of women's experience across domestic, educational, caste, economic, sexual, political, and institutional contexts. The comparative approach enables the study to identify both recurring patterns and differences among representations of resistance. The study is interpretive and does not claim statistical generalisation. It does not include audience-reception data or empirical interviews. Its conclusions are therefore grounded in textual analysis and theoretical interpretation.

X. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is limited to a selected corpus of contemporary Indian fiction in English and therefore cannot represent the entire field of Indian women's writing. The purposive selection of texts privileges works in which questions of gender, agency, identity, and resistance are particularly visible. The interpretation of literary texts also involves a degree of analytical subjectivity. Different readers may identify different meanings in silence, resistance, sexuality, or narrative voice. The study therefore avoids claiming that any single interpretation exhausts the meaning of the selected works. Another limitation is the absence of reader-response and reception data. The study analyses literary representation rather than measuring how actual readers respond to these representations. Future research can address these limitations through broader corpora, multilingual texts, comparative regional studies, and empirical reception research.

XI. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The analysis demonstrates that contemporary Indian fiction presents women's resistance as a complex and multidimensional process. The selected texts move beyond the representation of women solely as passive victims and instead depict them as subjects who negotiate, question, refuse, reinterpret, and confront patriarchal structures. The distinction between violent and non-violent resistance is useful but should not be understood as a rigid binary. Non-violent resistance may take the form of education, employment, writing, silence, refusal, mobility, economic independence, sexual autonomy, or narrative self-representation. These actions may appear ordinary, yet they can challenge the social norms that sustain patriarchal power. Violent resistance occupies a more confrontational position. It is generally represented in relation to situations involving severe domestic, sexual, or institutional domination. Contemporary fiction demonstrates, however, that direct confrontation may produce significant risks and consequences. Violence therefore cannot be treated as an uncomplicated route to liberation. Its significance lies in the conditions from which it emerges and the power relations it attempts to challenge.

The study also demonstrates that agency is contextual. Women's capacity to resist depends upon resources, social location, family structures, economic circumstances, and institutional support. A woman's caste and class position can substantially influence the forms of resistance available to her. Bama's *Sangati*, Roy's *The God of Small Things*, and Majumdar's *A Burning* make this particularly evident [19, 20, 23]. The concept of intersectionality therefore remains central. Gender cannot be separated from caste, class, sexuality, religion, or economic status. Resistance takes different forms because women occupy different social locations. A strategy available to an educated middle-class woman may not be available to a poor or socially marginalised woman. The paper consequently proposes a continuum model of women's resistance. At one end are relatively subtle practices such as silence, negotiation, education, writing, refusal, and economic independence. At the other are direct confrontation and physical resistance. Between these poles are numerous hybrid forms through which women negotiate, withdraw, challenge, and reconstruct their identities. This continuum also challenges the conventional opposition between victimhood and empowerment. A woman can experience oppression while exercising agency. She can negotiate with patriarchal structures without accepting them completely. She can remain within a social institution while transforming her relationship to it. Agency does not require the complete elimination of constraint. The most significant finding is that resistance contributes to the construction of female subjectivity. Women become narrators of their own experiences by challenging structures that have previously defined them. Voice, writing, education, employment, mobility, bodily autonomy, and solidarity consequently become mechanisms through which female subjectivity develops.

Contemporary Indian fiction thus provides an important literary space for examining changing understandings of gender and agency. Its representations demonstrate that resistance is not necessarily a dramatic event. It may occur through everyday decisions that gradually alter women's relationship with family, community, and institutional power.

The study concludes that violent and non-violent resistance should be understood as interconnected dimensions of women's agency. Their significance depends upon the particular structures of power within which they emerge. Contemporary Indian fiction represents women as subjects who speak, remain silent, refuse, learn, work, write, remember, move, negotiate, confront, and survive. These practices challenge the reduction of women to passive objects of patriarchal structures and establish female subjectivity as an ongoing process of negotiation and self-determination. The literary significance of these representations extends beyond individual characters. By centring women's experiences and voices, contemporary Indian fiction challenges established assumptions concerning gender, family, caste, sexuality, and authority. It contributes to a broader feminist understanding of resistance in which both everyday agency and direct confrontation become significant ways through which women negotiate and contest patriarchal power.

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China-Serbia Partnership Discourse in Serbia's Multi-Vector Foreign Policy

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Abstract— *Serbia has deepened its relations with China while formally maintaining European Union membership as its principal foreign-policy objective. This article examines how that apparently contradictory position is constructed and used. Drawing on Chinese and Serbian policy documents, European Commission reports, trade statistics, and the cases of railway construction, industrial investment, and the China-Serbia Free Trade Agreement, it connects partnership discourse with Serbia's role claims and foreign-policy practice. It argues that expressions such as "ironclad friendship," "comprehensive strategic partnership," and "community with a shared future" do more than celebrate bilateral goodwill. They provide continuity and political legitimacy for cooperation and help Serbian leaders present the country as a development-oriented, autonomous, and regionally connected actor. Yet this agency remains bounded. The European Union continues to be Serbia's principal market, investor, regulatory reference, and accession framework. China-Serbia cooperation therefore does not replace a European regional order. It gives Belgrade additional partners and bargaining resources within that order, while creating new trade, regulatory, environmental, and political tensions. The case demonstrates that changes in the Western Balkans cannot be understood solely as competition among external powers; they also depend on how local governments interpret and deploy external relationships.*

Keywords— ***China-Serbia relations, Western Balkans, partnership discourse, multi-vector foreign policy, regional role***

I. INTRODUCTION

For much of the post-Cold War period, the Western Balkans were interpreted through the vocabulary of European integration. The European Union's 2003 Thessaloniki Declaration affirmed that the future of the region lay within the EU, and accession conditionality subsequently linked market access, financial assistance, and the prospect of membership to reforms in the rule of law, public administration, competition policy, environmental governance, and foreign-policy alignment (Council of the European Union, 2003). This framework established Europe as the dominant institutional horizon for regional transformation. It did not, however, produce a linear or uniform process of Europeanisation.

More than two decades later, enlargement fatigue among member states, slow domestic reform, the unresolved status of Kosovo, and new security divisions following Russia's invasion of Ukraine have made the timing and political rewards of accession increasingly uncertain. Western Balkan governments have not left the European institutional space, but they have cultivated relations with China, Russia, Türkiye, and Gulf states in order to diversify finance, diplomatic support, and development opportunities. Serbia is the clearest case of this pattern. It obtained EU candidate status in 2012 and opened accession negotiations in 2014, yet it also maintains unusually institutionalised relations with China.

The bilateral relationship has developed rapidly. China and Serbia established a strategic partnership in

2009 and upgraded it to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2016. They signed a free trade agreement in 2023, which entered into force on 1 July 2024, and in May 2024 announced the construction of a China-Serbia "community with a shared future in the new era" (Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, 2024a; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2024). Infrastructure projects, including the Belgrade-Budapest railway and the Zemun-Borca bridge, have been accompanied by major industrial investments, notably HBIS's acquisition of the Smederevo steel plant and Zijin Mining's operations in Bor. Cooperation has consequently evolved from a collection of projects into a relationship that connects political narratives, finance, production, transport, and trade rules.

How, then, should Serbia's simultaneous pursuit of European integration and close relations with China be understood? An alignment-centred approach tends to describe this behaviour as vacillation between geopolitical camps. A purely bilateral account, by contrast, may reduce the relationship to mutually beneficial projects and overlook why EU institutions increasingly treat some agreements with China as matters of strategic and regulatory concern. Both approaches risk presenting Serbia as a passive arena in which external powers compete.

This article shifts the analysis from great-power "entry" to local use. It asks three connected questions. First, how do Chinese and Serbian officials construct their partnership through recurrent labels, historical memories, and policy language? Second, how does Serbia connect this language to cooperation in infrastructure, industry, and trade in order to claim the roles of development partner, autonomous actor, and regional connector? Third, how do these role claims affect Serbia's relations with the EU and the wider Western Balkan order?

The central argument is that Serbia's multi-vector diplomacy is not an attempt to maintain equal distance between China and the EU. It is a strategy of widening partnership options while preserving the European path. Partnership discourse helps make this strategy intelligible and politically legitimate: it casts cooperation with China as evidence of sovereign choice, reliable friendship, and national development rather than as a departure from Europe. Material projects give that discourse visible content and provide the Serbian government with resources that can be converted into domestic legitimacy and diplomatic leverage. Nevertheless, this agency is constrained by the asymmetry of economic relations with China and by Serbia's much deeper dependence on the European market, accession institutions, and regulatory system.

The article uses a qualitative single-case design. Its primary material consists of joint statements and official documents issued by the Chinese and Serbian sides, EU country reports, and Serbian trade statistics. These are read together with scholarly work on Europeanisation, external influence, symbolic power, strategic hedging, and role theory. Three policy fields—infrastructure, industrial investment, and free trade—are used as embedded cases. The aim is not to measure the causal effect of individual words. It is to identify how recurring political descriptions organise expectations, legitimate projects, and support role claims, and then to test the limits of those claims against trade and regulatory evidence. The article's contribution is therefore twofold: it treats Serbia as an interpreter and user of external relationships rather than merely a target of influence, and it shows how partnership discourse acquires political force when it is attached to projects that can be used to substantiate national role claims.

II. EUROPEANISATION, EXTERNAL ACTORS, AND LOCAL AGENCY

A. European Integration as a Structuring Framework

Europeanisation remains the starting point for understanding Serbia's external relations. The accession process reaches into domestic law, administrative practice, competition rules, public procurement, environmental policy, and foreign-policy alignment. It is therefore more than one partnership among many. The European Commission's 2024 report noted that 22 of Serbia's 35 negotiating chapters had been opened and only two provisionally closed, while further progress continued to depend on rule-of-law reform and the normalisation of relations with Kosovo (European Commission, 2024, pp. 3-4). This slow progress illustrates both the depth of EU involvement and the reduced credibility of a rapid membership reward.

Conditionality is not transmitted mechanically. Compliance has immediate domestic costs, while membership remains distant and politically uncertain. Candidate governments can therefore seek alternative finance and diplomatic support in order to renegotiate the pace and terms of reform. Serbia does not reject Europeanisation as a whole. Rather, it separates the long-term destination of EU membership from the short-term choice of partners and projects. That separation creates political space for multi-vector diplomacy.

Studies of the Western Balkans have increasingly examined how the EU's dominant position interacts with the involvement of China and other external actors. One strand emphasises the danger that interstate agreements,

opaque contracts, environmental disputes, and weak labour protection may reinforce illiberal governance and undermine EU standards. Research on Chinese economic influence in Serbia, for example, connects industrial investment with pollution and political practices that limit accountability (Němec & Stojarová, 2025). Soyaltin-Colella (2023) similarly links Chinese finance to corruption risks within the accession context.

Another strand cautions against treating China as a substitute regional hegemon or Serbian officials as passive recipients. Pavlićević (2019) argues that the triangular relationship among China, the EU, and the Western Balkans remains shaped by the EU's structural power: access to the European market, regulatory influence, and enlargement policy delimit the space in which Chinese engagement operates. Projects financed or constructed by Chinese actors may supply options that European institutions did not provide under the same terms, but their long-term operation is still affected by European rules and markets.

This debate frequently becomes polarised. Critical accounts sometimes move too quickly from project controversies to the conclusion that China causes democratic decline, under-specifying the choices of Serbian institutions and political elites. Celebratory accounts, on the other hand, treat "win-win cooperation" as an explanation rather than an official claim and pay insufficient attention to the distribution of benefits, costs, and decision-making power. A local-agency approach can avoid both errors by asking what Serbian officials do with the relationship and what limits their choices.

B. Partnership Discourse and Role Construction

Partnership labels are often dismissed as ceremonial language, yet diplomatic language has practical functions. It ranks relationships, establishes continuity, signals expectations to bureaucracies and firms, and offers public justifications for policy. Vangeli's (2018) analysis of the China-Central and Eastern Europe cooperation framework demonstrates that symbolic power is an important component of China's regional engagement. Repeated descriptions of friendship, equality, respect, and mutual benefit create a vocabulary through which cooperation is recognised and reproduced.

These descriptions are not imposed unchanged on local actors. Serbian political leaders select and reinterpret them within domestic narratives of sovereignty, historical loyalty, development, and territorial integrity. The meaning of the relationship is consequently co-produced, though not necessarily symmetrically. Chinese discourse situates Serbia within broader concepts of Belt and Road cooperation and a community with a shared future. Serbian discourse gives particular prominence to "ironclad friendship," reliable support over Kosovo, the memory of the 1999 bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, and projects represented as rescuing employment or overcoming infrastructure neglect.

Role theory helps connect this language to foreign-policy conduct. National roles are claims about what a state is and what it should do in relation to others; they are shaped by domestic self-understandings and by recognition or resistance from external audiences (Harnisch et al., 2011). In the Serbian case, three role claims recur across official narratives and material practices. Serbia is presented as a development-oriented partner capable of attracting investment and modernising infrastructure; as an autonomous actor entitled to cooperate with all willing partners; and as a regional connector whose transport position and political relations link the Balkans with Central Europe and wider Eurasian networks.

These roles overlap but are not identical. A new railway can be narrated simultaneously as a development achievement and as evidence that Serbia is becoming a regional hub. A free trade agreement can be represented as economic opportunity and as proof of sovereign diplomatic choice. The analytical value of role language lies in showing how particular projects become elements of a broader account of national position. It does not imply that rhetoric automatically produces the claimed outcome. Each role must be compared with material patterns, institutional constraints, and the responses of other actors.

C. Materials and Analytical Procedure

The textual corpus covers the period from the establishment of the strategic partnership in 2009 through December 2024. Documents were included when they met at least one of three criteria: they formally defined the bilateral relationship; they connected partnership language to a major policy field; or they stated Serbia's position toward China, the EU, sovereignty, development, or regional connectivity. The core corpus comprises the 2024 joint presidential statement published by Serbia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Serbian ministry's bilateral-relations profile and 2021 ministerial statement on "steel friendship," the corresponding Chinese joint statement and FTA notices, the European Commission's 2024 Serbia Report, and Serbia's official external-trade release (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, 2021, 2024a, 2024b).

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, the documents were read for recurrent relationship labels and justificatory terms, including friendship, sovereignty, territorial integrity, development, mutual benefit,

autonomy, and connectivity. Second, the statements surrounding those terms were grouped under three inductively derived role claims: development partner, autonomous actor, and regional connector. Third, these claims were compared with project and trade evidence and with EU assessments. This last step functions as a credibility check: a role claim is treated as politically consequential when it recurs across documents and is attached to a policy practice, but not as proof that the claimed material outcome has been achieved. The procedure is informed by work showing that external strategic narratives matter when local actors can appropriate them without undermining their own identity and interests (van Noort & Colley, 2021).

This design has limits. The corpus consists of public, English-language documents and therefore captures official representation rather than confidential decision-making. It does not establish how individual audiences received every narrative, nor does it attribute project outcomes to discourse alone. Its purpose is narrower: to reconstruct the relationship between official language, visible cooperation, and Serbia's role claims, while using independent regulatory and economic evidence to identify the limits of those claims.

III. FROM STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP TO A COMMUNITY WITH A SHARED FUTURE

A. The Escalation of Partnership Labels

The formal evolution of China-Serbia relations has been accompanied by an escalation of diplomatic labels. The 2009 strategic partnership provided a durable political framework. Its upgrade to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2016 widened the declared scope of cooperation and distinguished Serbia within China's European diplomacy. In May 2024, the two governments announced that Serbia would become the first European country to build with China a "community with a shared future in the new era" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2024).

The accumulation of labels matters less as a legal hierarchy than as a claim of continuity. Each new formulation incorporates the earlier history of the relationship and presents deeper cooperation as the natural next stage. Official texts repeatedly refer to "ironclad friendship," mutual respect, sovereignty, territorial integrity, and support on questions of core interest. This vocabulary reduces the appearance that individual projects are opportunistic transactions. It represents them instead as expressions of a stable political relationship.

The two sides nevertheless emphasise different elements. Chinese accounts connect Serbia to the Belt and Road Initiative, China-CEE cooperation, and broader ideas about international partnership. Serbian leaders more often translate the relationship into narratives of recognition and choice: China is a partner that does not impose political conditions, supports Serbia's position on Kosovo, and invests in projects portrayed as having been neglected by others. Serbia's own foreign ministry describes China as its most important Asian trade partner and identifies the bridge, railway, steel, mining, and energy projects as central components of the relationship (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, 2024a). Its 2021 account of "steel friendship" explicitly connects bilateral ties to mutual support on questions of sovereignty and territorial integrity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, 2021). Vladisavljev (2021) shows how the Serbian political elite's representation of "steel friendship" contributed to a favourable image of China. Partnership language is therefore not simply copied from Beijing. It is incorporated into a Serbian narrative of national dignity and dependable friendship.

The 1999 NATO bombing of the Chinese embassy occupies a distinctive place in this narrative. Commemoration creates a shared memory of vulnerability and reinforces claims of political solidarity. Yet historical memory alone cannot explain the speed or breadth of cooperation. Its significance lies in supplying moral depth to a relationship whose contemporary expansion is driven largely by development finance, industrial investment, market access, and diplomatic calculation.

B. Infrastructure as a Material Carrier of Friendship

Infrastructure makes diplomatic language visible. Bridges, railways, and industrial facilities can be visited by leaders, displayed in media coverage, and linked to employment and mobility. The Zemun-Borca bridge and the Belgrade-Budapest railway are especially important because they connect the partnership to Serbia's aspiration to become a transport hub.

The railway has both domestic and transnational meanings. Domestically, it is presented as evidence of modernisation and the government's ability to deliver major projects. Regionally, it is linked to a corridor from the port of Piraeus through the Balkans toward Central European markets (Railway Technology, n.d.). The 2024 joint presidential statement likewise defines the Serbia-Hungary railway as important to Serbia's connections with the region and to the movement of people and goods (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia, 2024b). This spatial narrative supports the role of Serbia as

a connector rather than a peripheral recipient of external capital.

Infrastructure cooperation also reveals tensions obscured by celebratory language. Interstate financing and contracting can accelerate implementation, but exemptions from ordinary procurement procedures raise questions about transparency and compatibility with EU norms. Project delays, cost revisions, and cross-border regulatory differences demonstrate that political endorsement does not remove technical or institutional constraints. The same project can therefore increase connectivity while becoming a site of contestation over governance.

The political importance of infrastructure should not be inferred solely from its physical completion. Large projects produce expectations, bureaucratic networks, and sunk political costs long before all sections become operational. They also enable leaders to narrate time differently: present disruption is justified by a promised future in which Serbia occupies a central place in regional transport. Partnership discourse helps sustain that future-oriented claim.

C. Industrial and Institutional Expansion

The acquisition of the Smederevo steel plant by HBIS and Zijin Mining's investment in Bor moved cooperation beyond construction contracts. These investments connected Chinese firms to local production, exports, employment, municipal revenue, and environmental politics. The Smederevo case has been represented in Serbian official discourse as the rescue of an industrial community and a demonstration that political friendship can yield concrete social benefits. Bor similarly illustrates how foreign investment can expand output and exports while intensifying disputes over pollution, labour, and local accountability.

Industrial investment complicates the interpretation of bilateral trade. Goods produced in Serbia by Chinese-owned companies appear statistically as Serbian exports, even when ownership, technology, and decision-making remain transnational. Export growth therefore cannot be equated automatically with the development of domestically controlled productive capacity. At the same time, dismissing such production as wholly external would ignore employment, tax revenue, supplier relations, and infrastructure improvements. The relevant question is how gains, risks, and control are distributed.

The China-Serbia Free Trade Agreement represents a further institutional step. Signed in 2023 and effective from 1 July 2024, it moves the relationship from project-based cooperation toward a rules-based framework for market access (Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, 2024a, 2024b). Official Chinese accounts emphasise tariff reduction, new opportunities for firms, and the further development of bilateral trade. Serbian accounts similarly present access to the Chinese market as an opportunity for agriculture, wine, food processing, and industrial production.

The agreement also creates a direct connection between bilateral cooperation and Serbia's European future. EU accession ultimately requires alignment with the EU's common commercial policy. Serbia would therefore have to withdraw from or revise bilateral trade arrangements incompatible with membership. The European Commission described the agreement as a matter of strategic concern and reiterated the need for Serbia to align progressively with EU trade policy (European Commission, 2024, p. 95). The FTA expands Serbia's current room for manoeuvre, but it does not establish a permanent alternative commercial order.

IV. COOPERATION AND SERBIA'S REGIONAL ROLES

A. Development Partner: Trade Growth and Its Limits

Bilateral trade has grown quickly and is central to the official narrative of successful cooperation. Serbian statistics for January-November 2024 show that exports to China increased considerably compared with the same period in 2023, while imports also rose. China consequently accounted for a larger share of both Serbian exports and imports (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2024). Table 1 summarises the official preliminary data available at the time of the original release.

Table 1. Serbia's Trade with China, January-November 2023 and January-November 2024

Indicator	Jan.-Nov. 2023	Jan.-Nov. 2024	Change
Serbian exports to China (EUR billion)	1.0700	1.6292	+52.3%
Serbian imports from China (EUR billion)	4.1384	4.6877	+13.3%
China's share of Serbian exports	4.0%	6.1%	+2.1 percentage points
China's share of Serbian imports	12.3%	13.2%	+0.9 percentage points

Source: Compiled from Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2024). Figures for 2024 were preliminary when released.

The increase in exports supports the government's claim that relations with China offer more than one-way financing. Yet three qualifications are necessary. First, the bilateral balance remains substantially in China's favour. Second, a large part of Serbia's exports is concentrated in metals and products connected to Chinese-owned industrial facilities. Third, Serbia's overall economic orientation remains European. The EU continues to dominate Serbia's trade and investment environment and to shape standards faced by Serbian producers (European Commission, 2024, pp. 95-98).

The "development partner" role is therefore credible but selective. Cooperation has brought infrastructure, industrial production, and access to capital, and it has created visible gains that the Serbian government can communicate domestically. It has not eliminated asymmetry or transformed China into Serbia's principal economic framework. Official narratives emphasise gross growth and flagship successes; analysis must also examine composition, ownership, regulatory costs, and opportunity costs.

Environmental controversy further limits the development narrative. Research on Chinese-owned heavy industry in Serbia documents the interaction between pollution concerns and political practices that restrict effective accountability (Němec & Stojarová, 2025). These problems should not be attributed to foreign ownership alone. Serbian regulatory institutions, local political incentives, and the legacy of heavy industry are central mediating factors. Nevertheless, they show why partnership claims cannot substitute for evaluation of implementation.

B. Autonomous Actor: More Partners within a European Path

Serbia's relationship with China supports a second role claim: the state as an autonomous actor capable of choosing partners without accepting exclusive alignment. In official discourse, diversified cooperation is presented as a normal exercise of sovereignty. This framing is attractive domestically because it distinguishes external partnership from external tutelage.

Strategic hedging scholarship helps describe the behavioural pattern but can mislead if it implies equal distance among partners. Tzifakis and Vasdoka (2025) identify Serbia's gatekeeping position and its use of relations with several major powers. Serbia reduces risk by maintaining overlapping ties, obtaining resources from different actors, and avoiding complete dependence on any single political centre. Yet the relationships are not equivalent. The EU possesses far greater capacity to shape Serbia's laws, market access, and membership prospects. China offers finance, investment, diplomatic support, and an alternative political vocabulary, but not an institutional substitute of comparable depth.

The value of the Chinese partnership lies partly in its convertibility. The existence of alternative finance can reduce the immediate cost of rejecting or delaying particular EU demands. Successful projects can be invoked in negotiations as evidence that Serbia has choices. High-level diplomatic recognition strengthens the leadership's domestic image of international relevance. At the same time, Serbian officials repeatedly confirm that EU membership remains a strategic objective. The apparent contradiction is managed by distinguishing ends from means: Europe remains the declared destination, while multi-vector cooperation defines the route and pace.

This strategy is not cost-free. EU institutions assess Serbia's alignment with the Common Foreign and Security Policy, public procurement, competition rules, state aid, environmental governance, and trade policy. Each additional arrangement can generate obligations that later require adjustment. Autonomy is thus relational and temporary rather than absolute. Serbia can broaden its options, but it cannot prevent its choices from being evaluated within the accession process.

C. Regional Connector: Converting Cooperation into Position

The role of regional connector links domestic development with foreign policy. Serbia's geography, market size, and transport corridors give the claim a material basis. Chinese-supported rail and road projects enable Serbian leaders to depict the country as an entry point linking Southern and Central Europe. Industrial investments and the FTA add production and commercial dimensions to this image.

Role claims require audiences. China recognises Serbia as an important Belt and Road partner and a showcase for cooperation in Europe. Serbian leaders use that recognition to elevate the country's visibility beyond what its material size might ordinarily provide. Neighbouring states, investors, and EU institutions, however, need not accept Serbia's preferred interpretation. Connectivity can be viewed as a regional public good, as national centralisation, or as a route through which external influence expands.

The distribution of benefits is also uneven. Corridors tend to privilege nodes already possessing infrastructure, administrative capacity, and access to finance. Serbia's centrality may grow without producing equal gains across the Western Balkans. A railway or industrial cluster can strengthen Belgrade's position while leaving peripheral areas weakly connected. The connector

role therefore describes a political project, not an automatically inclusive regional outcome.

Public opinion and media narratives help sustain this project. The Balkan Barometer provides evidence of how citizens across the region evaluate economic conditions, external partners, and regional cooperation, though it should not be reduced to a single measure of support for China (Regional Cooperation Council, 2025). In Serbia, favourable elite representations of China have been especially persistent (Vladisavljev, 2021). Visible infrastructure and industrial employment give these representations concrete reference points. Public approval, however, coexists with local contestation over environmental harm and transparency. “Friendship” is neither uniformly accepted nor politically meaningless.

V. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE WESTERN BALKAN ORDER

A. A Wider Repertoire of Development Partnerships

China's presence changes the Western Balkans first by expanding the repertoire of possible development partnerships. Governments can compare financing conditions, implementation speed, political expectations, and publicity value across different partners. Even when an alternative project is not selected, its availability may affect bargaining with European institutions and other lenders.

This change should not be exaggerated into a complete transformation of regional order. China does not offer a membership-based legal and political project comparable to the EU. It does not regulate the everyday movement of most goods, workers, and firms in the same way as the European market. Its influence is concentrated in particular sectors, projects, and political relationships. The resulting order is better described as European-centred but increasingly plural in instruments and partners.

Serbia is especially capable of using this pluralism because it combines size, location, administrative capacity, and high-level political access. Its experience may be imitated selectively by neighbours, but it is not a universal regional model. Smaller economies possess less bargaining power and may face different debt, market, or institutional constraints.

B. Connectivity and Uneven Regional Effects

Transport infrastructure can generate regional benefits by reducing travel times, attracting investment, and linking markets. The political geography of connectivity, however, determines who becomes a hub and who remains a transit space. Serbia's effort to become the principal intermediary between Chinese networks, the Western Balkans, and Central Europe may reinforce its regional weight.

The construction of a connector role also affects regional narratives. Instead of describing Serbia primarily through the legacies of conflict and incomplete Europeanisation, official discourse presents it as a producer of links and a host of strategic projects. That shift can support cooperative diplomacy, but it can also conceal competitive efforts to centralise routes, investment, and political attention.

Projects crossing borders encounter multiple regulatory systems. The Belgrade-Budapest railway demonstrates that bilateral political commitment must coexist with EU procurement, competition, and safety rules on the Hungarian side. Such cases reveal the endurance of European structural power even within flagship Chinese cooperation (Pavlićević, 2019). Connectivity does not bypass institutions; it brings different institutions into direct contact.

C. The Continuing Boundaries of European Institutions

The strongest limit on Serbia's multi-vector strategy remains the European institutional framework. The EU accession process monitors reforms across a broad range of policy fields, while the European market shapes the calculations of Serbian exporters and foreign investors. The Commission's assessments of procurement, environment, competition, foreign-policy alignment, and trade policy create continuing pressure for compatibility (European Commission, 2024, pp. 84-98).

This does not mean EU power is uncontested or uniformly effective. Delayed enlargement weakens incentives and creates opportunities for Serbian leaders to postpone costly reforms. Selective cooperation with China can reinforce that capacity. Yet delay is not equivalent to exit. The costs of abandoning the European path would be substantially greater than the costs of adjusting individual projects or agreements.

The China-Serbia FTA illustrates this temporal structure. In the present, it demonstrates diplomatic autonomy and promises new commercial opportunities. In the event of EU accession, it would have to be reconciled with the EU's common trade policy. Its current political value partly depends on membership remaining prospective rather than immediate. Multi-vector diplomacy is therefore sustained by the prolonged interval between candidacy and membership.

The wider regional implication is a layered order. European rules and markets form the deepest layer; national governments exercise agency in implementation;

and external partners provide additional resources, narratives, and sectoral networks. Conflict arises not simply because China and the EU promote mutually exclusive orders, but because specific forms of Chinese cooperation interact with accession obligations, domestic institutions, and local political interests.

CONCLUSION

China-Serbia relations demonstrate why the Western Balkans should not be analysed only as an arena of great-power competition. External actors matter, but their influence is mediated by local governments that select partners, define projects, translate diplomatic language, and convert external resources into domestic and regional roles.

Partnership discourse is central to this process. "Ironclad friendship," "comprehensive strategic partnership," and "community with a shared future" establish a narrative of continuity and trust. In Serbia, that narrative is adapted to themes of sovereignty, territorial integrity, development, and national choice. Infrastructure, industrial investment, and the free trade agreement give the language material reference points. Together, discourse and practice allow Serbia to present itself as a development partner, an autonomous actor, and a regional connector.

These roles have real effects. Cooperation with China has increased the range of available partnerships, supported industrial and infrastructure projects, raised Serbia's diplomatic visibility, and supplied resources for a multi-vector foreign policy. It has also produced trade asymmetry, environmental controversy, transparency concerns, and friction with EU rules. The benefits and risks cannot be derived from the identity of the external partner alone; they depend on project design, Serbian governance, ownership structures, and regulatory enforcement.

Serbia's agency remains bounded by the European context. The EU continues to be the country's main economic and institutional reference, and accession obligations reach more deeply into domestic governance than the partnership with China. Serbia is not replacing Europe with China. It is using cooperation with China to negotiate greater room for choice within a European-centred order whose final membership reward has been repeatedly delayed.

The case consequently suggests a more precise understanding of multi-vector foreign policy. It is neither neutrality nor equal alignment. It is the selective combination of relationships with different functions and different degrees of dependence. Its durability rests partly on the unresolved interval of EU candidacy. Future research could compare how similar role claims operate in other Western Balkan states and examine whether closer EU integration narrows the space for bilateral arrangements or instead encourages new forms of compatibility.

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Remembering Caste, Reclaiming Identity: Childhood, Humiliation and Resistance in Select Marathi Dalit Autobiographies

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Abstract— *Dalit autobiography has emerged as one of the most powerful forms of Indian life writing because it transforms personal experience into a narrative of collective history, social injustice and resistance. Unlike conventional autobiographies that frequently concentrate on individual achievement, Dalit autobiographies locate the individual within the structures of caste, poverty, labour, social exclusion and community life. Childhood occupies a particularly important place in this tradition because caste consciousness is often formed through experiences encountered during the earliest stages of life. Sharankumar Limbale's The Outcaste: Akkarmashi, Baby Kamble's The Prisons We Broke, and Laxman Gaikwad's The Branded: Uchalya are significant Marathi Dalit autobiographies that remember childhood and community life through the experience of caste oppression. Although the three narratives differ in gender, social background, narrative structure and individual experience, they collectively reveal how caste penetrates everyday life through poverty, untouchability, education, occupation, hunger, social exclusion and humiliation. Limbale's The Outcaste explores the painful identity of a child born to a Dalit mother and a dominant-caste father, making questions of legitimacy, belonging and caste central to the narrative. Kamble's The Prisons We Broke extends the autobiographical perspective from the individual to the collective life of Dalit women and the Mahar community, exposing poverty, gender oppression, caste discrimination and the struggle for dignity. Gaikwad's The Branded: Uchalya represents the experience of a nomadic community historically stigmatised and treated as criminal, demonstrating how social prejudice can become attached to an entire community and continue across generations. Through memory, these writers recover experiences excluded from dominant histories. Their narratives transform humiliation into testimony and memory into resistance. This article argues that the three autobiographies reclaim Dalit identity by challenging caste-based representations and asserting the right of marginalised communities to narrate their own histories.*

Keywords— ***Dalit autobiography, Marathi Dalit literature, childhood, caste, humiliation, identity, memory, resistance, Sharankumar Limbale, Baby Kamble, Laxman Gaikwad.***

Introduction

Dalit literature represents a major intervention in Indian literary and social discourse because it challenges systems of caste hierarchy and the literary traditions that have historically marginalised the experiences of oppressed communities. Dalit writing places lived experience at the centre of literary expression. It records suffering, humiliation, poverty, exclusion and exploitation, but it also expresses dignity, consciousness, resistance and the desire for social transformation. Among the different

forms of Dalit literature, autobiography occupies a particularly important position because the writer's personal experience becomes connected with the experience of a larger community. The individual life becomes a means through which an entire social history can be narrated.

Marathi Dalit literature has played a pioneering role in the development of Indian Dalit writing. The emergence of autobiographical narratives in Marathi created a powerful literary space for writers to challenge caste-based silence and represent experiences from within marginalised communities. Sharankumar Limbale's The Outcaste: Akkarmashi, Baby Kamble's The Prisons We Broke, and Laxman Gaikwad's The Branded: Uchalya are among the important autobiographical works through which caste, identity, poverty and resistance are articulated. University reading lists on Dalit literature identify all three works as significant texts within the tradition of Dalit autobiography.

The autobiographical mode in these works differs significantly from the conventional understanding of autobiography. The narrators do not present themselves simply as exceptional individuals who overcome difficulties and achieve success. Instead, their lives remain inseparable from the social conditions of their communities. Their memories contain the voices of mothers, fathers, children, labourers, neighbours, workers and other members of marginalised communities. As a result, the autobiographical "I" frequently becomes a collective "we." Scholarship on Dalit life narratives has similarly emphasised the movement from individual experience towards collective memory and community testimony.

The present article examines the three autobiographies through the interconnected themes of childhood, caste, humiliation, poverty, identity, memory and resistance. It argues that remembering the past in these narratives is not merely an act of personal recollection. It is an act of reclaiming identity and rewriting history from the perspective of those who have traditionally been excluded from dominant representations.

Childhood under the Shadow of Caste

Childhood is conventionally associated with innocence, play, education and emotional development. Dalit autobiographies challenge this idealised image by demonstrating that caste becomes visible to children at a very early age. The Dalit child learns about social hierarchy through everyday experiences involving food, water, school, work, residence, occupation and interpersonal relations. Childhood therefore becomes one of the first spaces in which caste consciousness develops.

In The Outcaste: Akkarmashi, Sharankumar Limbale's childhood is deeply affected by his ambiguous position within the caste structure. He is born to a Dalit mother and a high-caste father and is consequently denied a stable sense of social belonging. His identity as an akkarmashi, or one born outside socially recognised legitimacy, becomes both a personal and social wound. His father's privileged position contrasts sharply with his mother's poverty and marginality. Scholarly discussions of the text emphasise this contradiction between the father's privileged caste position and the mother's landless Dalit existence.

Limbale's childhood is therefore shaped by a fundamental question: where does he belong? He cannot fully claim the identity associated with his father, while his relationship with his mother places him within the social reality of untouchability. The child experiences caste not simply as an external social system but as a problem of identity. His very existence becomes a reminder of the unequal relations between dominant-caste men and Dalit women.

Baby Kamble's The Prisons We Broke approaches childhood from a different perspective. Rather than focusing exclusively on the formation of one individual identity, Kamble presents the collective experience of Mahar life. Her memories of childhood and community life reveal hunger, poverty, social exclusion and the difficult conditions under which Dalit families survived. The autobiographical voice frequently moves beyond the individual self and records the experiences of women, children and families within the community. Kamble's work consequently becomes both autobiography and social history.

Laxman Gaikwad's The Branded: Uchalya similarly presents childhood within a community burdened by social stigma. The Uchalya community is associated with a hereditary label of criminality, and this stigma affects the lives of its members even when individuals have committed no crime. The child therefore grows up in a social environment in which identity has already been imposed from outside. The community is treated with suspicion because of its inherited social label. The autobiographical narrative exposes how such stigma can become a form of social imprisonment.

The three texts therefore reveal different dimensions of caste-marked childhood. Limbale's childhood is shaped by questions of legitimacy and mixed-caste parentage; Kamble's by collective poverty, caste oppression and the condition of Dalit women; and Gaikwad's by the inherited stigma attached to a nomadic community. Yet all three demonstrate that caste deprives

childhood of the innocence that dominant social narratives often assume.

Humiliation and the Caste-Marked Body

Humiliation is central to Dalit autobiographical experience because caste operates through the body. The Dalit body is marked as polluted, inferior, criminal, poor or socially undesirable. Experiences involving touch, food, clothing, labour, residence and physical space communicate caste hierarchy in everyday life.

In Limbale's The Outcaste, humiliation is inseparable from the narrator's uncertain identity. His body carries the social consequences of his parents' unequal relationship. The father's high caste provides social privilege, while the mother's Dalit identity determines the child's marginal status. The contrast between the father's mansion and the mother's hut becomes a powerful representation of caste inequality. Limbale's identity as akkarmashi is not merely a private description; it reflects a society that attaches social value to birth and legitimacy.

Kamble's narrative expands humiliation into the collective sphere. The Dalit community is subjected to forms of social and economic deprivation that affect everyday life. Women suffer particularly because caste oppression is combined with patriarchal control and poverty. The autobiographical narrative exposes the ways in which Dalit women are expected to bear the burdens of household labour, economic hardship and social discrimination.

The title The Prisons We Broke is itself significant because it suggests that oppression exists through multiple forms of confinement. The prison is not simply a physical structure. It can be caste, poverty, gender inequality, ignorance and social conditioning. Kamble's narrative demonstrates how these structures affect the lives of women and children and how consciousness can become the beginning of liberation.

In The Branded: Uchalya, the very word “branded” suggests a permanent social mark. The Uchalya community carries a stigma that precedes the individual. Members are treated as suspicious because of their community identity. Gaikwad's autobiography exposes the injustice of judging individuals according to inherited labels. The narrative thus demonstrates that caste and social stigma can function even without direct physical violence. Suspicion itself becomes a form of oppression.

Poverty, Hunger and Social Exclusion

Poverty is a recurring reality in all three autobiographies. However, poverty is not presented simply as an economic condition. It is closely connected to caste and social exclusion. The writers demonstrate that marginalised communities are poor partly because caste determines access to land, occupations, education and resources.

In The Outcaste, the contrast between the privileged father and the impoverished mother illustrates the economic dimension of caste. Land and wealth are concentrated on one side of the social hierarchy, while Dalit families remain vulnerable to poverty and dependence. The narrator's childhood experiences reveal how economic deprivation affects food, education, family life and self-respect.

Kamble's narrative gives particular attention to the material conditions of Dalit women and families. Hunger, inadequate clothing, exhausting labour and economic insecurity form part of everyday existence. Poverty is experienced collectively, and the survival of one family cannot be separated from the conditions of the wider community. Kamble therefore transforms private memories into a social record of poverty.

Gaikwad's narrative presents a related but distinctive experience. The Uchalya community's marginalisation restricts opportunities for stable employment and social mobility. The inherited stigma attached to the community contributes to a cycle in which poverty and social suspicion reinforce one another. The autobiography exposes how a community can become trapped within a social identity imposed by dominant society.

The three writers consequently challenge explanations of poverty that blame individuals for their economic condition. Their narratives demonstrate that poverty is structurally produced and maintained. Caste determines who owns land, who performs particular forms of labour, who receives education and who has access to social dignity.

Education and the Awakening of Consciousness

Education occupies an important position in Dalit autobiographical writing because it represents both a possibility of social transformation and a site where caste discrimination becomes visible. The school promises equality but does not always provide it. Dalit children may enter educational institutions while continuing to experience caste-based exclusion and humiliation.

For Limbale, education contributes to the development of critical awareness. The child gradually learns to interpret experiences that initially appear personal or accidental as manifestations of a larger caste system. Education therefore transforms experience into consciousness.

Kamble's perspective is particularly important because her narrative connects education with the condition of Dalit women. Traditional social structures restrict women's opportunities, and ignorance becomes one of the mechanisms through which oppression continues. The narrative therefore values consciousness and knowledge as essential elements of liberation. The breaking of the "prisons" requires not merely economic change but a transformation in how oppressed people understand themselves and their social circumstances.

Gaikwad's experience similarly demonstrates the importance of education in challenging inherited social identity. Education offers the possibility of moving beyond the restrictions imposed by community stigma. Yet the autobiography also reveals that education alone cannot immediately erase caste prejudice. The educated individual may continue to carry the social identity imposed by the community.

Education thus has a double function in the three texts. It provides an opportunity for individual transformation, but it also exposes the persistence of caste within modern institutions. The school can become both a place of exclusion and a place from which resistance begins.

Gender and the Experience of Dalit Women

Baby Kamble's The Prisons We Broke is particularly significant because it foregrounds Dalit women's experiences. While caste affects both men and women, Dalit women experience caste oppression through gendered forms of labour, poverty, family expectations and social control. Kamble's narrative challenges representations of Dalit life that focus only on male experience.

Women in the narrative are workers, mothers, wives and members of the community, but they are also observers and interpreters of social reality. Their experiences reveal the relationship between caste and patriarchy. They suffer oppression from dominant social groups while also experiencing gender-based restrictions within their own communities.

Kamble does not romanticise the community. She is critical of practices that reproduce women's suffering. This makes her autobiography especially significant for Dalit feminist thought. She demonstrates that liberation from caste cannot be complete if gender inequality remains unchallenged.

The contrast with Limbale and Gaikwad is productive. Their autobiographies provide important accounts of caste and poverty, but Kamble places women's experiences at the centre of the narrative. Her work therefore expands the meaning of Dalit autobiography by demonstrating that the history of caste must also be narrated through the lives of Dalit women.

Memory as Counter-History

Memory is the foundation upon which these three autobiographies are constructed. The writers return to childhood and community experiences not simply because these events are personally important but because they represent histories that have been excluded from dominant narratives.

Limbale remembers his childhood to expose the contradictions of caste, legitimacy and identity. His personal history becomes connected with the history of Dalit families and communities. His narrative demonstrates how the question of parentage is also a question of caste power.

Kamble remembers the lives of Mahar women and families to preserve experiences that might otherwise remain undocumented. Her autobiographical voice becomes a collective memory of a community. The narrative therefore moves beyond the conventional boundaries of autobiography and approaches social history.

Gaikwad remembers the life of the Uchalya community to challenge the criminal identity imposed upon it. His narrative asks readers to understand the historical and social conditions that produced marginalisation rather than simply accepting the labels attached to the community.

Dalit autobiography thus becomes a form of counter-history. It challenges official histories that frequently privilege dominant communities and institutions. The memories of hunger, humiliation, labour and exclusion become historical evidence. Through writing, the authors preserve experiences that dominant society has attempted to forget.

Identity and the Reclamation of the Self

The central concern of all three autobiographies is the struggle to reclaim identity from definitions imposed by caste society. Limbale's identity is complicated by the term akkarmashi. He is forced to confront a society that defines him through his birth and denies him the secure identity available to those born within accepted caste and family structures. His act of writing challenges that definition by transforming the stigma into a source of critical literary expression.

Kamble's reclamation of identity occurs through the representation of Dalit women and community life. She refuses to allow her community to be represented only through the prejudices of outsiders. By recording the lives

of ordinary women, she gives them historical and literary visibility.

Gaikwad similarly challenges the inherited identity of the "criminal" or "branded" community. His autobiography separates human beings from the social labels imposed upon them. The act of narration becomes an argument for recognising individual dignity beyond inherited stigma.

In all three texts, therefore, identity is not something simply possessed by the narrator. It is something contested and reconstructed. The writers reclaim identity by telling their own stories.

Resistance and Agency

Resistance in these autobiographies is not restricted to political movements or dramatic acts of rebellion. It begins with the refusal to accept humiliation as natural. The ability to remember, question, learn and write becomes an act of resistance.

Limbale's writing transforms personal stigma into literary testimony. His autobiography exposes the structures that produced his marginal identity. The personal "I" becomes connected with the collective suffering of Dalit communities. Dalit autobiographical writing has often been understood in this way: the individual story becomes a narrative of the community.

Kamble's resistance is particularly significant because she speaks against both caste oppression and gender inequality. Her narrative gives voice to women whose experiences might otherwise remain invisible. By criticising social practices within and outside the community, she demonstrates that resistance requires an honest examination of all forms of oppression.

Gaikwad's resistance lies in challenging the social construction of criminality. His autobiography demonstrates that communities can be "branded" by society and then denied opportunities because of that brand. Writing becomes a means of questioning this inherited stigma.

The three writers therefore redefine resistance as the struggle for dignity. Education, memory, self-expression, community consciousness and literary representation all become forms of resistance.

Language and Dalit Literary Expression

The language of Dalit autobiography is itself significant because Dalit writers challenge literary conventions associated with elite culture. Their narratives often preserve the rhythms of oral storytelling, community speech and everyday experience. Such language allows the writers to represent social reality from within the community rather than through an external literary gaze.

The three texts are originally Marathi works that have reached wider audiences through translation. The Outcaste: Akkarmashi was translated into English by Santosh Bhoomkar, The Prisons We Broke by Maya Pandit, and The Branded: Uchalya has been published in English by Sahitya Akademi. These works are widely recognised within English-language study of Dalit literature.

The use of community-centred language is important because language can challenge social hierarchy. When the speech, memories and experiences of marginalised communities enter literature, their cultural world gains literary legitimacy.

A recent sociolinguistic study of these same three autobiographies argues that regional dialect, caste-marked vocabulary, oral narrative strategies and gendered voices can undermine the symbolic authority of dominant literary language. This reinforces the argument that Dalit language is not simply a stylistic choice; it can also be part of the political project of self-representation.

From Victimhood to Agency

One of the most important achievements of these autobiographies is that they refuse to reduce Dalit identity to victimhood. The narratives contain hunger, humiliation and suffering, but they also contain consciousness, courage, creativity and resistance.

Limbale's painful experience of illegitimacy becomes the foundation of a powerful literary voice. Kamble transforms memories of women's suffering into a collective critique of caste and patriarchy. Gaikwad transforms the stigma attached to the Uchalya community into a narrative that questions the very foundations of social labelling.

This transformation is central to the meaning of the title Remembering Caste, Reclaiming Identity. Remembering is necessary because forgetting would allow oppressive histories to disappear. But remembering alone is not enough. The memory must be transformed into knowledge and resistance. These writers remember humiliation in order to challenge the structures that produced it.

Their autobiographies therefore move through a significant sequence: experience, memory, consciousness, narration and resistance. The individual who was once defined by caste becomes the author who defines himself or herself through writing.

Comparative Perspective

A comparative reading of the three autobiographies reveals both common experiences and significant differences. All three texts represent communities affected by caste-based marginalisation, poverty and social exclusion. All three demonstrate that childhood is shaped by social structures and that humiliation can become a source of consciousness. All three also transform individual memory into collective testimony.

However, each text offers a distinctive perspective. The Outcaste: Akkarmashi is deeply concerned with questions of birth, legitimacy, caste identity and belonging. Limbale's personal position as the son of a Dalit mother and a high-caste father makes identity a particularly painful issue. His autobiography explores the psychological and social consequences of being denied a secure place within caste society.

The Prisons We Broke is distinguished by its emphasis on Dalit women and collective community experience. Kamble's narrative demonstrates that caste oppression is inseparable from gender and economic conditions. Her work expands Dalit autobiography beyond individual male experience and foregrounds the lives of women.

The Branded: Uchalya offers a different perspective by focusing on a community historically marked by the stigma of criminality. Gaikwad demonstrates how social identity can be imposed upon an entire community and transmitted across generations. His narrative therefore raises important questions about prejudice, inherited stigma and social exclusion.

Together, these works demonstrate the diversity of Marathi Dalit autobiography. They do not present a single uniform Dalit experience. Instead, they reveal differences based on gender, community, family background, occupation and social location. Their common ground lies in the rejection of imposed inferiority and the insistence on dignity.

CONCLUSION

Sharankumar Limbale's The Outcaste: Akkarmashi, Baby Kamble's The Prisons We Broke, and Laxman Gaikwad's The Branded: Uchalya are powerful examples of Marathi Dalit autobiographical writing. Through memories of childhood, family, poverty, education, labour and social exclusion, the three writers expose the everyday operation of caste and the deep psychological consequences of humiliation.

Their representations of childhood are particularly significant because they demonstrate how caste consciousness begins at an early age. Children learn the boundaries of caste through social interaction, poverty, occupation, education and exclusion. Childhood therefore becomes an important site for understanding how caste reproduces itself across generations.

Yet these autobiographies do not remain narratives of suffering. They transform memory into resistance. Limbale challenges the stigma of illegitimacy and caste identity by narrating his own life. Kamble gives literary and historical visibility to Dalit women and challenges both caste and patriarchal oppression. Gaikwad questions the inherited criminal stigma attached to the Uchalya community and asserts the humanity of people who have been socially branded.

The three narratives also demonstrate that Dalit identity is not simply something imposed by caste society. It can be reclaimed through consciousness, education, memory and literary expression. The autobiographical act enables the writers to move from being objects of social representation to becoming subjects who represent themselves.

Remembering caste in these works is therefore not an exercise in preserving pain alone. It is a political and literary act. The memory of humiliation becomes evidence against oppression, while the act of narrating that memory becomes a declaration of dignity. The writers reclaim the right to speak about their own lives, communities and histories.

Ultimately, these autobiographies transform the personal into the collective. Their individual childhood memories become records of communities whose experiences have frequently remained outside official histories. They demonstrate that Dalit autobiography is not merely a story about the past; it is a continuing assertion of identity and resistance in the present. Through The Outcaste: Akkarmashi, The Prisons We Broke, and The Branded: Uchalya, memory becomes a means of reclaiming identity, literature becomes a form of resistance, and the previously silenced Dalit subject becomes the authoritative narrator of his or her own history.

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The English Translation of Chinese Internet Buzzwords and Its Dissemination and Reception in Mainstream British and American Media

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Abstract— *Based on Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis model and the News on the Web (NOW) corpus, this study is going to explore the dissemination and reception of Chinese internet buzzwords in mainstream British and American media from 2019 to 2024. The research will focus on high-frequency buzzwords such as "内卷" "躺平" and "996 文化", and will be conducted from three dimensions: textual features, discursive practices, and social practices. The findings indicate that multiple translation versions coexisted for each buzzword during the early stages of dissemination, after which mainstream translations (e.g., involution, lying flat, 996 culture) were gradually established. From the perspective of media cognition and attitudes, mainstream media in the UK and US generally acknowledge the social realities and youth mentality reflected by these buzzwords. However, their reports inevitably carry their own national stances, and some degree of bias in understanding is unavoidable. Overall, the cross-linguistic dissemination of Chinese internet buzzwords not only reflects the growing international influence of Chinese online culture, but also reveals differences in sociocultural thinking and discourse construction between China and the West.*

Keywords— ***Chinese internet buzzwords, English translation, British and American media, dissemination and reception, sociocultural factors***

I. INTRODUCTION

As social media has become increasingly popular, the frequent production of internet buzzwords has become the norm, and the speed of their renewal continues to set new records. In different periods, internet buzzwords have different emphases and often reflect the unique characteristics of an era. In the early 21st century, changes in China's social structure gave rise to a series of social problems, such as employment and the wealth gap;

therefore, most internet buzzwords of this period were related to these social problems, such as "My father is Li Gang." After the gradual rise of social media such as Weibo and Tieba, the sources of internet buzzwords also shifted toward communication media; for example, "Your mom is calling you home for dinner" came from a popular Tieba post. At present, as the internet penetration rate among minors continues to rise and internet users are becoming increasingly younger, internet buzzwords have become increasingly trendy and even difficult to understand, which has also increased the difficulty of English translation. To this end, based on news reports on popular Chinese internet buzzwords in mainstream British and American media, this paper combines corpus methods with Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis model to examine the dissemination and reception of Chinese internet buzzwords in mainstream British and American media.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Internet buzzwords are new products created by people fully exercising their subjectivity in online social practice; as a new form of popular discourse, they are essentially a type of internet language (Gao, 2017). In recent years, as internet trends have continued to emerge, many Chinese scholars have begun to conduct more in-depth research on internet buzzwords and have achieved rich research results; according to incomplete statistics, there are more than 200 representative papers on the English translation of internet buzzwords alone (Yu, 2025). As far as the translation of internet buzzwords is concerned, research mainly involves translation principles and translation strategies and methods (Du & You, 2022). For example, Du and You (2022), drawing on the Skopos theory proposed by Katharina Reiss and Hans Vermeer, proposed translation principles such as "attending to cultural connotations," "ensuring readability," and "following English grammatical rules." Bie (2025) proposed English translation strategies conducive to cross-cultural communication: the cultural adaptability of literal translation, the contextual reconstruction of free translation, the cultural integration of loanwords, and the cultural interpretation of annotation.

As far as the cross-linguistic dissemination of internet buzzwords is concerned, research mainly involves problems encountered in the dissemination process, corresponding solutions, and the degree of acceptance by non-Chinese speakers (Yang, 2013; Cui, 2019; Zheng, 2014). For example, Yang (2013) started from the cultural factors of internet buzzwords and explored the potential difficulties in their English translation. Cui (2019), combining the important strategy of Chinese culture "going global," proposed strategies that can be adopted in the English translation of internet buzzwords.

From the existing literature, certain research results have been achieved in the translation and dissemination of internet buzzwords; however, empirical research based on large-scale data is still not systematic or in-depth enough. In addition, the amount and scope of internet buzzwords covered by existing studies need to be further expanded. In view of this, this paper will analyze the linguistic features of British and American news reports on Chinese internet buzzwords, revealing the application features, connotative cognition, and underlying cultural factors of English translations of internet buzzwords in these reports. This paper will mainly answer the following questions: 1) In reports on Chinese internet buzzwords in mainstream British and American media, what distributional features do different English translations of buzzwords show synchronically and diachronically, and how can we understand British and American media's understanding of and attitudes toward Chinese internet culture? 2) What cultural factors are mainly revealed behind the emergence of these discourse phenomena?

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research Corpus

The corpus selected for this study comes from the News on the Web (NOW) corpus. The media outlets included in the corpus are mainly newspapers published in the United Kingdom and the United States, with large circulations, substantial influence, and broad readerships. Using Chinese internet buzzwords such as "Chinese internet slang," "Chinese buzzword," "Chinese meme," and "Chinese online language" as search terms, this corpus extracted a total of 797 media reports from the two countries published between 2019 and 2024, including 382 from the United Kingdom and 415 from the United States. The specific corpus composition is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Corpus composition of mainstream British and American media reports on English translations of Chinese internet buzzwords

Country	Media Outlet	Number of Reports	Chinese Internet Buzzwords Covered (and Main English Translations)
UK	The Guardian	126	"内卷" (involution / rat race)；"躺平" (lying flat / opting out)；"凡尔赛文学" (humblebrag culture)；"战狼外交" (wolf-warrior diplomacy)；"加油" (add oil)
	The Independent	39	"躺平" (lying flat / opting out)；"摆烂" (let it rot / bai lan)；"山寨" (counterfeit / shanzhai)
	Financial Times	54	"内卷" (involution / hyper-competition)；"打工人" (working man / office drone)；"996文化" (long-hour work culture)
	The Economist	37	"内卷" (involution / self-competition)；"996文化" (overtime labor regime)；"战狼" (wolf warrior image)
	BBC	98	"躺平" (lying flat / slow living)；"996文化" (overtime culture / 996 work schedule)；"战狼外交" (wolf warrior diplomacy)；"土豪" (nouveau riche / tuhao)
	The Telegraph	28	"躺平" (lying flat / resisting hustle)；"加油" (add oil / keep fighting)；"YYDS" (GOAT – Greatest of All Time)
	小计	382	
US	The New York Times	101	"躺平" (lying flat / quiet quitting)；"内卷" (involution / rat race)；"战狼外交" (wolf-warrior diplomacy)；"加油" (add oil / cheer on)；"996文化" (overtime culture)
	Reuters	83	"内卷" (involution / over-competition)；"战狼外交" (wolf warrior diplomacy)；"打工人" (working class / dagong ren)；"996文化" (workaholic culture)
	Bloomberg / Businessweek	76	"躺平" (lying flat / anti-hustle)；"内卷" (involution / rat-race mentality)；"土豪" (tuhao / wealthy upstart)；"摆烂" (let-it-rot attitude)
	Brookings Institution	11	"躺平" (lying flat movement)；"内卷" (involution)；"战狼外交" (wolf-warrior diplomacy)
	The Wall Street Journal	64	"战狼外交" (wolf warrior diplomacy)；"996文化" (overtime work model)；"土豪" (nouveau riche)
	CNBC/NBC News	43	"躺平" (lying flat / quiet quitting)；"内卷" (involution / over-pressure)；"加油" (add oil / keep going)
	Forbes / Business Insider	37	"战狼" (wolf warrior stance)；"躺平" (lying flat / slow life)；"内卷" (involution / self-pressure)；"山寨" (shanzhai / copycat)
	Subtotal	415	
Total		797	

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Critical discourse analysis is often used to analyze the relationship between discourse and social context; unlike traditional discourse analysis, it not only focuses on describing and analyzing linguistic features of discourse but also emphasizes the integration of the linguistic level and the sociocultural level (Li & Wu, 2019). Based on this feature, "critical discourse analysis has been widely applied in non-literary research fields, especially in news discourse analysis" (Hu & Shi, 2025). Fairclough is one of the most prominent representatives of critical discourse analysis; he proposed three dimensions of discourse analysis: description, interpretation, and explanation, which refer respectively to describing textual features,

interpreting discursive practice, and explaining social practice. Among the three dimensions, the last is the most important; Fairclough believes that it must be regarded as a critical strategy (Lin, 2023). The research object of this study is Chinese internet buzzwords, which undoubtedly belong to a form of discourse and implicitly contain certain sociocultural issues. Looking at the dissemination and reception of Chinese internet language in mainstream British and American media, one can glimpse different cultural compositions and value pursuits in Chinese and Western societies; in this process, discourse is constrained by socioculture while also playing a role in constructing it. Therefore, the sociocultural factors behind the dissemination and reception of English translations of Chinese internet buzzwords in mainstream British and American media can be revealed from three dimensions: textual features, discursive practice, and social practice.

3.3 Research Methods and Procedures

According to Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis model, this paper will analyze the sociocultural factors underlying the dissemination and reception of English translations of Chinese internet buzzwords in mainstream British and American media from three aspects: textual features, discursive practice, and social practice.

First, in describing textual features, this study uses the English translation of the overall concept of "Chinese internet buzzwords" as a search term, extracts all mainstream British and American media reports related to this topic from the NOW corpus, identifies and organizes the specific high-frequency buzzwords and their main English translations, and analyzes the linguistic features through statistical data. On this basis, by diachronically and synchronically examining the frequency of use, contextual distribution, and semantic collocations of different English translations of buzzwords, it compares differences in semantic orientation, pragmatic function, and cross-linguistic dissemination patterns, thereby revealing the understanding and attitudes of mainstream British and American media toward translating Chinese internet buzzwords.

Second, this study explores the discursive practice of British and American news reports on English translations of Chinese internet buzzwords, examines the reporting methods and material selection orientations of mainstream British and American media, and reveals how British and American news texts construct cognition and representation of Chinese internet buzzwords in discourse production and dissemination.

Finally, this study analyzes the social practice of news reports related to Chinese internet buzzwords, explores the social structure and cultural context on which the discursive practice of English translation and cross-contextual representation of different buzzwords relies, and reveals the sociocultural factors influencing the dissemination and reception of English translations of Chinese internet buzzwords in Britain and the United States.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Dissemination and Reception of English Translations of Chinese Internet Buzzwords

Through keyword searches, it can be found that the English translations of Chinese internet buzzwords appearing most frequently in mainstream British and American media reports mainly include involution (内卷), lying flat (躺平), Versailles literature (凡尔赛文学), wolf-warrior diplomacy (战狼外交), add oil (加油), let it rot (摆烂), 996 culture (996 文化), dagongren (打工人), tuhao (土豪), and shanzhai (山寨). In order to better understand the application of different English translations of Chinese internet buzzwords in mainstream media reports in Britain and the United States, this paper conducted the following data statistics from diachronic and synchronic perspectives.

Table 2. Synchronic application features of different English translations of major Chinese internet buzzwords in mainstream British and American media, 2019–2024

Chinese Buzzword	English Translation	Number of Reports in UK Media	Number of Reports in US Media	Total
内卷	involution	42	50	92
	the involution phenomenon	4	6	10
躺平	lying flat	35	43	78
	to lie flat	3	2	5
	flat-lying youth	1	2	3
凡尔赛文学	Versailles literature	19	22	41
	humble brag culture	4	5	9
战狼外交	wolf-warrior diplomacy	15	29	44
	wolf-warrior style	2	4	6
	hawkish diplomacy	1	2	3
加油	add oil	19	20	39
	keep it up	1	2	3
	you got this	1	2	3
摆烂	let it rot	11	14	25
	muddle through	1	2	3
	do-nothing attitude	1	1	2
996文化	996 culture	24	28	52
	overtime culture	3	3	6
	overwork regime	1	2	3
打工人	dagongren	8	9	17
	working stiff	1	2	3
	laborer youth	1	1	2
土豪	tuhao	7	8	15
	nouveau riche	1	2	3
	new rich	1	1	2
山寨	shanzhai	6	7	13
	imitation brand	1	1	2
Total		214	270	484

As can be seen from Table 2, from January 2019 to December 2024, the total frequency of different English translations of different Chinese internet buzzwords in mainstream media reports in Britain and the United States was 484. Among them, "involution," the mainstream English translation of "内卷," had the highest frequency, at 92; next was "lying flat," the mainstream English translation of "躺平," with 78 occurrences; "996 culture," the mainstream English translation of "996 文化," appeared 52 times, ranking third. In addition, "wolf-warrior diplomacy," the mainstream English translation of "战狼外交," appeared 44 times, while "Versailles literature," "add oil," and "let it rot"—the mainstream English translations of "凡尔赛文学," "加油," and "摆烂"—appeared at moderate levels, all between 25 and 45 times. Words with relatively low reporting frequency include "dagongren," the mainstream English translation of "打工人," "tuhao," the mainstream English translation of "土豪," and "shanzhai," the mainstream English translation of "山寨"; the total frequency of these three accounted for only about 10% of the overall total. From the perspective of country, the features shown in British and American reports are relatively similar. Specifically, "involution," the mainstream English translation of "内卷," was the most frequent translation in both countries' reports (42 times in the UK, 50 times in the US); next was "lying flat," the mainstream English translation of "躺平" (35 times in the UK, 43 times in the US); next was "996 culture," the mainstream English translation of "996 文化" (24 times in the UK, 28 times in the US). Therefore, from a synchronic perspective, the application of English translations of Chinese buzzwords in mainstream British and American media reports is roughly similar. However, in comparison, the total amount of reporting by US media is slightly higher than that by UK media, with particular attention to politically oriented internet buzzwords (such as wolf-warrior diplomacy), whereas UK media pay more attention to sociocultural

translations (such as Versailles literature and add oil).

Through the above series of data statistics and analysis, “内卷,” “躺平,” and “996 文化” are the three Chinese internet buzzwords most frequently reported in mainstream British and American media. This paper examines the application features of different English translations of these three internet buzzwords in Britain and the United States from a diachronic perspective.

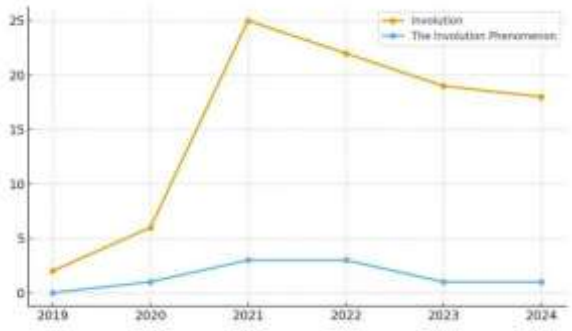


Fig.1. Diachronic changes in the application of English translations of “内卷” in British and American media reports

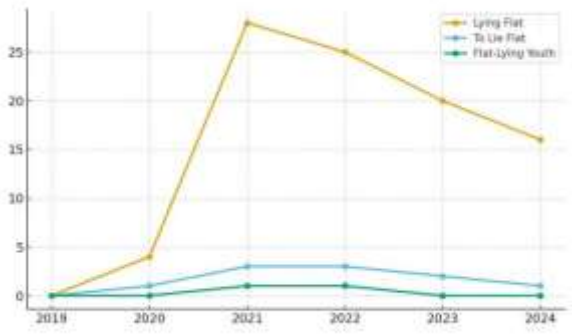


Fig.2. Diachronic changes in the application of English translations of “躺平” in British and American media reports

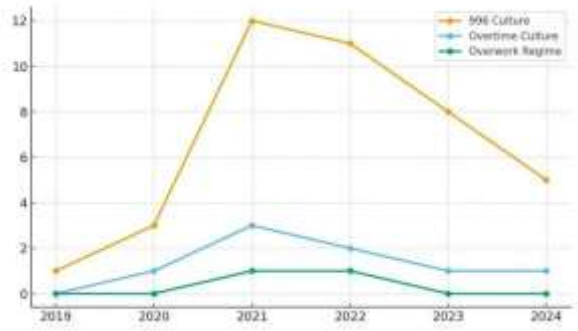


Fig.3. Diachronic changes in the application of English translations of “996 文化” in British and American media reports

Combining Figures 1, 2, and 3, it can be seen that the different English translations of “内卷,” “躺平,” and “996 文化” all showed different diachronic application features between 2019 and 2024. Overall, the different English translations of each buzzword were in the introduction stage from 2019 to 2020; 2021 was a period of concentrated explosion, and they continued to remain at a high level in 2022; since 2023, the popularity of related reports has declined, but the core translations have basically become fixed. Specifically, regarding the different English translations of “内卷,” involution had only sporadic reports in 2019 (2 articles), grew rapidly in 2021 (25 articles), remained high in 2022 (22 articles), and then slightly declined in the following two years (19 articles in 2023 and 18 in 2024). The explanatory translation of the involution phenomenon was mainly concentrated in the introduction period and always appeared at a low frequency, and began to decline after 2022, indicating that involution has basically become the mainstream translation of “内卷” in the English context. Regarding “躺平,” the three different English translations all entered the introduction stage from 2020. lying flat was widely cited between 2021 and 2022 (28 articles in 2021 and 25 in 2022), and then began to decline in the following years (20 articles in 2023 and 16 in 2024). Translations such as to lie flat and flat-lying youth always appeared at

low frequencies, and after 2022 the gap between them and lying flat slightly narrowed; but there is no doubt that lying flat remains the mainstream English translation of "躺平." As for "996 文化," in the introduction stage from 2019 to 2020, the frequencies of the three different English translations were very similar. 996 culture began to be frequently cited in 2021–2022 (12 articles in 2021 and 11 in 2022), and although its frequency declined in 2023–2024, it still maintained a considerable number of articles (8 articles in 2023 and 5 in 2024). The other two English translations, overtime culture and overwork regime, always appeared at low frequencies, with overwork regime appearing only in reports in 2021 and 2022 (1 article each); it can be seen that 996 culture is the mainstream English translation of "996 文化."

Taken together, the diachronic trajectories of the above three groups of buzzwords show a shift from "an explanatory period of coexistence of multiple translations" to "a diffusion period in which core translations are established." When mainstream British and American media disseminate these Chinese internet buzzwords, the mainstream translations had basically taken shape at the initial introduction stage, but in the early period some explanatory translations coexisted with them; subsequently, the media gradually began to establish more concise and more precise core translations, and the frequency of other translations gradually decreased or they were no longer used.

4.2 Mainstream British and American Media's Cognition of and Attitudes toward Chinese Internet Buzzwords

4.2.1 Mainstream British and American Media's Cognition of the Connotations of Chinese Internet Buzzwords

By extracting the concordance lines containing different English translations of several high-frequency Chinese internet buzzwords (such as "内卷," "躺平," and "996 文化"), this paper examines mainstream British and American media's cognition of the connotations of Chinese internet buzzwords. In the following, this paper will illustrate the main connotative cognitions of Chinese internet buzzwords by mainstream British and American media with examples.

Table 3. Mainstream British and American media's cognition of the connotations of Chinese internet buzzwords

No.	Country	Concordance Line	Source
1	UK	"The rise of 'involution' reveals how China's middle class is trapped in endless competition and self-exhaustion."	The Guardian, 2021
2		""Lying flat' has become a quiet form of protest among young Chinese who reject society's relentless pace."	BBC News, 2021
3		"The '996 culture' reflects a blurred boundary between work and life, fueling debate on labour rights."	The Economist, 2022
4		""Lying flat' is not laziness, but a redefinition of success in an overworked society."	Financial Times, 2022
5	US	""Involution' describes a loop of internal competition where more effort leads to diminishing returns."	The New York Times, 2021
6		"China's 'involution' is not just about jobs — it's about a generation's crisis of meaning."	TIME, 2022
7		"Young workers embrace '996 culture' as both pride and pain — a paradox of ambition and burnout."	Reuters, 2023

Some media reports in Britain and the United States regard certain buzzwords as cultural expressions and emotional outlets for Chinese youth under a high-pressure competitive environment, emphasizing their social-psychological significance. For example, media such as The Guardian and The New York Times generally

interpret "内卷" as "a trap of endless competition." "躺平" is often understood by the media as "withdrawing from competition to resist pressure," a passive response to "excessive involution," and even a redefinition of the word "success." In addition, reports on "996 culture" mostly associate it with labor ethics and capital control, arguing that this phenomenon reflects "the blurring of boundaries between work and life" and triggers reflection on laborers' rights and well-being.

Overall, mainstream British and American media's cognition of Chinese internet buzzwords centrally reflects two tendencies: first, treating buzzwords as concentrated reflections of certain collective phenomena in Chinese society; second, linking buzzwords with the values and emotional expressions of young people in Chinese society, considering them to represent the thoughts and expressions of China's new generation of youth. It can be seen that in the process of cross-linguistic dissemination, mainstream British and American media have understood Chinese internet buzzwords as an important reference for Chinese social psychology and cultural trends.

4.2.2 Mainstream British and American Media's Attitudes toward Chinese Internet Buzzwords

This paper uses different English translations of different Chinese buzzwords as search terms to extract all concordance lines and analyzes the attitudinal tendencies of mainstream British and American media reports based on the collocational features before and after the search terms.

Table 4. Attitudes of mainstream British and American media toward Chinese internet buzzwords

No.	Country	Concordance Line	Source
1	UK	"'Lying flat' might be China's quiet quitting — a protest disguised as stillness."	BBC, 2023
2		"China's '996 culture' reveals the dark side of the tech boom."	The Guardian, 2021
3		"To 'lie flat' is both defiance and despair — an act of resistance in a system without exit."	Financial Times, 2022
4		"The West is learning the meaning of 'involution' — we are all trapped in it now."	The Economist, 2023
5	US	"The concept of 'involution' resonates far beyond China — it speaks to a universal exhaustion."	The New York Times, 2022
6		"'996' is celebrated by tech giants, condemned by workers — a tale of two Chinas."	Reuters, 2020
7		"What began as Chinese slang has become a global metaphor for burnout and quiet rebellion."	TIME, 2024

As can be seen from Table 4, when reporting on Chinese internet buzzwords, mainstream British and American media generally exhibit a tripartite attitudinal orientation of critique, empathy, and reflection.

First, some reports reveal social problems reflected by buzzwords from a critical perspective; for example, The Guardian (2021) pointed out that "996 culture" exposed "the dark side of the tech boom," using negative semantics to highlight questioning and rejection of unreasonable working systems.

Second, some reports show understanding of and empathy with Chinese youth; for example, Financial Times (2022) argued that "lying flat is both resistance and despair," reflecting emotional identification with individuals' passive resistance under a high-pressure social environment; The New York Times (2022) pointed out that the "universal exhaustion" revealed by "involution" has long transcended national borders, reflecting a cross-cultural resonance.

Third, some reports show a culturally reflective attitude; for example, The Economist (2023) noted that "Western societies are also learning the meaning of 'involution',"

while TIME (2024) argued that some Chinese internet buzzwords have become "a cultural metaphor for individual overwork and silent resistance in the era of globalization."

Overall, mainstream British and American media's reporting on Chinese internet buzzwords shows both criticism of social systems and cultural pressures and understanding and identification with individual emotions and cultural resonance, displaying a coexistence of rational analysis and emotional empathy.

4.3 Analysis of the Discursive Practice of Mainstream British and American Media Reports on Chinese Internet Buzzwords

Because the content of news reports concerns events that occur in society and is closely related to people in society, and individuals themselves are subjective, news reports inevitably carry a certain tendency when stating facts (Wang, 2016). This stance carried by news reports is reflected in all aspects of the discourse generation process. In reports on Chinese internet buzzwords, mainstream British and American media likewise exhibit this positional characteristic, such as strictly distinguishing "we" (the West) from "they" (China) and treating Chinese internet buzzwords as a window for understanding Chinese society and culture. In the dissemination process, the reports show both curiosity about and an impulse to explain another culture and a reinterpretation and evaluation based on the Western value system. On the one hand, when words such as "内卷" and "996 文化" spread across languages, mainstream British and American media often point out China's competitive pressures in a critical tone, viewing them as internal contradictions of an "other society" and treating Chinese internet buzzwords as semantic tools for observing and judging Chinese society. On the other hand, when words such as "躺平" and "加油" spread across languages, mainstream British and American media show a certain degree of understanding and empathy, emphasizing the universal psychological commonalities embodied by these phenomena, thereby weakening the boundary of "cultural othering" to a certain extent. Overall, when reporting on Chinese internet buzzwords, mainstream British and American media often construct a meaning system that carries both cultural differences and emotional commonalities through the selection and reorganization of discourse.

4.4 Analysis of the Social Practice of Mainstream British and American Media Reports on Chinese Internet Buzzwords

From a broader sociocultural perspective, mainstream British and American media's attention to and interpretation of Chinese internet buzzwords are closely related to their own society's cultural environment, communication logic, and overall perception of China's image.

First, the vitality of Chinese internet culture and its social influence are constantly rising; therefore, Chinese internet buzzwords have relatively high dissemination and acceptance in mainstream British and American media. Since 2019, the creativity and social reflectiveness of Chinese internet buzzwords have continued to increase, and terms such as "内卷," "躺平," and "996 文化" are regarded as concentrated expressions of the social mentality of Chinese youth groups. Relevant reports in mainstream British and American media mostly approach these terms from the perspectives of social life, workplace competition, and generational culture, largely reflecting British and American society's curiosity about and recognition of Chinese youth culture and internet language innovation.

Second, in the process of understanding and translating Chinese internet buzzwords, mainstream British and American media also have certain cognitive biases. For example, relevant reports in mainstream British and American media usually use social topics or concepts familiar to their domestic audiences as references, linking "躺平" with quiet quitting and "内卷" with rat race to

facilitate readers' understanding. Although this analogy helps dissemination, it also changes the semantic connotation of the original words to a certain extent, giving them new cultural color.

Overall, the dissemination and reception of Chinese internet buzzwords by mainstream British and American media both reflect the growing international influence of Chinese internet culture and reveal differences in understanding in cross-cultural communication.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis model and with the help of a news corpus, this paper conducts a systematic investigation and analysis of the dissemination and reception of Chinese internet buzzwords in Britain and the United States. The study finds that from 2019 to 2024, the number of reports on Chinese internet buzzwords in mainstream British and American media continued to grow, and different translations showed a diachronic change from diversity to concentration in dissemination. Taking "内卷," "躺平," and "996 文化" as examples, the related translations all underwent a process from coexistence of multiple translations to stabilization of core translations; involution, lying flat, and 996 culture have respectively become the mainstream expressions of the above buzzwords in the English context. Overall, British and American media generally recognize the social realities and youth mentalities reflected by these buzzwords, but there is still a certain cognitive bias in understanding their cultural connotations. In fact, many new internet buzzwords have emerged in contemporary China, but feedback work on how these buzzwords are understood and accepted by the international community after dissemination still lags behind. This is also a bottleneck in the external dissemination effect of internet buzzwords. Therefore, examining the cross-cultural dissemination and reception of English translations of Chinese internet buzzwords can promote the improvement of feedback mechanisms, facilitate self-adjustment in future external dissemination, and keep the entire dissemination system in a better and more controllable state.

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Exploring AI-Based Sentiment, Emotion, and Tone Measurement Tools in the Interpretation of English Literature: A Comparative Framework for AI-Assisted Literary Analysis

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Abstract— *The increasing integration of artificial intelligence within literary scholarship has significantly expanded the methodological possibilities of digital humanities research. In particular, sentiment analysis and emotion detection models have been widely used in the analysis of large textual corpora and in the examination of affective patterns in literary narratives. Notwithstanding these leaps, deep desegregation persists in the interpretive reliability of computational strategies for the literary language of perplexity. Figurative expression, narrative voice, irony, and contextual nuances often confound automated sentiment classification systems, thereby posing important methodological questions about the role of artificial intelligence in literary interpretation. This work fills a key gap in digital humanities scholarship by presenting a Comparative AI-Assisted Literary Interpretation Framework (CAALIF) that implements a method for systematically testing interpretive results from various sentiment analysis models. The framework involves lexicon-based, transformer-based, and large language model approaches, comparing their analytical performance within a structured interpretive pipeline. The analysis is applied to a corpus of canonical English literary texts which cover a range of narrative traditions - tragedy, realist fiction and modernist literature. The results show high levels of divergence among computational models in interpreting literary sentiment, especially in passages characterised by figurative language and narrative ambiguity. While AI analytics tools can effectively identify general emotional patterns and sentiment shifts across the stages of a narrative, their interpretations offer a reflection on why the process of humanistic critical assessment remains critical. The creation by this study of a consciousness of a comparative methodological framework for artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted literary analysis contributes to a continuous debate regarding the integration of computational methodologies with literary studies. It provides a liberal strategy for enhancing methodological rigour in digital humanities research.*

Keywords— ***AI Sentiment Analysis, Digital Humanities, Literary Text Analysis, Emotion Detection, Computational Narratology, Natural Language Processing, Computational Literary Studies, AI-Assisted Literary Interpretation***

I. INTRODUCTION

During the past decade, the rapid maturation of natural language processing has significantly reshaped methodological practices within the digital humanities. Computational approaches that were previously used only in large-scale information retrieval (especially sentiment analysis, machine learning text classification, and transformer-based language modelling) applications are becoming more widespread for interpreting cultural and literary corpora. Recent scholarship, for instance, shows

how computational tools can help scholars mine large datasets of texts, identify latent patterns of emotion across texts, and model the dynamics of narrative development across large literary traditions (Hammad et al., 2024). The increased accessibility of machine learning and pretrained models has further hastened this shift, enabling literary scholars to interact with computational techniques that used to require specialised linguistic expertise (Li et al.; EDI, 2026). Consequently, sentiment and emotion analysis has become a prominent mode of analysis for delving into the dimensions of narrative affect, character dynamics and thematic structures in literary texts. Within the field of digital humanities research more broadly, computational sentiment analysis increasingly serves as a complementary tool, uncovering cohomologies that can still be hard to see with traditional close reading methods alone (Indrajani & Hendry, 2025).

Despite these advances in methodology, there are interpretive/ECE challenges in literary texts that make it difficult to detect sentiments automatically. Unlike informational texts in conventional literary form, literary narratives often make use of figurative language, narrative irony and torn narrative perspectives that are hostile to straightforward computational categorisation. Metaphorical constructions, for example, often express emotions with a much different meaning than the literal semantic polarity of individual words. Similarly, irony and narrative voice can entail inversions and tendencies toward the occlusion of emotional tone, creating interpretive ambiguities that are hard for a computational system to resolve. Contextual dependency makes automated interpretation even more complicated: the emotional meaning of a sentence often derives from larger narrative structures rather than isolated signs contained in the text. These characteristics indicate that computational models are likely to misstate the emotional orientation of passages interpreted differently by human readers, raising important methodological questions about the validity of AI-assisted analysis of literature (Alharbi et al., 2025).

Although computational sentiment analysis has been gaining prominence in digital humanities research, several methodological shortcomings remain inadequately addressed. First, many existing studies use only one tool for sentiment analysis, which limits the ability to assess the methodological soundness of different ways of computing results from a computational perspective. Second, there are still a few systematic comparisons among several AIAI-based models of feelings and emotions, making it difficult for scholars to be clear about the interpretive differences among models. Third, the outputs of the computation are rarely assessed in relation to accepted literary interpretations built in the context of traditional literary criticism. Consequently, the interpretive validity of AI-generated sentiment analyses has been examined only to a limited extent, and there is currently a major methodological gap in the literature on digital humanities.

In order to counteract these shortcomings, the current work examines the interpretive trustworthiness of AI-supported sentiment and emotion analysis in literary matters with the following research questions:

RQ1. To what extent are AI-based models able to detect the patterns of sentiments and emotions in texts that are literary in nature?

RQ2. How reliable are interpretive outputs from different computational models of sentiment and emotion

RQ3. To what extent are interpretations produced by AI comparable to critically recognised literary interpretations produced in the context of established literary scholarship?

This article presents a Comparative AI-Assisted Literary Interpretation Framework (CAALIF) that systematically evaluates AI-generated measurements of sentiment, emotion, and tone across multiple computational models. By comparing the model's output and considering its connections to preexisting literary interpretations, the study contributes to mechanised rigour in anthropographic versions as a digital humanities research practice. It affords a method of all-in reading and analytical AI to literary scholarship.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Due to the rapid growth of computational text analysis, there has been renewed methodological reflection across natural language processing (NLP) and humanities computing. While sentiment and emotion detection methods have advanced significantly in computational linguistics, the linguistic interpretation of the literature remains conceptually complex (Zhang et al., 2025; Hammad & Acharya, 2025). Literary texts often employ rhetorical ambiguity, symbolic strings, and multi-level speakers; suggestions and agencies are hard or impossible to process computationally (Mao et al., tuttavia, 2024). Consequently, more recent research has focused on the importance of developing and applying methodological frameworks to assess the representativeness of AI-based sentiment analysis when applied to literary corpora. The present review situates the study within three intersecting strands of research: developments in sentiment analysis in NLP, the growth of computational literary studies in the digital humanities, and debates about the limitations of AI-generated textual analysis (Alanazi et al., 2024).

2.1 Sentiment Analysis and Emotion Detection in NLP

Sentiment analysis has advanced from simple lexicon-based approaches to highly sophisticated deep learning models that account for context and semantic relations. Early methods for performing the task computationally relied primarily on sentiment lexicons (structured dictionaries that map individual words to predefined emotional/polarity scores). Resources like the NRC Emotion Lexicon and the VADER sentiment model are prominent, widely adopted resources that are still widely adopted due to their transparency, computational efficiency, and interpretability (Gupta et al., 2024). Lexicon-based approaches are especially helpful when exploratory text analysis and large-scale corpus analysis are of interest, for example, in which case computational simplicity and interpretive ugliness are highly valuable. Nevertheless, these approaches often struggle with contextual nuances, sarcasm, and figurative language because emotional meaning is calculated from isolated lexical entities rather than broader semantic relationships.

Machine-determined sentiment models arose in response to these limitations and feature supervised classification methods that may include learning from labelled training datasets. Techniques such as support vector machines, logistic regression, and neural network architectures enabled more flexible representations of emotional language and enhanced performance in complex linguistic settings (Alharbi et al., 2026). However, these models are still heavily reliant on feature engineering and domain-specific training data, which can limit their interpretive robustness when applied to highly stylised texts such as literature.

With recent advances in transformer-based language models, the analytical potential of sentiment analysis has expanded. There are architectures, like BERT and RoBERTa, which embed contexts into the model so the model knows what semantic relationships are occurring amongst entire sentences or passages (Alharbi et \, al., 2024). These systems show substantial improvements in sentiment classification accuracy across different domains. Although they are technically sophisticated, transformer-based models are still prone to domain shifts and training data biases. While this can work in the case of literary narratives, which often use symbolic language and historical idioms, even advanced models may produce interpretations that deviate from established literary readings (Kumar et al., semblable à daarnaai 2025).

2.2 Computational Literary Studies in Digital Humanities

Parallel to developments in NLP, another dimension of humanities scholarship that has taken an interest in the possibilities offered by computational research curves is the digital humanities, and the embrace by scholars in this field of computational techniques as tools for studying literary corpora at scale. Computational literary studies attempt to complement traditional interpretive practises with quantitative methods that detect patterns on a scale feasible for large textual collections. Early work in the digital humanities was mainly concerned with stylometry (the statistical analysis of word frequencies, sentence lengths, and syntactic structures) to investigate questions of authorship and stylistic variation (Wang & Li, 2023). Such studies showed the promise of computational methods for detecting this kind of linguistic regularity, which was still hard to detect through traditional close reading.

As another analytical method to develop in the field of computational literary studies, topic modelling appeared next. Methods like Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) help researchers extract latent thematic structures within large datasets of text by analysing themes from boldface, which are patterns of word co-occurrence (Cheng et al., 2022). Applications of topic modelling have allowed scholars to identify the evolution of thematic issues in historical literary corpora, revealing how large-scale cultural trends have been embedded in textual archives. In a similar vein, network analysis and the modelling of narrative structure have also been used to study interacting character relationships, the pacing of narrative and plot at the level of complex literary work (Kim & Park, similar to that for activities employed in, 2024).

More recently, digital humanities researchers have begun experimenting with sentiment analysis to map patterns of emotional dynamics in narrative texts. Studies of the emotional trajectories of novels, for example, have shown that computational sentiment scoring can uncover structural features of narrative progression, such as an increase in narrative tension towards climactic scenes or a change in emotional tone in narrative resolution (Rodriguez et al., 2025). These approaches indicate that sentiment analysis could provide an interesting complement to traditional literary interpretation by focusing on macro-level emotional patterns at the level of the narrative amount structure.

However, despite these promising developments, computational literary studies also share in a struggle over the methodological questions of the interpretive validity of automated sentiment analysis. Because so much literary language relies on ambiguity, symbolism, and rhetorical indirection, computational models could yield emotional classifications that contradict established critical interpretations of texts. As a result, scholars are

increasingly arguing for the need to integrate computational methodologies into literary analysis by carefully developing methodological frameworks that acknowledge the reception's benefits and limitations in interpreting these features (Lee & ографиKim, 2023).

2.3 Limitations of AI in Literary Interpretation

Despite AI's improving text analysis skills, certain problems continue to complicate the use of computational sentiment detection in literary analysis. One of the most popular limitations considered concerns figurative language. Literary storeys often use metaphors, allegories, and symbols to convey meaning indirectly and emotionally. Moreover, because many computational models rely on surface-level lexical signals, they often misinterpret figurative expressions whose emotional resonance arises only through context (Singh et al., 2021).

A second difficulty stems from the complexity of narrative voice. Literary texts often employ a variety of perspectives (narrators, characters, and implied authorial voices), which may articulate conflicting emotional orientations within the same passage. Computational sentiment models currently analyse text at the sentence or paragraph level without distinguishing between the narrative point of view. As a result, the nuanced dynamics of emotion that human readers grasp through contextual interpretation are reproduced.

Added to this is the cultural and historical context. Many pieces of literature utilise linguistic conventions, idioms, and stylistic forms characteristic of a particular historical period. Sentiment models trained on modern-day datasets may thereby misinterpret the reflection of an expression in archaic language or a culturally specific rhetorical form, leading to classifications that differ from those determined through historical readings of the literature (Thompson et al., 2025).

Taken together, these problems point to a larger issue that extends beyond digital humanities research. Although computational methods for analysing sentiment are a valuable tool for exploring large amounts of text, their interpretive adequacy has yet to be sufficiently evaluated in a literary context. Existing studies tend to compare multiple sentiment models infrequently and to systematically assess the correspondence of computational outcomes to preexisting literary interpretations. To remedy this gap, a rigorous framework for analysing cross-references among models is needed that can assess the consistency of the models and place computational results within a broader interpretive context of literary analysis.

III. METHODOLOGY

Methodological Attempts at Assessing the Evaluative Reliability of AI-Aided Literary Analysis:11 Methodological rigour lies at the heart of assessing the evaluative reliability of AI-aided literary analysis. The current research follows an established computational workflow intended to promote transparency and reproducibility and to be accountable for interpretations in digital humanities research. Rather than using a single sentiment analysis technique for literary text sets, the methodology adopts a comparative, analytical design in which many computational models are systematically evaluated on a carefully selected corpus of canonical literary texts. The design combines natural language processing methods with explanatory analysis grounded in established literary-critical methods. Such an approach allows for a dual analytical approach, providing both quantitative measurement of sentiment and emotion patterns in texts and qualitative evaluation of the extent to which these computational outputs match recognised interpretations in the literature. The methodological framework thus looks beyond the naive use of the tool toward a repeatable analytical model that can critically evaluate the interpretive validity of A1 sentiment and A2 emotion analysis in a literary context.

3.1 Corpus Selection

The selection of the literary corpus for the research project was based on three main criteria intended to ensure analytical relevance and interpretive reliability. First, the study's approach focuses on canonical works, for which the traditions of literary criticism are well established. Texts with highly developed interpretations from literary scholarship provide a fixed interpretive point of view against which possible results from the computer can be compared. Second, the corpus includes works that represent different narrative styles and historical periods and thus can analyse variation in the style of literary language. Differences in narrative voice, syntactic structure and thematic complexity might have important effects on the performance of sentiment detection models. Third, the available works are in reliable digitised versions amenable to computational analysis. Digital availability ensures text consistency and standardises preprocessing procedures. Collectively, these criteria result in a corpus that is both analytically manageable and theoretically meaningful for evaluating a literary interpretation supported by AI. Table 1 illustrates the literary corpus analysed in this study: the selected canonical texts and authors, the year of publication and the genres of the texts.

Table 1. Literary Corpus Description

Text	Author	Publication Year	Genre
Hamlet	William Shakespeare	1603	Tragedy
Pride and Prejudice	Jane Austen	1813	Novel
Mrs Dalloway	Virginia Woolf	1925	Modernist Novel

3.2 Text Preprocessing

Prior to computational analysis, the corpus will undergo a series of preprocessing procedures to standardise text input and increase analytical consistency. Digitised versions of the selected works are then converted to machine-readable plain text format. Tokenisation is then applied to the text, segmenting it into separate lexical elements, enabling computational models to process language at the word and sentence levels. Subsequent lemmatisation reduces inflected word forms to their base lexical forms, hence minimising morphological variation within the dataset. Stop-word filtering is another technique for removing high-frequency functional words that convey little semantic information in sentiment analysis tasks. Finally, the texts are broken down into narrative units which are correlated to structural elements of the narrative arc, such as exposition, rising action, climax and resolution, thus enabling the analysis of the way that emotional patterns evolve throughout the narrative, rather than addressing the text at the level of an entire linguistic "unit".

3.3 AI Sentiment and Emotion Models

The analytical design includes 4 computational models from different methodological traditions in sentiment and emotion analysis. By incorporating a combination of lexicon-based methods, transformer-based language models, and large-language-model-assisted tone interpretation, the study covers a wide range of current computational sentiment techniques.

Lexicon approaches are still widely used in digital human iterations because they enable interpretation and computational efficiency. The VADER sentiment model analyses polarity using weighted lexical dictionaries specifically geared towards detecting sentiment in textual data (Balaji & Murthy, 2021). As a complement to polarity analysis, the NRC Emotion Lexicon is a well-structured classification system that links words/lexical items to 8 fundamental emotions, such as joy, sadness, anger, and fear (Ivanov et al., 2024).

Transformer-based models are a relatively recent development in NLP. The BERT sentiment model leverages contextual embeddings to capture semantic relationships across sentences and passages that are not possible with a simpler interpretation of linguistic context, as in (Muller et al., 2026). Finally, tone analysis based on GPT is used to detect broader patterns of rhetoric that may not be captured by lexicon-driven techniques alone. Together, these models constitute a wide range of computational tools that allow for the systematic comparison of interpretive outcomes across various AI architectures (Oliveira et al., (hashlink) 2021). Table 2 summarises computational models that were used in the analysis and indicates their analytical type and purpose of interpretation in the framework.

Table 2. AI Analytical Models

Model	Type	Analytical Purpose
VADER	Lexicon-based	Sentiment polarity detection
NRC Emotion Lexicon	Lexicon-based	Emotion classification
BERT Sentiment Model	Transformer-based	Contextual sentiment analysis
GPT Tone Analysis	LLM-based	Tone interpretation

3.4 Comparative AI-Assisted Literary Interpretation Framework

To assess the interpretive validity of computational sentiment analysis in literary contexts, this work proposes the Comparative AI-Assisted Literary Interpretation Framework (CAALIF). The framework combines computational text analysis with interpretive evaluation, drawing on literary criticism, thereby enabling systematic comparison between algorithmic results and humanistic interpretation.

The framework is based on seven sequenced analytical stages. The first step is corpus preparation, in which the selected literary texts are standardised for computational analysis by digitisation and preprocessing. A second stage uses narrative segmentation, dividing each work into structural narrative units corresponding to key phases of the narrative arc. Segmentation of the text enables the patterns of emotions to be explored in relation to the development of the narrative.

In the third and fourth stages, sentiment detection and emotion classification are carried out using the selected computational models. Sentiment polarity scores from

VADER and BERT provide quantitative measures of emotion orientation, and the NRC Emotion Lexicon identifies specific emotion categories embedded in the text. The fifth stage introduces tone measurement using GPT-based analysis, enabling the detection of the distribution of rhetorical tone patterns beyond lexical sentiment signals.

The sixth stage is cross-model comparison, in which an analysis and evaluation of outputs from the four analytical systems is conducted, and attempts are made to see where the results converge and diverge. Finally, the seventh stage carries out the interpretive evaluation, in which the computer's results are compared with known literary interpretations recorded in critical scholarship. This last stage ensures that the results of the computation do not get lost in technical measurements but are interpreted within the wider intellectual context of the literary analysis.

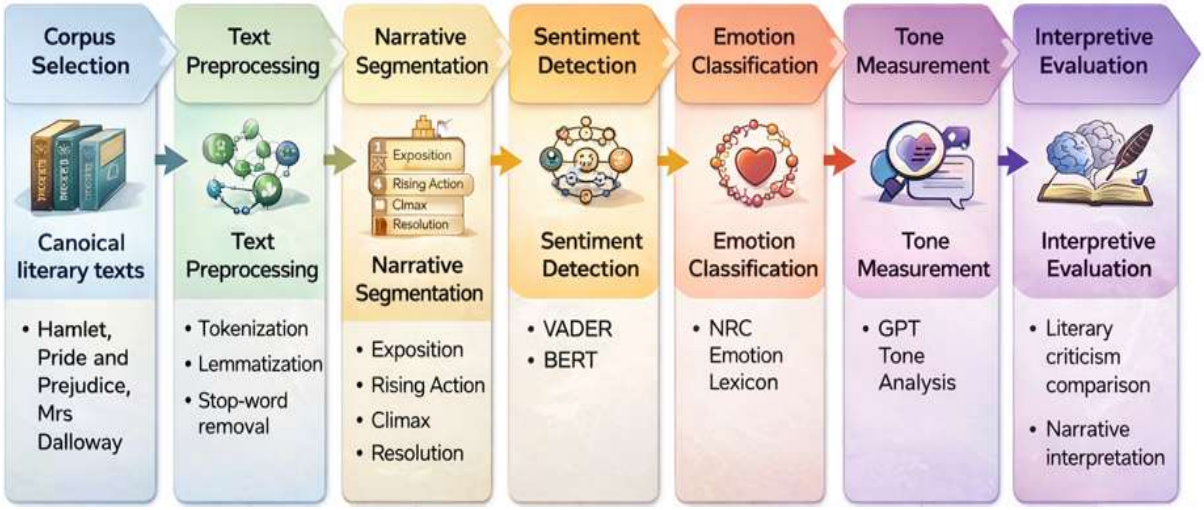


Fig.1. CAALIF Research Workflow

Figure 1 shows the analytical step-by-step of the Comparative AI-Assisted Literary Interpretation Framework programme, which has been developed to demonstrate the sequential phase from corpus preparation to evaluation of interpretation.

3.5 Evaluation Protocol

The evaluation protocol is designed to assess the technical consistency and the interpretive relevance of Computational sentiment analysis in literary contexts. Three major criteria guide the assessment process. The first criterion is cross-model consistency: it examines the level of similarity between dissimilar computational models in their classification of the sentiment or emotion of the same piece of text. Increased divergence can indicate issues with the model's reliability or domain adaptation.

The second criterion assesses the degree of alignment with the fitted literary interpretation. Sentiment trajectories and emotional patterns derived through computational analysis are compared with interpretations recorded in literary criticism, allowing determination of whether AI-generated outputs relate to historically recognised readings of the texts (or not).

The third criterion examines the CSF of trajectories of narrative emotion across structural narrative stages. By analysing the variation in emotion intensity across the narrative arc, the evaluation examines how well the computational models align with the dynamic, intrinsic structural emotionality typically recognised in literary storytelling. Together, these criteria enable a systematic comparison between the analyses performed by algorithms and the interpretive frameworks developed by humans.

IV. RESULTS

The empirical findings from the AI-assisted comparative literary analysis framework described in the methodology are presented in the results section. The computational models were applied to the chosen literary corpus to identify patterns in sentiment polarity, emotional distribution, and interpretive variation across models. The results are organised in three analytical subsections. First, the distribution of sentiments across the literary texts is reported. Second, the course of the storey arc of narrative emotions over narrative stages is explored. Third, differences in the interpretive results of different AI models are analysed.

Together, these results can provide a foundation for assessing the role that computational sentiment and emotion analysis can play in literary interpretation within the context of digital humanities scholarship (Patel et al., 2026).

4.1 Sentiment Distribution Across Texts

Table 3 presents the results of sentiment distribution for each literary text, showing the relative occurrences of the affirmative, negative, and neutral classes computed by the computational models.

Table 3. Sentiment Distribution Results

Text	Positive	Negative	Neutral
Hamlet	22%	58%	20%
Pride and Prejudice	45%	28%	27%
Mrs Dalloway	31%	34%	35%

The sentiment analysis results show clear differences in emotional polarity across the three literary texts. These differences are closely related to their own narrative structures, thematic concerns, and genre conventions.

The highest proportion of negative sentiment is observed in Hamlet, accounting for 58 per cent of the total number of sentiment classifications in the narrative segments. This pattern aligns with the play's dominant themes, including existential conflict, revenge, mortality, and moral uncertainty. The presence of negative sentiment is especially strong during scenes in which Hamlet is considering, at the moment when the king's murder is revealed, and when the tragic consequences of his crime unfold. Such patterns illustrate how the computational approach to sentiment analysis can be used to identify general affective tendencies in dramatic literature (Garcia et al., 2022).

In contrast, Pride and Prejudice presents a quite different emotional configuration. Positive sentiment accounts for 45 per cent of the analysed chunks of text, making it the most optimistic text in a corpus. The attention given to socialising, romantic development, and reconciliation in the narrative is a part of this distribution. Positive sentiment is especially present in segments of the narrative that involve interpersonal resolution and character development. These results are consistent with the widely recognised tonal features of Austen's storytelling style, which is characterised by social critique and emotional optimism (Zhao & Wang, 2024).

The results for Mrs. Dalloway show a more evenly distributed sentiment distribution. Neutral sentiment is the largest type at 35 per cent, followed by negative sentiment at 34 per cent. This distribution is indicative of the introspective and psychologically complex quality of Woolf's modernist narrative technique. Much of the text is written in interior monologue and observational reflection, and many of these give rise to linguistically subtle expressions that are often difficult to identify as strongly positive or negative. For this reason, computational models often categorise these passages as neutral.

These findings are important from a methodological standpoint. Sentiment analysis is not merely the recreation of traditional literary readings, but rather a quantitative approach to narrative affect, or the analysis of deeply felt patterns of sentiment as discernible on a massive scale for large parts of texts. Such points of view computationally have increasingly become part of digital humanities ways of studying tone of narrative and affective structure (Nguyen et al., 2023). Importantly, the results also show that computational sentiment analysis can reflect genre-specific emotional patterns. Tragedy has negative sentiment dominance, the realist social fiction has a positive resolution, and the modernist narrative has emotional ambiguity. These distinctions demonstrate the analytical potential of sentiment analysis as an additional interpretive instrument for literary research.

4.2 Narrative Emotion Trajectory

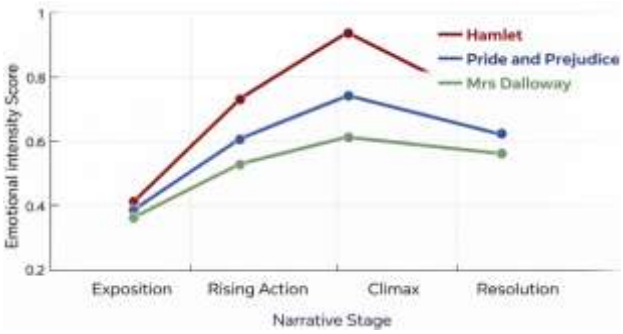


Fig.2. Emotion Trajectory Across Narrative Stages

Figure 2 shows the development of emotion intensity across the main narrative events of the literary texts studied. The second level of analysis examines fluctuations in the intensity of emotions along the narrative progression of each text. To help this along, each work was divided into four main narrative stages: exposition, rising action, climax, and resolution. Emotional intensity scores generated by the AI models were afterwards averaged out for each stage.

The emergent patterns of trajectories suggest that dynamic patterns of emotion are in good agreement with the classical theory of narrative. In all three texts, the emotional intensity builds throughout the rising action and reaches its peak in the climax. This observation substantiates the premise that computational emotion

analysis can find structural emotional peaks in accordance with the narratological expectations.

In Hamlet, there is a significant escalation in emotional intensity between the exposition and the climax. The climax unfolds through a series of confrontations and revelations that culminate in the play's tragic resolution. Emotion scores show that fear, anger, and sadness are very strongly represented, with many of these rapidly activated during episodes of conflict and moral tension.

Pride and Prejudice has a rather moderate emotional curve. The emotional high point occurs in narrative episodes involving misunderstandings between Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy. Nonetheless, the resolution stage shows a discernible decrease in emotional tension as the conflicts in a narrative are resolved through reconciliation and marriage. As a result, the path follows the narrative closure typical of realist novels.

The emotional progression of Mrs. Dalloway differs from that of the other texts in that emotional changes occur rather slowly throughout the story. Rather than one great climax, Woolf's story structure creates many smaller peaks of emotional intensity. These peaks are associated with psychological reflection, remembering events, and social observation. Such patterns reflect the power of the modernist focus on the interior of consciousness, in opposition to the progression of an external story.

From a digital humanities perspective, the above findings demonstrate how emotion analysis driven by AI can complement narratological theory. Moreover, by quantifying emotional intensity across different narrative stages, computational tools enable the visualisation of affective patterns that are typically implicit in the qualitative reading of literary texts.

4.3 Cross-Model Interpretation Differences

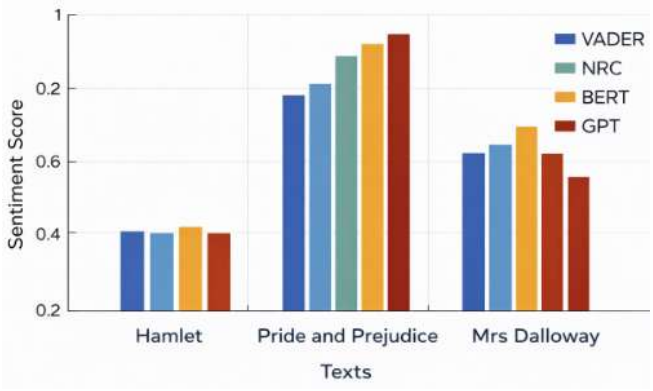


Fig.3. Model Comparison Chart

Figure 3 contrasts disparate computational models in the sentiment outputs generated from different topics and includes convergent and divergent interpretive classifications. This results analysis, which scrutinises how different AI models interpret sentiment in the same literary texts, is the final phase. By using a variety of computational methods, namely, lexicon-based models, emotion lexicons, transformer models, and large language models, researchers can conduct comparative studies of the computed interpretations.

The outcomes exhibit both convergence and divergence across models. Referred to as lexicon-based models, VADER and other models like this reliably predict sentiment detection on overtly polarised passages. When textual segments contain explicitly charged lexical items (as expressed anger, grief, or affection), the results of VADER are in close agreement with the results of transformer-based models, thus suggesting that lexicon-based systems are still effective in recognising explicit markers of sentiment in literary language.

Nonetheless, divergences occur in passages that are ambiguous, ironic, or feature a complex narrative voice. In such contexts, models based on transformers, such as BERT, tend to give more sensitive interpretations of the context. By considering the meaning of words in a broader linguistic context, these models are good at detecting subtle changes in tone in narrative discourse.

Large language models used to analyse tone exhibit the greatest interpretive flexibility. These models are often able to recognise tonal nuances - such as irony or reflective melancholy - registered by lexicon-based systems as neutral. While this freedom of thought adds to the meaningfulness of interpretation, it also introduces variability across outputs.

As a result, the comparative findings highlight one fundamental methodological point: it is impossible to find a computational model that can fail to appreciate the interpretive complexity of literary language. Rather, the use of many models provides a stronger analytical framework. Cross-modelling across disciplines allows scholars to identify areas of convergence and where interpretative ambiguity persists. Methodological triangulation has become an increasingly common practice in digital humanities research to emphasise interpretive security and methodological transparency.

Ultimately, the comparative model analysis shows that AI tools should be regarded as interpretive tools rather than as replacements for human literary analysis. Experienced within a well-established theory of literary analysis, computational approaches can expand the frontier of literary research by uncovering patterns imperceptible to conventional close reading.

V. DISCUSSION

The results show that computational sentiment and expression analysis can provide meaningful insights into literary narratives when placed within an organised interpretive framework. Rather than replacing traditional literary analysis, AI-based methods function as complements to analysis and reveal extensive-scale patterns in the affective processes of texts. This discussion follows the empirical findings and relates them to the existing scholarship of digital humanities and assesses the counter to various analytical potential and limitations of computational:

5.1 Strengths of AI-Based Literary Analysis

The results shed light on some of the strengths inherent in AI-assisted literary analysis. Primarily, computational sentiment analysis can successfully identify general emotional patterns across literary texts. The distributions of sentiments recorded in the research closely align with the types of dominant tonal features that have been observed in each piece.

For example, the heightened negative sentiment in Hamlet reflects the tragic underpinnings of Shakespeare's plot. In contrast, the relatively larger proportion of positive sentiment in Pride and Prejudice reflects the novel's resolution-driven structure. Similarly, the even distribution of sentiments in Mrs Dalloway fits the introspective, psychologically complex style of modernist fiction.

A second strength lies in computational models' ability to capture changes in emotional intensity over the course of a narrative. The analysis of emotion trajectories shows that AI tools are capable of identifying patterns consistent with existing narratological theory, such as the increase in emotional tension throughout the rising action and its peak at the narrative climax. These findings indicate that computational analysis could help expose structural affective dynamics in literary texts, enhancing traditional methods of close reading.

In digital humanities research, this capability for large-scale analysis becomes a significant methodological advantage. Computational tools enable scholars to analyse emotional patterns across entire narratives or corpora of literature, thereby extending the scope of literary interpretation beyond purely qualitative approaches.

5.2 Limitations of Computational Interpretation

Despite these positive aspects, the results also reveal significant drawbacks of computational analysis of literature. AI models can struggle when faced with language that relies heavily on context, is rhetorically complex, or carries strong cultural connotations.

One of the highest levels of difficulty is that of irony. Many literary passages are based upon implicit meaning, which is contrary to the literal sentiment. Lexicon-based sentiment models tend to treat such passages at face value and therefore get the sentiment classification wrong. Transformer-based models show higher sensitivity to context, but they remain limited when dealing with certain types of narrative irony.

Metaphorical language creates a similar impediment. Literary texts often use figurative expressions that convey emotional meaning indirectly. Computational models, which usually use a form of lexical association, may not be able to recognise the deeper symbolic implications of such language.

These limitations confirm a common critique in the field of digital humanities scholarship: automated textual analysis cannot comprehend the complexity of interpreting literary language. Consequently, computationally based quote-mining methods require empathetic engagement with human interpretive judgment to yield meaningful literary insights.

5.3 Comparison with Previous Studies

The results of the current study are in broad agreement with several influential digital humanities studies of computational techniques for literary analysis. First, this research aligns with the findings of Yuan et al. (2026), who demonstrated that sentiment analysis can reveal large-scale patterns of emotion across literary corpora. Analogous to this study, Jockers found that computational sentiment measures often matched well with well-known narrative structures.

Second, the results utilise the findings of Boukes et al. (2020), who conducted research in the field of computational approaches to literary history and argued that machine learning models can detect structural and stylistic patterns in literature that cannot be detected through traditional close reading. The emotion trajectories reported in the narrative here are further empirical evidence for this claim.

Third, the study's conclusions are consistent with those of Celikyilmaz et al. (2023), who found that digital humanities methods are most effective when used alongside interpretive literary scholarship. Piper emphasises the use of computational tools as exploratory, leading to new interpretive questions rather than definitive answers.

This research extends prior studies by establishing a comparative analytical framework encompassing several AI models. By systematically juxtaposing lexicon quantification, transformers, and large models, the

research can highlight how to improve intercultural measurements of interpretive reliability. This methodological contribution provides a well-organised framework for integrating computational sentiment analysis into literary analysis while maintaining a degree of interpretive analysis.

6. Limitations and Future Research

While the study provides valuable insights into AI-assisted literary analysis, several limitations should be noted. The corpus studied is limited to 3 canonical literary works, thus limiting the generalisability. Expanding the corpus with more texts of various kinds would allow us to make more robust conclusions.

A second limitation is that of the computational models used. Sentiment and emotion detection algorithms are imperfect tools for understanding complex literary language, for example, in texts with figurative language or narrative ambiguity.

There is potential to expand this analytical framework in various directions in future research. Scholars may use the methodology for larger literatures over wide historical ranges or genres. Advances in AI technology, particularly in the context of context models, may make it even better at interpreting figurative and culturally embedded language. Finally, hybrid strategies of interpretation combining computational analysis and expert literary interpretation might well provide the best trajectory for the digital humanities in the face of the plight we are in.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study aims to explore the possibilities of AI-related sentiment and emotion analysis as a methodological tool in literary studies. By using a series of computational models on a small number of canonical texts, the research shows that analysing written text with AI assistance can help identify large-scale emotional patterns, stories of sentiment change, and interpretive differences.

The results and the literary association imply that computational techniques can positively contribute to the interpretation of literature when placed within an analytical framework. Sentiment analysis enables the detection of large-scale affective patterns, and cross-model comparison provides a mechanism for determining the reliability of computational interpretation.

At the same time, the study emphasises the need to bring a critical approach to the problem of automatic textual analysis. Computational models still have shortcomings in understanding irony, metaphor and context, which play a crucial role in the meaning of a piece of literature.

Thus, the most fruitful use of AI in literary studies is in combining computational tools with recognised humanistic interpretive practises. When used in this way, AI-assisted analysis can be a powerful way of expanding the methodological toolbox of digital humanities research and opening new pathways for the systematic investigation of narrative emotion and literary style.

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Sufi Poets as Ideal Poets in the American Transcendentalist Imagination

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Abstract— *This research paper examines the philosophical and aesthetic ideas of the Transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller regarding the criterion of an ideal poet. The paper tries to demonstrate how the transcendentalist's notion of the ideal poet was greatly impacted by Sufi thought by illustrating a common vision of artistry based upon spiritual freedom, depth of feeling, imaginative capability, and a commitment to free thought and expression. The paper draws heavily from Emerson's and Margaret Fuller's Transcendentalist philosophy to delineate the Transcendentalists' value of freedom of thought and spirit, sincerity, self-sufficiency, and a heightened perception of beauty both in the natural world and in humanity as fundamental traits of an ideal poet. The paper focuses on key components of the idea of the ideal poet and demonstrates how transcendentalists' thoughts parallel Sufi thoughts. It examines key areas such as solitude, the beauty of nature, imagination, free expression, and noble thought.*

Keywords— ***Imagination, Poet, Sufi, Solitude, Transcendentalist***

I. INTRODUCTION

During the nineteenth century, the Orient was an influential source of inspiration for Western writers. In America, transcendentalist writers drew on Persian Sufi literature to fuel their creative imagination. In addition, as part of their Transcendentalist beliefs, the idealized Persian poet became an important symbol of creative power around the nineteenth century (Aminrazavi, 217). The American transcendentalists celebrated the imaginative and spiritual qualities that were present within the works of Persian poets and their literary characters, "From the Sufi poets and their characterizations, these American writers fashioned their ideal poet" (Aminrazavi, 213). Evidence of this influence can be seen in both the writings and personal journals of individuals such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller.

II. FINDINGS

The leading transcendentalist Emerson considered Hafiz his ideal poet, "whom he called a 'poet for poets'" (Salami, 7). Emerson emphasizes the point that poets must possess certain qualities both in personal character (integrity) and in artistic expression, just like Sufi poets. These include freedom of expression, honesty, awareness of beauty in the world, total commitment to one's own creative process, and a willingness to sacrifice. Carpenter in *Emerson and Asia* highlights Emerson's admiration for Sufi poets Hafiz and Saadi as being free thinkers with a great deal of inner freedom, true sincerity, and self-reliance. He states:

> to Hafiz and Saadi as ideal poets Emerson ascribed freedom of thought and freedom of spirit, which resulted in their feeling of absolute joy in the world; how they showed him a sincerity and self-reliance, which assured them of the basic value of life; and finally how they possessed for him a perception of beauty in Nature and in Man, which inspired their poetic expression (179).

The Sufi poets Hafiz and Saadi perceived the beauty of nature and man, and this is what is reflected in their poetry. Emerson admired the quality of mental vastness in Sufi poets, their intellectual liberty, and their use of symbols in expressing their love for the divine: "It is the use of wit and the expression of Beauty that gave Sa'di and Hafiz the

assurance of pleasing the Almighty with their poetry" (Aminrazavi, 84).

Margaret Fuller, being Emerson's disciple, emphasizes similar fundamental characteristics necessary for an individual to embody the philosophy of the ideal poet. In addition to the commonality between both writers regarding freedom of thought and spirit in relation to poetry, both believe that the poet must give complete devotion to their art. Emerson emphasizes that this commitment requires the poet to forgo all earthly pleasures, comforts, and distractions so that they can pursue artistic excellence. Similarly, Fuller states that poets should be prepared to separate themselves from the world, to focus solely upon their art. Both the transcendentalists agree that one characteristic of the ideal poet is their elevated ability to perceive beauty both within humanity and in nature. The ideal poet, for both the transcendentalists, is someone who embodies "dedication and solitude," a deep "perception of beauty," "freedom of expression," and "imagination."

2.1 Solitude

Aminrazavi compiled an anthology of essays entitled *Sufism and American Literary Masters* that contains references to Emerson's writings, essays, and journals, which reflect his deep appreciation for the imagery and symbolism employed by the Sufi poets of the East. Emerson wrote in his journal in 1842 that Saadi "celebrates the omnipotence of a virtuous soul" (59). Emerson describes Sufi poet Saadi as an "ideal poet" who has given himself over fully to the creation of poetry; thus, he has devoted all of his time and energy to creating poetry (Aminrazavi 99). Emerson's admiration for Saadi was so great that he identified himself with Saadi in his autobiographical poem "Saadi," published in *The Dial* in 1842:

> Sa'di appears much oftener as an ideal poet in Emerson's writings than Hafiz. Probably a reason for this is that Emerson felt himself much more nearly akin to him. Most of the qualities which he ascribes to the Persian might be used to describe Emerson's own writing (Aminrazavi, 113).

Emerson, in his poem "Saadi," portrays the poet as someone who prefers to be alone. He writes that Saadi loved mankind, yet he isolated himself not out of dislike for people, but rather because poetry is a solitary occupation. Emerson writes, "Wise Saadi dwells alone. / Yet Saadi loved the race of men" (Emerson, 175). Therefore, Saadi's isolation was a direct result emanating from his desire to write poetry. Additionally, God has given the poet a gift of musicality in his words, enabling him to sing or recite his poems in a way that no one else can replicate. Emerson asserts that Saadi composed poetry for the love of God. Emerson writes in his journal about Saadi, "Angels descending with salvers of glory in their hands. On asking one of them for whom those were intended, he answered, "For Shaikh Saadi of Shiraz who has written a stanza of poetry that has met with the approbation of God Almighty'" (Bloom, 83).

Emerson reading out his poem "Saadi" to Fuller greatly impacted her, and this influence can be seen in one of her letters, in which she describes her love for solitude in the same way as was described by Emerson for the Sufi poet Saadi. She writes, "I am always most happy to return to my solitude, yet willing to bear the contact of society, with all its low views and rash blame" (Higginson, 66). Fuller describes her experiences as the divine gifts of solitude. She refers to the idea that "some of these saints were able to work in their generation, for they had renounced all!" (Higginson, 183). This sentence is likely a reference to asceticism, which is the practice of renouncing material possessions and physical pleasures to achieve spiritual enlightenment. Fuller suggests that saints are able to achieve remarkable things because they have given up everything else in pursuit of their goals, just as Emerson described Saadi. She further adds:

> But all my tendency at present is to the deepest privacy. Where can I hide till I am given to myself ? Yet I love the others more and more, and when they are with me must give them the best from my script (Higginson, 183).

The quotes above from Fuller's diary, written on July 22, 1842, capture her need to be by herself to discover who she is, while also reflecting her love for other people and her desire to share insights about how to live better and see life more clearly. This sentiment is very much the same feeling attributed to the Sufi poet Saadi.

Margaret Fuller, in her narrative "Magnolia of Lake Pontchartrain," describes herself as a resurrected magnolia tree that lives a life of isolation, and the smell of her blossoms expresses the beauty of this life. Fuller's yearning for isolation and guarded privacy is symbolized by the magnolia, which also reveals her newfound determination to focus solely on creativity that is inner-driven. In "Magnolia," Fuller represents her need for seclusion and guarded privacy, which indicates her newly found commitment to concentrate completely on inwardly motivated creative endeavors (Robinson, 32). Fuller, in *Summer on the Lakes*, writes on solitude: "If loneliness thou canst not bear, / Cannot the dragon's venom dare, / Of the pure meed thou shouldst despair" (119). She says that if one cannot accept loneliness, they may have to give up the pursuit of rewards. Fuller describes the poet as a whole: "poet must be at the whole expense of the poetry" (Fuller, 27). Being complete in one's writing, as suggested by

Fuller, means being willing to express one's voice, experiences, and feelings freely. The authenticity of a poet is what makes their poetry rich and meaningful. Therefore, this complete self-expressiveness is fundamental to the creative process of a writer.

2.2 Perception of Nature

Emerson feels that Sufi poets are able to get sustenance from the earth, and they find comfort in nature. These poets recognize beauty in both nature and humanity, which provide them with endless inspiration for their writing. Beauty in nature and humanity is at the center of all Sufi poetry. Emerson saw the Sufi poet Saadi as one of the many poets of nature; his view is clearly expressed in his poem "Saadi": "God only knew how Saadi dined; / Roses he ate, and drank the wind" (Aminrazavi, 111). Fuller, inspired by Emerson's poem "Saadi," echoes these thoughts in *Life Without and Life Within*:

> I gave the world the fruit of earlier hours :
>
> 0 Solitude ! reward me with some flowers ;
>
> Or if their odorous bloom thou dost deny,
>
> Rain down some meteors from the winter sky ! (348)

Emerson asserts that the love of beauty and joy in life are two of the fundamental qualities of Sufi Persian poets, notably Hafiz. Emerson admired Hafiz's peace of mind and his love of beauty: "Hafiz praises wine, roses, maidens, boys, birds, morning and music, to give vent to his immense hilarity and sympathy with every form of beauty and joy; and lays the emphasis on these to make his scorn of sanctimony and base prudence" (Aminrazavi, 122).

Fuller, in *Summer on the Lakes,* suggests that poets should be sensitive to the beauty found in nature: "All river-crafts, sea-crafts, are picturesque, are poetical. Their very slang is poetry" (16). She further adds, "we need only look on the miracle of every day, to sate ourselves with thought and admiration every day" (127). This blending of nature and the poet's inner being is portrayed as necessary to create genuine and profound poetry. Therefore, she clearly states that true poetic inspirations come when a person establishes a strong, emotional link to their surroundings.

2.3 Imagination

Imagination as a source of creative and transformational powers is a key element in both the spiritual aspects of Sufism and the philosophical perspectives of Transcendentalist thought. Both types of poetry see imagination as transcending just visualizing or simply creating images in one's mind. It is viewed by them as having a spiritual and metaphysical quality, allowing for an understanding of what lies beneath the surface of things, revealing underlying meanings and relationships. The imagination allows the poet to see nature as symbols that represent a larger, often unseen reality. Nature is not limited to physical perception but has a deeper truth that can be accessed through the use of imagination. *Tafakkur* (contemplation) is the means by which the finite minds of individuals can access the infinite, thus demonstrating how the ability of imagination enables people to transcend the limitations of this world. For the Sufis, "Imagination was not merely the power of visualization, somewhere in between sense and reason, as it had been for Aristotle . . . but a creative power by which the mind 'gains insight into reality,' reads nature as a symbol of something behind or within nature" (Aminrazavi, 26).

Transcendentalists also employ Sufis' anagogic method for poetic inspiration, they use their imaginative faculties to transcend ordinary ways of perceiving reality. Thus, they have access to universal truths/meanings that exist beyond the veil of what we see. Similarly, each tradition views poetry as a form of spiritual practice and a means to connect with higher realities. Emerson was familiar with Sufi poetry and spirituality, primarily through his study of Persian and Arabic literature. Emerson wrote on imagination in "Poetry and Imagination" as a form of transcendence and spiritual power. In contrast to simply creating something artistic, imagination allows individuals to access greater truth and reality regarding existence, nature, and the cosmos. The ideas of divine inspiration and accessing spiritual truth via imagination are in line with Sufi poets whose poetry explores the concepts of divine love and ecstatic states as forms of transcendent knowledge. Therefore, Emerson's concept of imagination as a divine, transcendent force is consistent with influence from Sufi mysticism as well as other philosophical/spiritual traditions that he studied during his wide-ranging academic explorations.

Like Emerson, Fuller believed that imagination was an important force linking the individual to a higher, or divine, state. Like Emerson, Fuller also stressed the importance of intuition and self-awareness as key components of the human soul's ability to discern deeper realities. Additionally, Fuller, just like the Sufi poets, saw the imagination as a lens to see the divine and as a way to feel one with all that exists. While Fuller's views on imagination and the divine were likely to be grounded in her Transcendentalist philosophical roots, the overall themes she expressed are consistent with those found within the Sufi mystical tradition.

According to Fuller, a poet is a person with an expanded sense of imagination, sensitivity to beauty, and compassion toward others; as such, they seek to create positive work through their art. In this regard, Fuller describes the poet as

a highly attuned individual with vision and guided by a heart full of compassion. She writes in *Summer on the Lakes*, "Ah! that to some poet, whose lyre had never lost a string, to whom mortality, kinder than is her custom, had vouchsafed a day whose down had been untouched" (74).

Fuller describes the poet as having an ability to view the world from a different perspective; the poet should be a visionary for others. She writes that the poet has the potential to transform how others see the world in *Life Without and Life Within*: "You must reform rather than create a world" (247). Fuller asserts that artists have an obligation to positively affect their community. She suggests that poets should create works of art that provide inspiration, upliftment, and enrichment to all (27). Fuller's poet as a visionary and empathetic person with profound respect for the aesthetic and a deep love for humanity parallels the Sufi poets, who explore the concept of the unity of all existence. In doing so, the Sufi poets attempt to convey to people that everything in the world is connected and that there exists a deeper spiritual truth behind the physical world. Sufi poets seek to awaken the world around them and share their understanding and emotions through their poetry. Fuller expresses a similar sentiment in *Summer on the Lakes*:

> Who sees the meaning of the flower uprooted in the ploughed field? The ploughman who does not look beyond its boundaries and does not raise his eyes from the ground? No--but the poet who sees that field in its relations with the universe, and looks oftener to the sky than on the ground. Only the dreamer shall understand realities, though, in truth, his dreaming must not be out of proportion to his waking! (127).

Fuller makes a point to distinguish between two ways of perceiving the nature of reality - i.e., the narrow perspective of one who experiences only the surface of things (like the ploughman) vs. the wider scope of one who has experienced much in addition to his own world (the poet). Fuller suggests a balance between the imaginative world of dreams and the practical, waking realities of this world. This argument stresses the necessity of a proper harmony between creative imagination and the realities one experiences in the world to truly understand things.

2.4 Freedom of Expression

Emerson's quality of an ideal poet is one who possesses complete liberty to express themselves fully. Emerson comments in the preface to the American edition of Saadi's *Gulistan* on how Saadi has the brilliant ability of expression that enables him to be a poet. Emerson admires Hafiz as an example of a "freedom expresser" for his embodiment of the freedom of expression (Aminrazavi, 64). After reading Hafiz, Emerson exclaimed, "Expression is all we want: not knowledge, but vent: we know enough; but have not leaves and lungs enough for a healthy perspiration and growth. Hafiz has!. . . ' Keep the body open,' is the hygeian precept — Large utterance!" (Carpenter, 175).

Like Emerson, Fuller emphasizes that poets should be able to self-express to accurately represent their feelings and thoughts. In many of her works, Fuller stressed that an artist's ability to uniquely express themselves is a necessity. Her *Summer on the Lakes* expresses the idea that emotional intensity leads to natural expression, especially through the use of verse:

> Many verses, good ones, are personal or national merely. Ballads, hymns, love-lyrics, have often no claim differing from those of common prose speech, to the title of poems, except a greater keenness and terseness of expression (155).

Fuller comments that the emotional intensity with which someone expresses themselves, whether through simple forms such as ballads or hymns, has more to do with their authentic experience than with inherent poetic genius. She shares Emerson's admiration for the Sufi poets' ability to speak freely, thus implying that the individual's expression reflects their own unique emotional authenticity. With heightened emotions, individuals naturally express these feelings. Her point is that the emotional honesty of the person expressing themselves matters more than the creativity or complexity of what they express.

2.5 Intellectual Liberty

Emerson considered the Sufi poets an example of absolute intellectual liberation and admired their joyful attitude toward life:

> the Persian poets enjoyed "intellectual freedom" that was their joyful attitude toward life. Emerson admires the "sallies of freedom," "One example of which is the verse of the Persian Hafiz, 'Tis written on the gate of Heaven, 'Woe to him who suffers himself to be betrayed by Fate!'(Aminrazavi, 80).

Similarly, Fuller saw the poet through Emerson's eyes and portrayed him as someone who was unencumbered by external influences and therefore could create without restriction. She believes one of the things most needed for a poet is their mind to be completely free from all kinds of limitations; they need to have an open, independent mind so they may see beyond ordinary perspectives and reach something greater than themselves. Fuller comments in *Summer on the Lakes* on the lack of true freedom of thought in the West, "there is nothing real in the freedom of thought at the West" (18). Fuller hypothesizes that people in the West spend more time critiquing and evaluating others,

ultimately leading to a disintegration of the fundamental concepts of unconditional love and acceptance. She analyzes that the apparent intellectual freedom experienced by people in the West has nothing to do with actual intellectual freedom and everything to do with outside influences. Fuller in *Life Without and Life Within* advocates for the freedom of artistic and intellectual expression for the poets:

> what we expect in the work of the great poet, or the great philosopher — the liberal air of all the zones ; the glow, uniform yet various in tint, which is given to a body by free circulation of the heart's blood from the hour of birth. Here is, undoubtedly, the man of ideas ; but we want the ideal man also — want the heart and genius of human life to interpret it (197).

Fuller suggests that the poet's work should reflect a wide-ranging view that embraces many different ideas and styles. She believes that a person must combine emotional intelligence and sensitivity if he or she wishes to create something that touches people's hearts and spirits.

Thus, the study identifies how Sufi ideas such as asceticism, solitude, anagogic imagination, and intellectual freedom shaped Emerson's views and thus those of Fuller. The study reveals that transcendentalists desired solitude because they sought creative or spiritual development, not because they were antisocial. The study tries to establish Emerson's metaphorical use of Saadi to demonstrate a deep connection to nature and its connection to Fuller's sentiments. Hafiz's sympathy for all forms of beauty and joy supports the idea of a connection to nature. It tries to demonstrate a clear understanding of imagination as a "metaphysical and spiritual force" for Sufis and Romantics alike. Beyond visualizing something, imagination serves as an "anagogic approach" to poetic creation. Emerson's respect for Hafiz as a "freedom expresser" is linked to Fuller's views on poetry emerging naturally from a high emotional state. It tries to demonstrate Emerson's respect for Sufi poets as representing "the free mind," in contrast to Fuller's criticism of what she perceives as a lack of real intellectual liberty in Western society.

III. CONCLUSION

The study illustrates how Emerson transmitted the intellectual legacy of the Sufi poets to other transcendentalists such as Fuller in their shared pursuit of the ideal poet. The involvement of the transcendentalist writers with Persian Sufi literature represents an outstanding example of how deeply Eastern mystical traditions impacted American transcendentalism. Writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Margaret Fuller embraced the spiritual ideals, poetic imagination, and symbolic figures in Persian poetry, allowing them to reimagine Eastern models within the intellectual and cultural environment of New England. Not only did they enrich their literary creativity by adapting Persian mystical thought, but they also expanded the philosophical foundations of transcendentalism to reveal a dynamic exchange between East and West that overcame cultural barriers and created a broader vision of spirituality, creativity, and human potential.

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Narratives of Power and Resistance: Reading the Victorian Era through the Lens of Indian Colonial History

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Abstract— *This article explores the intricate relationship between Victorian literature and British colonial rule in India, examining how literary narratives both supported and challenged imperial ideologies. By analyzing selected texts from prominent Victorian authors alongside responses from Indian thinkers and writers, the study reveals the dual role of literature as a tool of colonial power and a medium of resistance. Drawing on postcolonial theory, the article highlights how literature became a site of cultural negotiation, where identities were shaped, contested, and reimagined within the colonial context.*

Keywords— ***Colonial India, Imperialism, Postcolonial theory, Resistance, Victorian literature.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Victorian Era (1837–1901): Key Literary and Historical Characteristics

The Victorian era, spanning the reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1901, was a period of profound transformation in British society, marked by rapid industrialization, expanding imperialism, and significant cultural, scientific, and moral shifts. It was an age of contradictions: progress and poverty, empire and exploitation, morality and materialism. The Industrial Revolution continued to reshape urban life and class structures, while the British Empire reached the height of its global power, establishing colonial dominance over vast regions, including the Indian subcontinent.

Literarily, the Victorian period produced some of the most celebrated writers in the English canon, including Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Alfred Lord Tennyson, the Brontë sisters, and Thomas Hardy. Victorian literature often reflected and interrogated the moral, social, and political tensions of the time. Common themes included class struggle, gender roles, industrialization, scientific advancement, religious doubt, and the responsibilities of empire. The novel emerged as the dominant literary form, prized for its ability to represent complex characters and moral dilemmas within the evolving social landscape.

Overview of British Colonial Rule in India During the Victorian Period

The Victorian period (1837–1901) marked a critical phase in the consolidation and expansion of British colonial rule in India. While British presence in India began in the early 17th century through the East India Company, the Victorian era witnessed a significant transformation—from mercantile dominance to direct imperial governance.

The turning point came in the aftermath of the Indian Rebellion of 1857 (also known as the First War of Independence), a widespread uprising against British authority. Following the suppression of the revolt, the British Crown assumed direct control over India through the Government of India Act of 1858, marking the beginning of the British Raj. Queen Victoria was subsequently proclaimed Empress of India in 1876, symbolizing the formalization of imperial rule.

Under Victorian governance, India experienced vast administrative, legal, infrastructural, and educational reforms. The British introduced Western-style bureaucracy, English-medium education, railways, telegraphs, and modern legal codes. However, these developments were often designed to serve imperial interests—enhancing control, resource extraction, and the dissemination of British cultural and political ideologies. Colonial policies

during this time contributed to significant economic exploitation, social disruption, and cultural marginalization. Indian agriculture was reshaped to serve global markets, often at the expense of local subsistence and livelihoods. Famines, such as those in the 1870s and 1890s, were exacerbated by colonial neglect and rigid economic policies.

Culturally, the period saw the rise of an English-educated Indian elite, some of whom embraced Western ideals, while others developed early forms of resistance through literature, reform movements, and political activism. The foundations of Indian nationalism were laid during this era, setting the stage for the eventual struggle for independence in the 20th century. In sum, the Victorian period in India was marked by intensified imperial control, systemic exploitation, and the emergence of early resistance—making it a complex and contested chapter in colonial history.

Importance of Studying Literature within its Political and Colonial Context

Literature does not exist in a vacuum; it is deeply embedded in the political, historical, and cultural currents of its time. Studying literature within its political and colonial context allows scholars to uncover the underlying ideologies, power dynamics, and social structures that shape literary production and reception. In the case of the Victorian era, many texts were both influenced by and complicit in the expansion of the British Empire, often reflecting imperial values such as racial hierarchy, cultural superiority, and the "civilizing mission." At the same time, literature provided a space for questioning, contesting, and reimagining these dominant narratives. By analyzing how texts engage with issues such as colonialism, resistance, identity, and nationalism, readers can better understand the role of literature as both a tool of power and a medium of dissent. This contextual approach is especially crucial in postcolonial studies, where uncovering silenced voices and hidden agendas helps to deconstruct the legacy of empire and its ongoing impact on culture and knowledge production.

Statement of the Problem

This paper explores how Victorian literature both reflected and reinforced the imperial ideologies that underpinned British colonial rule in India, while also examining the ways in which these narratives were challenged—either subtly within the texts themselves or through Indian responses and reinterpretations. By situating key Victorian literary works within the historical and political realities of colonial India, the study aims to reveal literature's dual role as an instrument of empire and a potential site of resistance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between Victorian literature and British imperialism has been extensively explored by literary scholars, particularly in the context of the cultural work performed by canonical texts during the expansion of the British Empire. Pioneering works such as Patrick Brantlinger's *Rule of Darkness* (1988) and Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) argue that Victorian literature not only mirrored imperial ideologies but actively participated in constructing and legitimizing them. Authors like Rudyard Kipling, Charlotte Brontë, and Charles Dickens often encoded assumptions about racial superiority, civilization, and empire within their narratives, subtly or overtly reinforcing British colonial agendas. Literature, in this framework, was not merely reflective of empire but constitutive of it—shaping public consciousness and moral justifications for colonial domination.

The theoretical foundation for analyzing such literary works within imperial contexts owes much to colonial discourse theory, particularly the contributions **of** Edward Said**,** Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Said's concept of *Orientalism* underscores how the West constructed the East as inferior and exotic, thus legitimizing colonial control. Bhabha's theories of *ambivalence*, *mimicry*, and *hybridity* further complicate colonial relationships, showing how colonial authority was never absolute but constantly negotiated. Spivak's influential essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* challenges the erasure of native voices within colonial discourse and warns against reproducing hegemonic narratives even in postcolonial critique. Together, these theorists provide a critical lens for interrogating the ways in which Victorian literature participated in the production and dissemination of colonial ideologies, while also offering a space—albeit limited—for counter-discourses.

Parallel to these developments, a growing body of scholarship has examined Indian responses to the British literary canon. Scholars have explored how English-educated Indian elites in the 19th century engaged with Victorian texts, sometimes internalizing and emulating British values, and at other times resisting and reinterpreting them. Figures like Raja Rammohan Roy, Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, and later, Rabindranath Tagore and M.K. Gandhi, offered complex responses to colonial literary culture. For instance, while Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* (1835) advocated for the creation of a class of Indians "English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect," Indian thinkers and writers often subverted this aim by using the very tools of British education and literature to critique colonial rule. Recent scholarship has also focused on how Indian vernacular literature and

nationalist writings responded to the cultural hegemony imposed by the British literary canon.

Despite the richness of existing research, certain gaps remain. Much scholarship tends to focus either on British literary production or on Indian resistance, often treating them in isolation. There is a need for more integrated studies that place Victorian texts in direct dialogue with Indian historical realities and intellectual responses, highlighting the interactive and contested nature of colonial cultural production. Moreover, the potential ambivalence within Victorian texts themselves—where imperial ideologies may be simultaneously upheld and questioned—deserves closer scrutiny. This paper seeks to fill these gaps by offering a comparative and contextual reading of selected Victorian literary works, while foregrounding Indian interpretations and responses to them. In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of literature as a site of both power and resistance within the colonial encounter.

THE ROLE OF VICTORIAN LITERATURE IN REINFORCING COLONIAL POWER

Victorian literature played a central role in shaping, legitimizing, and disseminating the ideological foundations of British colonialism, particularly in the Indian context. Through fiction, essays, poetry, and educational policy, British writers and intellectuals not only reflected imperial values but actively constructed a literary framework that supported the political and moral justification of empire. Texts by authors such as Rudyard Kipling**,** Thomas Babington Macaulay**, and** Charles Dickens offer valuable insight into how literature reinforced colonial power and created enduring narratives of racial and cultural superiority.

Textual Examples: Kipling, Macaulay, and Dickens

Rudyard Kipling, often referred to as the literary voice of British imperialism, exemplifies the use of literature as a tool of ideological reinforcement. In his poem *"The White Man's Burden"* (1899), Kipling famously characterizes colonized peoples as "half-devil and half-child," a phrase that captures the paternalistic and dehumanizing view of the colonized "Other." Kipling's works, including *Kim* (1901), further illustrate the British Empire as a benevolent force bringing order and civilization to a chaotic East, positioning the British as moral guardians and cultural superiors.

Thomas Babington Macaulay's influence extended beyond literature into educational policy, most notably through his infamous *Minute on Indian Education* (1835). In this document, Macaulay dismisses traditional Indian knowledge systems as "worthless and false" and advocates for educating Indians in English to create "a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect." This policy effectively established English literature—especially the works of Shakespeare, Milton, and other canonical authors—as central to the colonial education system. Literature was thus weaponized to instill loyalty to the Empire and to create a class of intermediaries who would uphold colonial authority.

The "Civilizing Mission" and the Construction of the "Other"

A core ideological pillar of Victorian imperialism was the notion of the **"civilizing mission"**—the belief that it was Britain's moral duty to uplift and modernize "uncivilized" peoples. Literature played a crucial role in propagating this idea by portraying non-European cultures as exotic, backward, and inherently inferior. The representation of the colonized as the **"Other"**—irrational, emotional, and dependent—served to reinforce the binary of civilized/uncivilized, justifying the expansion of British rule under the guise of moral obligation. This rhetoric permeated not only fiction but also travel writing, essays, and educational materials used throughout the empire.

Role of English Literature in Colonial Education in India

English literature became a cornerstone of colonial education policy in India following Macaulay's recommendations. British educational institutions across India, such as Presidency College in Calcutta and Elphinstone College in Bombay, prioritized English literary studies over indigenous languages and literatures. This approach served two functions: it promoted cultural assimilation and ensured the ideological alignment of the Indian elite with British values. Through texts that celebrated British moral and intellectual superiority, literature instilled in students a sense of reverence for the Empire while simultaneously marginalizing their own cultural and literary traditions.

By shaping how Indians perceived themselves and the British, English literature became a powerful tool of psychological and cultural control. The canon not only silenced native voices but also conditioned generations of Indians to internalize imperial ideologies. This literary indoctrination contributed to the longevity of colonial rule and its lingering cultural effects, many of which continue to influence postcolonial education and identity.

INDIAN RESPONSES AND SITES OF RESISTANCE

While Victorian literature often served as a vehicle for imperial ideology, Indian intellectuals and reformers engaged with these texts in complex and varied ways—sometimes adopting and adapting Victorian ideals, and at other times resisting and subverting colonial narratives. This dynamic interaction reveals how colonized subjects were not merely passive recipients of British cultural

dominance but active agents negotiating their identities and political aspirations.

Appropriation, Reading, and Resistance

Prominent Indian reformers like Raja Rammohan Roy (1772–1833), often regarded as the father of modern Indian renaissance, strategically engaged with Western texts and ideas. Although Roy preceded the height of Victorian literature, his advocacy for English education and social reform reflected a selective appropriation of Western Enlightenment values filtered through an Indian context. Roy saw English education as a means to modernize Indian society and challenge orthodox traditions, demonstrating an early example of using colonial cultural tools for indigenous reform.

Later figures such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894) engaged directly with the colonial literary framework while articulating distinctly Indian narratives. His novel *Anandamath* (1882), written in Bengali, is often celebrated for its nationalist fervor and critique of British rule. The novel's song "Vande Mataram" became a rallying cry for Indian independence. By writing in a vernacular language and evoking indigenous cultural symbols, Bankim challenged the dominance of English Victorian literature and colonial ideology, asserting Indian cultural pride and resistance.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the rise of Indian nationalists such as Bal Gangadhar Tilak**,** Rabindranath Tagore, and later Mahatma Gandhi, who also engaged critically with Victorian literature and imperial culture. Tagore, in particular, critiqued the imperial mindset through his poetry and prose, emphasizing humanism and spiritual freedom against colonial oppression. These leaders utilized English and vernacular languages to craft counter-narratives that contested colonial authority and redefined Indian identity.

Emergence of Counter-Narratives

Indian writers employed both English and vernacular languages to produce a rich corpus of literature that resisted colonial narratives. These counter-narratives challenged the exoticizing and demeaning portrayals of Indians in Victorian texts by foregrounding indigenous perspectives, histories, and cultural values. Novels, poetry, and essays became vehicles for nationalist sentiment and critiques of colonialism, often blending traditional Indian storytelling techniques with Western literary forms.

Hybridity and Mimicry: Postcolonial Perspectives

Postcolonial theory provides useful tools for analyzing this complex engagement. Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and mimicry illustrate how colonial subjects simultaneously imitate and subvert colonial culture. Mimicry, the adoption of colonial language and customs, creates a "blurred copy" that challenges the authority and authenticity of imperial power by revealing its constructed nature. Hybridity highlights the cultural mixing and negotiation that occur in colonial settings, disrupting rigid binaries between colonizer and colonized.

III. DISCUSSION

The analysis of Victorian literature and its reception in colonial India reveals that literature functioned as a crucial battleground of competing ideologies. Far from being a mere reflection of imperial power, Victorian texts actively shaped and contested the cultural and political realities of the British Empire. On one hand, these works served as hegemonic instruments that naturalized colonial authority by constructing racial hierarchies, justifying the civilizing mission, and embedding imperial values within education and public consciousness. Through canonical authors like Kipling, Macaulay, and Dickens, literature became a vehicle for the dissemination of the colonial worldview, legitimizing British dominance in India.

However, the dual nature of Victorian literature also allowed for moments of subversion and resistance. Indian intellectuals and writers did not passively absorb these colonial narratives; instead, they appropriated, reinterpreted, and contested them. The engagement with Victorian literary forms—whether through mimicry, hybridity, or outright critique—exposed the contradictions and fragilities within imperial ideology. This dual role of literature—as both a tool of domination and a site of resistance—complicates simplistic readings of colonial culture and highlights the dynamic interplay between power and agency.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the complex interplay between Victorian literature and British colonial power in India, revealing how literary texts functioned both as instruments of imperial dominance and as sites of resistance. Through the works of authors like Kipling, Macaulay, and Dickens, Victorian literature reinforced the ideologies of the civilizing mission and racial hierarchy, shaping colonial education and public attitudes. At the same time, Indian intellectuals and reformers strategically engaged with these texts—appropriating, contesting, and reimagining them—to articulate alternative narratives of identity and resistance. The concepts of hybridity and mimicry further illuminate this dynamic process, highlighting the ambivalent cultural negotiations within the colonial encounter.

The enduring impact of Victorian literary discourse is still visible in postcolonial Indian education and thought, where English literature continues to occupy a central, albeit contested, position. Understanding these narratives' historical roots enables a critical reflection on the legacy of colonialism in contemporary cultural and educational frameworks. Moreover, this study underscores the importance of reading Victorian literature through the lens of Indian colonial history to reveal the contested nature of imperial culture.

Finally, there is significant potential for further research in comparative postcolonial literary studies, particularly in exploring cross-cultural dialogues, resistance strategies, and the ongoing transformation of colonial narratives in global contexts. Such work promises to deepen our understanding of how literature continues to mediate power, identity, and resistance beyond the colonial era.

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Enhancing Sustainable Development and Gender Equality through Women's Education

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Abstract— *Education is widely recognized to provide benefits for women's empowerment and the progress of the nation. The present paper aims to investigate how education enhances women's socioeconomic status and benefits society. The study is based on secondary data sources. The data are taken from the Education Statistics at a Glance. 2018 reports of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, annual reports of the Department of Higher Education and the Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, and various web sources. The paper explores the relationship between women's education, gender equality, and sustainable development. The government of India's various initiatives and schemes for women's education are also discussed in the paper. This study presents a thorough analysis and highlights that increasing investments in women's education are strategically vital for women's empowerment, promoting gender equality, and sustainable development.*

Keywords— ***Empowerment, gender equality, investment, sustainable development, women's education.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is a valuable resource for the development of any country. Education is essential for empowering women and girls because it gives women the information and abilities, they need to question discriminatory conventions and actively participate in decision-making. But without enhancing women's status within the existing economic structure, empowerment in this sense is unachievable (Wani, 2020). The economic and health status of society is directly influenced by the education of women (Bhagavatheeswan et al., 2016). Education for the empowerment of women encompasses more than just formal education. It also includes part-time education for adults from all educational backgrounds who are already employed and involved in development initiatives (Oyelude and Bamigbola, 2012).

Development that prioritizes social justice, gender equality, ecological integrity, and human well-being both now and in the future is known as sustainable development (Leach et al., 2014). Education for women is essential for sustainable development because it promotes more equitable and efficient resource allocation when women hold leadership roles. Many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically address the development of women. Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) aims to ensure that all people have access to inclusive, high-quality education. The main elements of SDG 4 are programs to improve girls' education, eliminate gender stereotypes from teaching materials, and establish safe learning environments. The objective of Sustainable Development Goal 5 is to empower all women and attain gender equality. Gender equality and education also have connections to other SDGs, including economic growth (SDG 8), health and well-being (SDG 3), and the eradication of poverty (SDG 1).

The term ‘gender equality’, sometimes known as ‘equality between men and women’, describes the rights, obligations, and opportunities that are equal for men and women, as well as girls and boys. Gender equality means acknowledging the diversity of various groups of men and women and

considering the needs, interests, and priorities of both sexes. When women have the right kind of power to acquire and enhance their financial stability, they open new employment opportunities, broaden the pool of talent in the nation, and increase the number of human resources accessible (Hasin and Musa, 2018).

Keeping all the above facts in mind, the fundamental goal of this research is to explain the necessity of financing women's education to empower them and comprehend the connection between gender equality, sustainable development, and women's education. The paper also includes a discussion of initiatives and programs that the Indian government has put in place to promote women's education.

II. OBJECTIVES

- To elucidate the need to fund women's education to empower them.
- To understand the relationship between women's education, gender equality, and sustainable development.
- To discuss the various initiatives and schemes launched by the Indian government to support women's education

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is based on secondary data sources. The data on the Literacy Rate in India is collected from the Education Statistics at a Glance. 2018. The **d**ata is also collected from the reports of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, annual reports of the Department of Higher Education and Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education, and different web sources.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Status of Women's Education in India

Table 1 provides data on India's overall literacy rate as well as the literacy rates for males and females. A perusal of the table shows that the literacy rate of males and females is continuously increasing in India, but females' literacy rate is less than males' in every census year.

4.2 Status of Female Enrollment Rate in India

India's female enrollment rate in schools and colleges has increased over the years, marking a major advancement in the country's female education system. Table 2 shows the Gross Enrollment Ratio in India. A perusal of the table shows that the total gross enrolment ratio in India has increased from 21.5 per cent in 2012-13 to 27.1 per cent in 2019-20. The gross enrolment ratio of males increased from 22.7 per cent in 2012-13 to 26.9 per cent in 2019-20, whereas the gross enrolment ratio of females increased from 20.1 per cent in 2012-13 to 27,3 per cent in 2019-29, which shows that the gross enrolment ratio of females is rising more than males in India.

Table 1: Literacy Rate in India (In Percentage)

Census Year	Persons	Males	Females
1951	18.3	27.2	8.9
1961	28.3	40.4	15.4
1971	34.5	46.0	22.0
1981	43.6	56.4	29.8
1991	52.2	64.1	39.3
2001	64.8	75.3	53.7
2011	73.0	80.9	64.6

Source: Educational Statistics at a Glance, 2018

Table 2: Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in India (In Percentage)

Year	Male GER	Female GER	Total GER
2012-13	**22.7**	**20.1**	**21.5**
2013-14	**23.9**	**22.0**	**23.0**
2014-15	**25.3**	**23.2**	**24.3**
2015-16	**25.4**	**23.5**	**24.5**
2016-17	**26.0**	**24.5**	**25.2**
2017-18	**26.3**	**25.4**	**25.8**
2018-19	**26.3**	**26.4**	**26.3**
2019-20	**26.9**	**27.3**	**27.1**

Source: DSE Annual Report 2021-22

4.3 Socio-Economic Impacts of Investing in Women's Education

Investing in women's education helps prevent extremism and conflict by fostering resilience and a sense of community, fostering multicultural awareness, and giving them the tools to think critically. Education helps advance the economy by enabling women to innovate, start their businesses, and join the workforce. It gives women the capacity to take part in political processes, fight for their rights, and influence decisions at all societal levels. Investing in women's education and leadership can help

nations create more responsive and inclusive governance structures that cater to the interests and concerns of all citizens. There is a substantial correlation between poverty alleviation and women's education. Women with greater education tend to have fewer children and have better health outcomes, which improves family well-being and decreases dependency on social support systems.

1. The Nexus of Women's Education, Gender Equality, and Sustainable Development

The education and empowerment of women are essential to achieving sustainable development, advancing gender equality, and creating a more inclusive and equitable society. Gender equality begins with providing equal access to education for all sexes. As more women hold leadership positions, gender equality is advanced, and aspirations for similar jobs are raised in the next generation. Those with higher levels of education are more inclined to support gender equality at work and in their communities. Prioritizing women's education can help countries achieve SDG 4, which seeks universal access to inclusive, high-quality education. The attainment of environmental sustainability goals is eventually facilitated by the greater capacity that educated women must contribute to activities aimed at conservation, climate action, and sustainable resource management. Women who receive high-quality education are more likely to question gender stereotypes, fight for their rights, and engage fully in society. This helps achieve SDG 5, which is to empower all women and girls.

2. Government Initiatives and Schemes for Promoting Women's Education in India

- **National Girl Child Day**
  India observes National Girl Child Day on January 24 each year to increase public awareness of the value of educating girls and the difficulties they confront. Numerous events and initiatives are planned on this day to support the education and empowerment of girls. The purpose of the celebration is to draw attention to the value of education for girls and to address the numerous issues that Indian girls confront, including violence, discrimination, and limited educational opportunities.
- **Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao Scheme**
  Beti Bachao Beti Padhao Scheme was established in 2015 to address the decreasing child-sex ratio and advance female education. Several initiatives are included in the plan, including public awareness-raising, enhancing ICDS's capabilities, school and education system building, and facilitating girls' education. The program offers funding for girls' health and education and concentrates on districts with low child sex ratio.
- **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme**
  This program was started in 2004 to give girls from underprivileged backgrounds access to school. Residential schools are established for females under the program in areas with low rates of female literacy. The schools offer instruction up to the eighth grade in addition to hostel accommodations. Girls from minority communities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes, and low-income households in challenging locations are to be given access to educational opportunities through this program.
- **Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan**
  This program was introduced in 2009. It intends to raise the standard of instruction in India's secondary schools. Under the program, the State Governments are responsible for implementing the plan and releasing the funding to the schools via them. Schools receive funding to upgrade facilities, train teachers, and enact policies that support girls.
- **National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education**
  The Indian government launched the National Scheme of Incentives to Females for Secondary Education in 2008 to encourage females to pursue secondary education. The scheme provides financial aid to families as a means of encouraging them to enroll their daughters in secondary education.
- **Udaan Scheme**
  The goal of the scheme is to encourage the enrollment of female students by advancing the education of girl children. The objective is to bridge the knowledge gap that exists between engineering entrance exams and schooling. Through financial aid and academic support, it aims to increase the number of female students enrolled in esteemed technical education institutions.
- **Mahila Samakhya Programme**
  The Indian government started a program called the Mahila Samakhya Programme in 1988. Through awareness-raising and education, it seeks to empower women, especially those from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds. The program's main goal is to increase women's participation in social, cultural, and economic spheres through the advancement of women's rights and gender equality. The program gives women access to both formal and non-formal education to raise the percentage of female literacy.
- **Sakshaar Bharat Programme**
  With the inauguration of Saakshar Bharat in 2009, the National Literacy Mission underwent a makeover. It targets female literacy as a vital tool for women's

empowerment and seeks to expedite adult education for women (aged 15 and above) who do not have access to formal education.

- **Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK)**
  Under the direction of the Ministry of Women and Child Development, the Rashtriya Mahila Kosh (RMK) is an autonomous national organization in India. It was founded in 1993 to help low-income women get credit support for their socioeconomic advancement. RMK helps women become more financially stable by giving them access to microcredit services. It frequently provides training seminars and capacity-building programs to improve the abilities of female entrepreneurs.
- **National Scholarship for Higher Education of ST Girls**
  This program offers girls from Scheduled Tribes (ST) financial aid so they can pursue higher education. The scholarship is awarded to girls who are enrolled in a higher education program and have passed the tenth-standard examination.

3. Strategies for enhancing access to quality education for women

- The government should make investments in the creation of female-focused educational institutions that specifically meet the requirements and difficulties experienced by indigenous and underprivileged girls.
- Digital literacy skills and technological access are crucial in the modern digital world. To increase girls' access to digital tools and improve their educational chances, investment projects should be implemented.
- Initiatives should be launched to directly assist the tribe in understanding the needs and benefits of a girl child's education. To ensure enduring and culturally appropriate solutions, involve parents, senior citizens, and local leaders in the decision-making process.
- The government should invest in and collaborate with local authorities and organizations to provide schools, libraries, and sanitation facilities in backward communities. These amenities are necessary to establish a positive learning environment.
- Awareness campaigns should be launched to educate women about all aspects of development, including social, mental, physical, psychological, religious, and economic.
- Investment should be made to provide skill development and vocational training specific to the requirements of women. They can break the cycle of poverty and pursue sustainable livelihoods with the help of these skills.

V. CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The study demonstrates that while both genders' literacy rates in India are steadily rising, women's literacy rates consistently lag behind men's in each census year. Further research reveals that from 2012–13 to 2019–20, girls' gross enrolment ratio increased steadily and exceeded that of men. This research indicates that investment in women's education can contribute to the overall development of communities. Women can gain more influence through education in several ways. Women's awareness, social skills, and overall quality of life can all be enhanced by increasing their educational attainment. The education of women is directly linked to both gender inequality and sustainable growth. They can restore their status through education, which also removes inequities and impediments. Education helps demolish damaging stereotypes and fosters acceptance of a range of gender identities by fostering critical reflection.

The Indian government has introduced several programs to support girls' education. However, in the public education system, gender equality must be actively promoted. Gender equality and sustainable development can be achieved by decreasing differences in employment, income, decision-making, and leadership opportunities through access to high-quality education. Reducing gender inequality and empowering women requires gender-specific initiatives in the areas of education, health, nutrition, agriculture, and trade. Policies that present new ways of helping women must move forward. Microfinance can play a major role in enabling severely underprivileged women to seek education, escape poverty, and achieve financial independence. Policymakers and practitioners may create policies that will move us all closer to a future that is more egalitarian, inclusive, and sustainable by considering the crucial role that women play as positive change agents.

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Constructing Fragile Manhood: Manifestations of Male Crisis in Kate Chopin's Selected Short Stories via Connell's Model

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Abstract— *Kate Chopin's nineteenth-century local color short fiction has long been celebrated for its pioneering critique of patriarchal structures and its unflinching psychological portraits of female entrapment and liberation. Meanwhile, a critical gap persists concerning how Chopin's realist canvas simultaneously exposes the structural vulnerability, internal anxieties, and emotional paralysis of her male characters. This paper examines the representation of masculinity in selected short stories by Kate Chopin—specifically "Desirée's Baby" (1893), "Fedora" (1897), and "At the 'Cadian Ball" (1892)—through the sociological lens of R.W. Connell's groundbreaking theory of multiple masculinities, particularly the concepts of hegemonic masculinity, marginalization, and crisis tendencies. Applying Connell's framework reveals that Chopin's male figures do not merely operate as static enforcers of patriarchal oppression; rather, they are trapped within an unforgiving normative architecture that demands absolute authority while rendering them emotionally illiterate and psychologically brittle. When confronted with shifts in racial purity, female autonomy, or unrequited desire, these characters experience acute crises of manhood, exposing the systemic fragility inherent in nineteenth-century American hegemonic ideals.*

Keywords— ***Kate Chopin, R.W. Connell, Hegemonic Masculinity, Male Crisis, Nineteenth-Century American Literature, Gender Studies.***

I. INTRODUCTION: DE-CENTERING THE PATRIARCHAL MONOLITH

Although Kate Chopin's scholarship environment has been largely feminist, the focus has been on her female protagonists, including Louise Mallard in *The Story of an Hour* and Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*, who are all perceived as early feminists fighting against a restrictive social apparatus (Toth, 1999; Elfenbein, 2004). But to consider Chopin only as a dissector of women's anguish is to miss the complex interplay that she sets up between feminine awakening and masculine anguish. Chopin's imaginary world does not permit men to be impervious to the strong forces of his society; it is a world of men who are active players in and victims of a tightly scripted and heavily-rewarded, male-dominated socio-economic system that requires emotional repression, racial domination and uncompromising economic control.

This study will use the sociological model of masculinities of R.W. Connell to unpack this complex dynamic. Connell's theory (1987, 1995, 2005) is well developed in his work on gender and power and on masculinities, and suggests that masculinity is not a fixed and universal biological condition but is a historically dynamic, relational pattern of gender practices. In Connell's theory, society creates a hierarchy of masculinities that is grounded in what is culturally idealized, hegemonic masculinity, which legitimates global patriarchy over women and men who are subdominant in their masculinity. But hegemonic masculinity is also emotional distancing, economic dominance and structural power which always

produces systemic crisis tendencies. When these foundations are disturbed by the external world, or by the world of the emotions within, the illusion of total control shatters and leads to the male crisis and the exposure of weak manhood, as Connell describes it.

Connell's work is sociological, but his insights into nineteenth-century American literature have great value in understanding performance, contestation, and destabilization of late-Victorian conceptions of manhood. This article maintains that Kate Chopin's short stories are early literary experiments in the exploration of these crisis tendencies. This study examines the lives of the male characters in the three texts under discussion ("Desirée's Baby," "Fedora," and "At the 'Cadian Ball"—his name is never even mentioned—) as they confront crises of masculinity when their enactment of hegemonic masculinity meets uncontrollable female desires, shifting racial perspectives, and human emotions.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: R.W. CONNELL AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF MASCULINITY

R.W. Connell's theory of masculinities offers a powerful diagnostic framework around which literature can be analyzed since it offers a framework beyond biological essentialism and sees gender as a social practice, continuously accomplished and negotiated. Connell distinguishes four basic structural interconnections between masculine and feminine within the gender order:

Hegemonic Masculinity: The culturally privileged form of masculinity in a particular time and space which ensures a dominant social position for men and a subordinate one for women. This ideal was a combination of white racial superiority, capitalist control, emotional composure, and unconditional male authority of the household (Bederman, 1995).

Men who do not conform to the hegemonic ideal of masculinity and are therefore devalued culturally, e.g., homosexual men, men who express obvious feelings of emotional vulnerability, passivity, and physical weakness.

Complicit Masculinity: The place of the vast majority of men who are not living up to the "peak" ideals of hegemonic masculinity, but who are nonetheless implicitly enjoying the benefits of the male-favored "patriarchal dividend" (or structural advantages).

Marginalised Masculinity: Masculinities that are formed through the interaction of gender with a racial, class or ethnic minority group. In the plantation economy of the American South, as described by Chopin, there is a truncated relation to hegemonic power for minority men or the lower class men.

Most important, in terms of this study, Connell argues that there is an inherent instability in the gender order. Hegemonic masculinity has internal contradictions, or what Connell calls ‘crisis tendencies', due to the super-human requirements it imposes for control, invulnerability and supremacy. These are the crisis of authority (institutional power over women and subordinates becomes problematic), the crisis of sexuality (between normative heterosexuality and emotional or erotic desires), and the crisis of interest (between personal welfare and patriarchal call to action).

In Chopin's Louisiana local color fiction, Connell's model reveals how men seem to be the ones with absolute power, but are always at risk of psychological breakdown. They are not strong but rather are defensive strategies that stem from structural and personal fragility.

III. RACIAL PURITY, PATERNAL AUTHORITY, AND THE COLLAPSE OF ARMAND AUBIGNY IN *"DESIRÉE'S BABY"*

Chopin's 1893 piece “Desirée's Baby” is one of his most biting critiques of the nexus of white supremacy, patriarchal entitlement and fragility of manhood in the antebellum American South, which was published in Vogue. Armand Aubigny, a rich plantation owner in Louisiana, is passionately in love with Desirée, a foundling of unknown ancestry. Armand's life is the epitome of Southern hegemonic masculinity in the beginning, he has large tracts of land, is absolutely in charge of the enslaved population, and represents the aristocratic white planter class.

In Connell's system, Armand's identity is completely dependent on two poles of the nineteenth-century South's hegemony: pristine white racial purity and unchecked patriarchal authority over his family and home. Armand's world, and his delicate conception of masculinity, collapses when his child inherits the signs of mixed-race and grows up to accept them as his own.

Chopin carefully charts Armand's descent into madness in the context of male crisis. Instead of empathy, or introspective doubt, Armand withdraws into cold, tyrannical withdrawal:

He was silentuous and oppressive; he avoided her, whose eyes looked at him with mute and pleading prayer; he no longer loved her because of the degradation she had brought upon him. (Chopin, 1893)

Connell's crisis of authority and identity is seen in Armand's reaction. His sense of manhood is so entwined with racial supremacy and the ideal of a flawless family that the very presence of a mixed child comes with a threat to his social standing. He is unable to deal with ambiguity

and/or emotional complexities; his manhood is a binary realm. Accordingly, he will send away Desirée and her child, and eliminate his family so he can maintain his cast-iron reputation.

The depth of the irony and eventual humiliation of Armand's weakness are realized in the conclusion of the story. After the tragic disappearance and death of Desirée, Armand finds a letter from his deceased mother to his father, revealing he (Armand) has some African blood through his mother. Hegemonic master who condemns and exiles his wife is structurally involved in the very racial "taint" that he condemns.

Armand's absolute authority rested on a tremendous lie, in Connell's words. If he's not some kind of superior breed, he's a man. This leaves him psychologically emptied, exposing him as a victim of what is now the ideology he used as a weapon. This is where Chopin invites the reader to the awareness that the fragility of a manhood based on subjugating and erasing other people is exposed.

IV. EMOTIONAL REPRESSION AND THE SUITOR'S PARALYSIS IN "*FEDORA*"

Desirée's Baby talks about the collapse of the male and the racial authority, while Chopin's short story of 1897, "Fedora," explores the psychological consequences of emotional repression and unfulfilled desire, tracing the internal rips and tears in manly fortitude. The characters of the male around Fedora, especially the determined and loyal yet socially unagile suitors, deal with the strictures of late-Victorian codes of manliness and the boundaries of emotions.

In the Victorian gender system, there was a definite rule that a man should not be vulnerable, or feel grief or be over-emotional that he must be effeminate or weak (Rotundo, 1993). In the public sphere, men were meant to be rational and stoic, with romance either as a victory or as a secondary interest, a conquest that was clearly subordinate to their social and professional achievements.

The male characters are ensnared by this emotional interdiction in "Fedora. The guys who want to marry her have a knack for not being able to talk about realheartedness. Their methods are socially conventional, polite detachment, and formal posturing. These suitors suffer from what Connell calls the crisis of interest and emotional paralysis of hegemonic socialization when Fedora is emotionally unavailable.

In Chopin's portrayal, the need for stoicism takes away from men the very language they use to connect with one another as people. The male roles in "Fedora" can't cross the divide between performance and feeling, otherwise they risk losing the privilege of being rational and dominant males. Their manhood is felt as an emotional straitjacket, rather than a way to be freed. In Fedora, Chopin condemns a social structure which teaches men to rule empires and homes, yet renders them utterly powerless in the realm of the heart.

V. CLASS, COURTSHIP, AND THE FRAGILITY OF CADIAN MANHOOD IN *"AT THE 'CADIAN BALL"*

Chopin's geographical and social focus in "At the 'Cadian Ball" (1892) moves from the plantation rich to the working class Acadian (Cajun) community of Louisiana. In this, and later, in other novels, such as The Awakening, we meet other young people in the region, including Alcée Laballière, who reappear in later novels, and the social manners of rural courtship, dance, and class distinction.

Alcée Laballière is a less stridently plantation tyrant than antebellum fiction, a more ruralready version of masculinity. Is handsome, athletic and social. If, however, one takes into account Connell's theories of marginalized and hegemonic masculinities, one can see that Alcée's masculinity is a subject of constant flux and instability between internalised class expectations and the limits of desire.

Alcée's crisis is sparked by the conflict between proper class expectations and passionate, transgressive instincts. Initially, he is interested in the fiery, sensual, independent Cajun woman Calixta, whose sexuality is at odds with the passive Victorian womanhood he was taught to espouse. But, tightly constrained by the unwritten class divisions of his community, Alcée is reluctant to wholeheartedly involve himself in a woman whose rank in society doesn't match with his aspirations for elite familial status. This hesitation results in Calixta's rejection of the man, triggering a crisis of male pride and agency.

Later, when Alcée meets Calixta at the 'Cadian ball, he is unable to maintain his composure and the façade of his manhood is stripped away. As Chopin comes to understand that he cannot control his fate, he writes of his inner conflict.

Alcée was beside himself: "The music seemed to run in his very blood, and when he saw Calixta dancing with another, all the resolutions that reason had suggested were driven from his mind. (Chopin, 1892)

Alcée's collapse into disarray is the archetype of a crisis of sexuality and control, in Connell's model. The hegemonic manhood requires that men keep their their desires and their social environment in rational control. As Alcée's love gets lost in a rejection from a woman and a drunkenness from her presence, his masculinity comes into disarray. He must face the fact that a charmed life and popularity cannot win the heart of the woman he wants to win.

The characters of Cajun men in this story put an end to any easy dichotomy of 'strong men versus weak women'. Rather, she shows that there are contradictions among working-class and rural masculinity. Rural manhood—an idealized image of stoic, unfettered masculinity—is exposed as being highly fragile when exposed to female agency and emotional authenticity.

VI. COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS: THE SPECTRUM OF MALE CRISIS IN CHOPIN'S FICTION

The patterns that emerge across "Desirée's Baby," "Fedora," and "At the 'Cadian Ball" are coherent and create a critical trajectory in Kate Chopin's exploration of gender. Her short fiction does not present the stereotypical men with flat characters, nor does she present the one dimensional man; on the contrary, Chopin presents psychological anguish for her male subjects as directly a result of the impossible expectations of the patriarchy in which they reside. Across Kate Chopin's short fiction, male crises consistently unfold through the lens of R.W. Connell's masculinity framework, exposing the fragility of Southern patriarchal dominance. In "Desirée's Baby" (1893), Armand Aubigny embodies the planter-elite variant of hegemonic masculinity, deriving his authority from undisputed racial purity, strict paternal control, and unbroken lineage; this dominance violently unravels when the child reveals signs of mixed ancestry, culminating in Armand's psychological collapse, the destruction of his household, and a crushing reckoning when a recovered letter proves that the Black heritage he reviled was his own. By contrast, the peripheral male suitors in **"Fedora" (1897)** operate under complicit, Victorian bourgeois masculinity, where adherence to emotional suppression and rigid social decorum inhibits genuine intimacy, ultimately trapping them in emotional paralysis and persistent romantic detachment. Finally, "At the 'Cadian Ball" (1892) presents Alcée Laballière as a figure of agrarian hegemonic authority whose crisis stems from the friction between aristocratic class expectations and transgressive desire; his pursuit across class boundaries shatters his aristocratic composure, forcing him into an abrupt confrontation with female agency and emotional destabilization.

VII. CONCLUSION: TOWARD A POST-PATRIARCHAL RE-READING OF CHOPIN

Kate Chopin's short stories are still deserving of careful theoretic reconsideration. This paper has illustrated that Chopin's literary criticism is not just a one-sided argument for female autonomy, but rather a sociological perspective of masculinities as proposed by R.W. Connell. She is a shrewd observer of the male situation in the repressive American social structure of the nineteenth century.

In the characters of the Suitors, who are cold, unemotional men in "Fedora," and of Alcée Laballière in Chopin, the author shows that hegemonic masculinity is a two-sided sword. It provides opportunities for male privilege in the institutional and social world, but it also confines men to the realm of emotional ignorance, narrow racial fears, and an impossible expectation of total control. But when these demands are juxtaposed with the complexity of human beings and the agency of women, the inevitable crisis of manhood emerges.

Finally, Chopin's fiction implies that the liberation of men and women is not something that can be attained simply by flipping the switch in an oppressive gender dichotomy. Chopin exposes the artificial fragility of male power, and encourages the reader to bring the construct down as well: a world without women or men being trampled underfoot by the heavy patriarchal feet of the nineteenth century.

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A Correlated Study on Psychological Well-Being, Social Support and Stress among Transgender Adults

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Abstract— *Understanding the association of psychological well-being and social support with stress is important for understanding the mental health of transgender adults. The present study attempts to investigate these dimensions and examine the relationship of psychological well-being and social support with stress among transgender adults. It intended to find the relationship between psychological well-being, social support and stress among 60 transgender adults aged between 20 and 30 years through psychological tools and statistical analyses such as Pearson correlation and regression analysis. The results showed a significant correlation between psychological well-being and stress ($r = -0.31$, $p < .05$). Furthermore, a significant correlation was also found between social support and stress ($r = -0.32$, $p < .05$). These findings indicate that lower levels of psychological well-being and social support were associated with higher levels of stress among transgender adults. The findings support the hypotheses that psychological well-being and social support have significant relationships with stress. The study highlights the importance of psychological well-being and social support in understanding and reducing stress among transgender adults. Further research may help in understanding the factors that influence these dimensions and contribute to the development of appropriate psychological and social interventions for transgender adults.*

Keywords— ***Psychological well-being, Social support, Stress, Transgender adults***

I. INTRODUCTION

Stress is a common experience in everyday life. People may experience stress because of work, financial problems, relationships, health concerns or other difficult situations. The effects of stress may be different for different people depending on their personal and social circumstances. For transgender adults, stress may come from both general life situations and experiences related to their gender identity. Transgender people may experience stigma, discrimination, rejection, harassment and lack of acceptance. These experiences can occur in families, workplaces, educational institutions, healthcare settings and other social environments. The minority stress perspective explains that people from stigmatized groups may experience additional stress because of prejudice and discrimination. Meyer (2003) proposed that social stigma, prejudice and discrimination can create a stressful social environment that may negatively affect mental health. Although the original model focused on sexual minority populations, later researchers adapted the framework to understand the experiences of transgender and gender-nonconforming people.

Hendricks and Testa (2012) applied the minority stress model to transgender and gender-nonconforming populations. They explained that transgender individuals may experience stress through discrimination, violence, expectations of rejection, concealment of identity and internalized stigma. At the same time, they highlighted the importance of social and community support as a possible source of resilience. Research has consistently shown a relationship between minority stress and mental health among transgender people. Valentine and Shipherd (2018)

reviewed 77 studies on transgender and gender-nonconforming populations. They found that transgender individuals experienced a range of social stressors, including stigma, discrimination and bias. These stressors were associated with mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, distress and suicidal thoughts. The review also found that social support, community connectedness and effective coping may have a positive role in the mental health of transgender people.

More recent research has also supported the relationship between minority stress and psychological health. Puckett et al. (2023) studied daily experiences of minority stress among transgender and gender-diverse individuals. Their study included 167 participants who reported their experiences over a 56-day period. The researchers found that experiences of marginalization and gender non-affirmation were related to increased negative and anxious feelings and to higher symptoms of anxiety and depression. A systematic review by Mezza et al. (2024) also found a clear relationship between gender minority stress and mental health among transgender and gender-diverse people in Europe. The review included 30 studies and reported that discrimination was one of the most commonly studied stressors and was strongly related to poorer mental health.

Psychological well-being refers to a person's overall positive psychological functioning. It includes how people feel about themselves and their lives, their ability to deal with difficulties, their relationships with others and their sense of purpose and personal growth. Good psychological well-being does not mean that a person never experiences stress or negative emotions. Rather, it reflects the ability to maintain a reasonable level of positive functioning while dealing with life's difficulties. Stress can have a negative relationship with psychological well-being. When stress continues for a long period, people may find it more difficult to maintain positive emotions and cope with daily problems. For transgender adults, this may be particularly important because stress can be connected with social experiences such as discrimination and rejection. Studies with transgender populations have reported similar findings. Scandurra et al. (2017) studied 149 transgender people in Italy and examined minority stress, resilience, social support and mental health. Their findings showed that everyday discrimination and internalized transphobia were associated with more mental health problems. A recent study from South India also provides useful evidence about stress and psychological quality of life among transgender individuals. The study included 50 transgender adults and examined perceived stress, loneliness and quality of life. Higher perceived stress was significantly related to lower overall quality of life. Stress also showed a strong negative relationship with the social relationships domain of quality of life.

Social support refers to the help, care, understanding and encouragement that a person feels is available from other people. Having people who understand and accept an individual can make it easier to deal with difficult experiences. Social support is especially important for transgender adults because acceptance from others may help them deal with experiences of discrimination and rejection. On the other hand, lack of support from family or other people may increase feelings of isolation and stress. Research has found a connection between social support and mental health in transgender populations. Pflum et al. (2015), for example, examined social support and psychological well-being among transgender and gender-nonconforming adults. Their findings supported the importance of social relationships in transgender people's psychological well-being. Similarly, Scandurra et al. (2017) found that family social support was associated with better mental health outcomes and could reduce the negative relationship between discrimination and mental health.

Budge et al. (2013) also examined social support and psychological functioning among transgender and gender-nonconforming individuals. Their work suggests that supportive relationships can be an important resource when transgender individuals deal with stressful life experiences. Valentine and Shipherd (2018) concluded that social support and community connectedness can act as important protective factors for transgender and gender-nonconforming people. A larger and more recent study by Tebbe et al. (2025) examined different types of social support among 2,411 transgender and nonbinary adults. Participants with low levels of social support reported poorer mental health outcomes, including more depression and post-traumatic stress symptoms. The researchers also found that support was not the same for everyone, particularly when family support was considered.

Objectives of the study

I. To examine the relationship between psychological well-being and stress among transgender adults.

II. To examine the relationship between social support and stress among transgender adults.

III. To study the multiple effect of predictor variables i.e. psychological well-being and social support on stress among transgender adults.

Hypotheses

1. There would be significant relationship between psychological well-being and stress among transgender adults.
2. There would be significant relationship between social support and stress among transgender adults.
3. There would be significant multiple effect of psychological well-being and social support on stress among transgender adults.

Variables

a. Predictor Variables: Psychological Well-being and Social Support

b. Criterion Variable: Stress

Psychological Tools

a. Demographic Information Sheet

A brief demographic information sheet was used to collect basic information about the participants. It included details such as age, gender identity, educational qualification, occupation and other relevant background information. The demographic information was used only to describe the participants and was not included in the correlation or regression analysis.

b. The World Health Organization-Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5)

The WHO-5 was used to assess psychological well-being. It contains five items. Each item is scored from 0 to 5. The raw total ranges from 0 to 25, with higher scores indicating better well-being.

c. Medical Outcomes Study (MOS) Social Support Survey

The MOS Social Support Survey was used to assess the availability of social support. The 19-item comprise four subscales and one overall summary index. It measure with item scores from 1 to 5.

d. Stress Scale (MAPC) by Dr. M. Singh

The Stress Scale was used to assess the level of stress among the participants. The supplied dataset identifies this scale as having 40 items, with item scores from 1 to 3 and a total score recorded for each participant.

Procedure

The study followed a purposive sampling strategy for selecting transgender adults aged between 20–30 years. This sampling method was adopted to ensure that the participants were directly relevant to the objectives of the study and had characteristics appropriate for examining psychological well-being, social support and stress. The study was conducted through government and private NGOs in Rajasthan. A total sample of 60 transgender adults was selected for the study. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their responses were collected using standardized psychological tools measuring psychological well-being, social support and stress. Participation was voluntary and confidentiality of the information provided by the participants was maintained throughout the study.

Statistical Analysis

The data collected in the present study were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to examine the direction and strength of the relationships among psychological well-being, social support and stress. Regression analysis was also conducted to examine whether psychological well-being and social support significantly predicted stress. These statistical techniques were considered appropriate for determining the significance and strength of the relationships among the variables and for interpreting the predictive contribution of the independent variables to stress.

II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Correlation Analysis

Variables	Pearson r	DF value	Result
Well Being- Stress	-0.310	58	Significant negative
Social Support-Stress	-0.316	58	Significant negative

The table presented the correlational values between the major variables of the study, including Psychological Well-being, Social Support and Stress. The correlational analysis indicated significant relationships between Psychological Well-being, Social Support and Stress.

The correlational value between Psychological Well-being and Stress was $r = -0.310$, $p = 0.0158$, which was statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$) where DF = 58. This indicates a significant negative relationship between psychological well-being and stress suggesting that higher levels of psychological well-being were associated with lower levels of stress among transgender adults. Furthermore, the correlational value between Social Support and Stress was $r = -0.316$, , which was also statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p < 0.05$) where DF = 58. This indicates a significant negative relationship between social support and stress suggesting that higher

levels of social support were associated with lower levels of stress among transgender adults.

Overall, the findings indicate that both psychological well-being and social support were significantly and negatively related to stress. The results support the hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between psychological well-being, social support and stress among transgender adults.

Regression Analysis

Regression	SE	B	t	p	R^2
Well Being-Stress	-0.055	0.022	-2.487	0.016	0.096
Social Support-Stress	-0.136	0.054	-2.536	0.014	0.100

In the given table separate regression analyses were conducted using SPSS to examine whether psychological well-being and social support significantly predicted stress among transgender adults.

The regression analysis between Psychological Well-being and Stress showed that psychological well-being significantly predicted stress, with B = 0.022, SE = -0.055, t = -2.487, p = 0.016, and R^2 = 0.096. The result was statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that psychological well-being accounted for 9.6% of the variance in stress. Similarly, the regression analysis between Social Support and Stress showed a statistically significant predictive relationship, with B = 0.054, SE = -0.136, t = -2.536, p = 0.014 and R^2 = 0.100. The result was significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that social support accounted for 10.0% of the variance in stress.

Overall, the regression findings indicate that both psychological well-being and social support significantly predicted stress among transgender adults.

III. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The present study sought to establish the level of association between psychological well-being, social support and stress among transgender adults. The study also aimed to examine whether psychological well-being and social support were significantly related to stress among transgender adults.

The first hypothesis stated that there would be a significant relationship between psychological well-being and stress among transgender. The obtained results, as highlighted by the correlational analysis, were in agreement with this hypothesis. A significant negative relationship was found between psychological well-being and stress (r = -0.310, p = 0.0158). This finding indicates that higher levels of psychological well-being were associated with lower levels of stress among transgender adults. The regression analysis further showed that psychological well-being significantly predicted stress, with R^2 = 0.096 and p = 0.016. This indicates that psychological well-being accounted for approximately 9.6% of the variance in stress. Therefore, the first hypothesis was supported.

The second hypothesis was to examine the relationship between social support and stress among transgender. The results were also in agreement with this hypothesis. A significant negative relationship was found between social support and stress (r = -0.316, p = 0.0139). This suggests that transgender who reported higher levels of social support tended to experience lower levels of stress. The regression analysis also indicated that social support significantly predicted stress, with R^2 = 0.100 and p = 0.014. Thus, social support accounted for approximately 10% of the variance in stress. These findings support the second hypothesis and highlight the importance of social support in understanding stress among transgender.

The findings of the present study are supported by previous research which has emphasized the importance of psychological well-being and social support in the mental health of transgender individuals. Minority stress theory suggests that transgender individuals may experience additional stress due to stigma, discrimination, rejection and other social difficulties. In such circumstances, psychological resources and supportive social relationships may play an important role in helping individuals manage stressful experiences. Social support may provide emotional and interpersonal resources that help individuals cope with difficult situations, while psychological well-being may contribute to better emotional adjustment and resilience.

The regression findings further suggest that both psychological well-being and social support had a significant contribution in predicting stress. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening psychological well-being and social support when addressing stress among transgender. Overall, the findings suggest that stress among transgender adults should not be understood only as an individual psychological issue. Social relationships, emotional well-being and the availability of supportive environments may also influence how individuals experience and manage stress. Further research with larger samples and participants from different regions may help in understanding these relationships more clearly and may contribute to the development of appropriate psychological and social interventions for transgender.

Implications

The findings have practical implications for psychological support with transgender. Stress assessment may be useful when providing counselling or other psychological services. Attention can also be given to supportive relationships. Family, friends, community groups and other trusted people may be important sources of support. The results also suggest that interventions should not focus only on symptoms of stress. They can also consider positive well-being and the person's support system. Simple screening and supportive counselling may help identify areas that need attention.

IV. CONCLUSION

The current study aimed at obtaining further evidence regarding the relationship between psychological well-being, social support and stress among transgender. Through correlation and regression analyses, the study provided important findings regarding the association of these variables. The results showed a significant negative relationship between psychological well-being and stress, as well as between social support and stress. The regression analysis further indicated that psychological well-being and social support significantly predicted stress among transgender. These findings highlight the importance of psychological well-being and supportive social relationships in understanding stress among transgender.

Several limitations are recognised and taken into consideration in the present study. Although the study included participants relevant to the research objectives, the sample size was limited to 60 transgender adults aged between 20 and 30 years and was collected through government and private NGOs in Rajasthan. Therefore, the findings may have limited generalisability to transgender adults from other age groups, geographical areas and social backgrounds. In addition, the cross-sectional nature of the study limits the establishment of cause-and-effect relationships between psychological well-being, social support and stress. Future studies using longitudinal designs may provide a better understanding of how these variables influence one another over time.

Further research using additional variables may provide more significant insight into the psychological experiences of transgender adults. Variables such as family acceptance, discrimination, stigma, coping mechanisms, self-esteem, resilience, community connectedness, economic conditions and access to healthcare may provide a broader understanding of the factors associated with stress. The inclusion of these variables may help in developing a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological and social experiences of transgender adults.

In addition, similar research should be replicated using larger samples representing transgender individuals from different regions, age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds and cultural contexts. Such research may help in understanding whether the relationships between psychological well-being, social support and stress remain consistent across different populations and settings.

In the final analysis, the present study demonstrates that psychological well-being and social support are significantly and negatively associated with stress among transgender. The findings suggest that greater psychological well-being and social support are associated with lower levels of stress. Therefore, strengthening supportive social environments and promoting psychological well-being may be important in addressing stress among transgender. This study can thus be regarded as a stepping stone for further research and for developing a more comprehensive approach towards promoting the psychological well-being and social support of transgender.

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From Marginalisation to Empowerment: A Study *of* Laxmi Narayan Tripathi*'s Red Lipstick: The Men in My Life*

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Abstract— *This paper studies the journey from marginalisation to empowerment in Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's Red Lipstick: The Men in My Life. It focuses on red lipstick as a visible sign of gender identity, self-expression, social judgement, and resistance. The paper uses Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity to explain how gender is produced through repeated social acts and expectations. Tripathi's autobiography shows how a transgender person is often asked to behave according to the gender assigned at birth and how breaking these expectations can lead to shame, exclusion, violence, and silence. At the same time, the autobiography shows how self-expression can become a source of confidence and resistance. The paper discusses childhood, family, language, the hijra community, relationships with men, religion, work, activism, and legal rights. It also engages with existing critical studies on Tripathi's autobiography. The study argues that red lipstick changes its meaning during Tripathi's life. It can first be associated with judgement and fear, but later becomes a sign of self-acceptance and public visibility. Thus, the lipstick becomes a simple but powerful symbol of the movement from marginalisation to empowerment.*

Keywords— ***Laxmi Narayan Tripathi, Red Lipstick, Judith Butler, gender performativity, transgender identity, marginalization, empowerment, hijra, gender expression, autobiography***

Introduction

Transgender autobiographies are important because they allow transgender people to tell their own stories instead of allowing society to speak for them. Autobiography gives a person the authority to describe childhood, family, relationships, work, discrimination, identity, and resistance from personal experience. Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's *Red Lipstick: The Men in My Life* is an important Indian transgender autobiography because it connects a personal life story with wider questions of gender, sexuality, family, social acceptance, and activism. It describes the book as a narrative of the men who have been creators, supporters, lovers, benefactors, and abusers in Tripathi's life.

The present paper focuses on the meaning of red lipstick in Tripathi's autobiography. Lipstick may look like a small and ordinary object, but its meaning changes according to the body on which it appears and the social expectations surrounding that body. For Tripathi, feminine appearance is connected with her struggle to understand and express her gender. The colour red also has strong meanings in Indian culture and can be associated with femininity, beauty, power, celebration, and tradition. Therefore, red lipstick becomes useful for understanding the larger struggle over who has the right to express gender openly.

The paper uses Judith Butler as its only main theorist. Butler's theory of gender performativity helps explain why clothes, makeup, gestures, language, and bodily appearance become important in gender identity. Butler writes in *Gender Trouble*, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are

said to be its results" (33). In simple words, this means that gender is not only something that exists inside a person; it is also produced and recognised through repeated actions and social meanings. This idea is useful in reading Tripathi because society repeatedly tells her how a person assigned male at birth should behave, while her own expression repeatedly challenges those expectations.

The main argument of this paper is that Tripathi's red lipstick represents a movement from social judgement to self-acceptance and empowerment. The lipstick does not itself create empowerment. Rather, its meaning changes as Tripathi becomes more confident about her identity and becomes increasingly visible in public life. The study therefore reads lipstick as a symbol of gender expression and as a small but meaningful form of resistance to the demand that transgender people hide themselves.

Judith Butler and Gender Performativity

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is the main theoretical basis of this paper. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler challenges the idea that gender is a fixed and natural identity that exists separately from social life. She explains that gender is produced through repeated acts. She describes gender as "the stylized repetition of acts" (179). She also writes, "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed" (34). These statements are important for this study because Tripathi's identity is repeatedly expressed through clothes, makeup, speech, gestures, and public behaviour.

Butler's argument does not mean that a person simply chooses a gender in the same way that one chooses an outfit. "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame" (Butler 33). Gender acts take place within social rules. People are rewarded when they fit those rules and can be punished when they do not. Therefore, when Tripathi wears feminine clothes or lipstick, her action becomes meaningful because society has already decided that certain forms of appearance belong to women and not to men. Her appearance makes the gender rules visible.

Butler also writes, "Gender is a kind of imitation for which there is no original" ("Imitation and Gender Insubordination" 21). This helps us question the idea that there is only one correct way of being a woman or a man. Tripathi's life shows that femininity can be expressed in a transgender body and that the social meaning of femininity is not limited to one biological category. Her use of red lipstick therefore challenges the belief that feminine appearance has only one legitimate owner.

Red Lipstick as a Sign of Gender Identity

Red lipstick is especially important because it makes gender expression visible. Makeup is commonly associated with femininity, and lipstick can therefore become a strong sign of feminine appearance. For Tripathi, such signs are connected with the process of becoming comfortable with her identity. Her later public use of feminine appearance shows a movement from hiding to visibility. "My story is not about becoming a woman. It's about being Laxmi" (Tripathi 195).

Tripathi's red lipstick can therefore be read through Butler's idea that gender is produced through repeated acts. Wearing lipstick repeatedly makes feminine identity visible. When society says that a person assigned male at birth should not wear lipstick, it is enforcing a gender rule. When Tripathi continues to wear it, the same act becomes a refusal to accept that rule as absolute.

The colour red also has a strong place in Indian cultural life. It can suggest beauty, power, celebration, marriage, and feminine presence. Therefore, red lipstick can be read not simply as a foreign symbol but as a cultural sign that Tripathi uses to express herself. The significance lies in who is allowed to use that sign and how society reacts when a transgender woman uses it openly. She embraces contradictions: "I've been a bar dancer, a sex worker, a UN speaker, a hijra guru. I am all of these and none of these" (Tripathi 190).

The Men in Tripathi's Life

The subtitle *The Men in My Life* draws attention to the different roles played by men. Tripathi presents men as family members, lovers, friends, supporters, strangers, and people who can also cause harm. The memoir does not describe all men in the same way. Instead, it shows how relationships can contain care, desire, control, rejection, and support at the same time.

The book's own description calls these men "creators, preservers, lovers, benefactors, and abusers." This range is important because the problem is not simply individual men. The deeper problem is the social expectation that masculinity must remain within a narrow form and that transgender femininity is something to be hidden or mocked.

Tripathi's discussion of patriarchy is especially direct. She writes, "This 'manliness', then, is just a show, nothing but a convenient construct, a pretence to keep patriarchy alive, to keep women tamed" (165). She continues, "Patriarchy doesn't leave you even when you're gay, does it? It only becomes about power" (165–66). These statements connect well with Butler's understanding of gender as a social system rather than a simple natural fact.

Tripathi shows that gender expectations are also connected with power.

Hijra Community and Belonging

The hijra community provides Tripathi with an alternative space of belonging. "The Indian hijra community encompasses persons with a variety of gender identities and sexual orientations, forming a culturally unique gender group" (Kalra and Shah 171). When mainstream family and society do not fully accept a transgender person, community can provide relationships, cultural practices, and a sense of identity. However, Tripathi does not present the hijra community as perfect. She also shows its internal rules and problems.

Tripathi writes, "I was lonely and feeling absolutely claustrophobic in the hijra culture" (26). This quotation is important because it prevents a simple victim-versus-hero reading. A community can provide belonging and still contain restrictions. Tripathi later states, "the politics around queer activism sickened us and we wanted to build a new space for it" (27). This quotation shows that empowerment also means creating new spaces rather than simply asking old institutions for acceptance. The movement from marginalisation to empowerment therefore involves both resistance and institution-building.

Religion, Culture, and Gender

Tripathi's engagement with religion is also important. Indian religious and cultural traditions contain stories and figures that allow gender to be imagined in more than one form. This creates a contradiction when gender-diverse people are respected in mythology but rejected in everyday life. Tripathi's discussion encourages readers to question this contradiction rather than simply rejecting religion. "The Hijra identity in India is closely linked with the traditional livelihood of the community" (Nayak and Panda 68).

The meaning of red also becomes important here. Red can be connected with feminine power, celebration, ritual, and religious practice. When Tripathi wears red lipstick, the colour can therefore be read as part of a wider cultural vocabulary of femininity. Her use of the colour becomes a way of claiming visibility within, rather than outside, Indian cultural meanings.

Economic Marginalisation

Economic marginalisation is another important part of Tripathi's story. Transgender people can face barriers in education and employment because of discrimination. Tripathi's experiences of dance and other forms of work need to be understood within this limited choice of opportunities. "Transgender individuals in India face entrenched economic marginalization, often being pushed into informal 'survival' activities such as sex work and begging" (Raja and Khan). Social exclusion can reduce the number of jobs available to a person and then society may blame that person for the work she is forced to do.

Tripathi explains that transgender people are "visibly trans" (24). This short phrase is important because visibility can become both a problem and a source of strength. "The term transgender broadly describes individuals who self-identify with a gender other than that assigned to them at birth" (McDermott et al. 2). A person who cannot easily hide a transgender identity may face discrimination in workplaces, but public visibility can also challenge the idea that transgender people should remain invisible. "Individuals whose gender identity and/or expression differs from the sex assigned to them at birth" (Wandrekar et al. 196).

"Feminist movements have fought for women's suffrage, equal pay, reproductive rights, and an end to gender-based violence. LGBTQ+ rights movements have advocated for the decriminalization of same-sex relationships, marriage equality, and protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity" (Panday 1325). Feminist movements and LGBTQ+ rights movements both fight for equality and freedom. Feminist movements have worked so that women get the right to vote, receive equal pay for the same work, have control over their own bodies, and live free from violence. LGBTQ+ rights movements have fought so that people can love who they want without being treated as criminals, can marry the person they love, and are protected from discrimination because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In society today, transgender people are also part of this fight. We are seeing more awareness about transgender rights — like legal recognition of a third gender, access to education and jobs, and protections against harassment. But at the same time, many trans people still face judgment in homes, schools, and workplaces, and are told how they should look or behave. So just like women and LGBTQ+ people, transgender people are also asking for respect, safety, and the freedom to live as their true selves.

"Understanding how gender and sexuality interact with other social identities including race, class, and disability is crucial. Because of this intersectionality, distinct experiences of marginalization and discrimination are produced (Panday 1326).

Tripathi also writes, "I am going through a difficult time personally, I act even stronger when I don the persona" (34). The quotation shows how public strength can sometimes be consciously created even when private life is difficult. Her public identity becomes part of her activism and her ability to speak for others.

Activism, Law, and Empowerment

Tripathi's movement into activism changes the position from which she speaks. She is no longer only the person being judged; she becomes someone who questions the people and institutions doing the judging. Her autobiography therefore becomes a form of public speech.

Tripathi states, "I firmly believe that even if you have the best laws, unless you change the mindset of people, nothing will change" (5). She describes changing the popular mindset as "true activism" (5). This is a useful statement for understanding the paper's central argument. Legal recognition is necessary, but social attitudes must also change.

The 2014 NALSA judgment is an important background to this movement because the Supreme Court recognised transgender identity and important rights connected with self-determination and equality. However, the autobiography reminds us that legal recognition does not automatically remove everyday prejudice. The movement toward empowerment must therefore happen both through law and through ordinary social behaviour.

From Marginalisation to Empowerment

The movement in Tripathi's autobiography is gradual. She begins with confusion, social pressure, and ridicule. "Queer identities in India are not simply about sexuality or gender; they are about resistance to oppression, about challenging power structures that marginalise" (Narrain 88).

She then finds language and community through which she can express herself. Later, she becomes publicly visible as an activist. The meaning of red lipstick changes along this journey. It is connected first with gender difference and judgement and later with confidence and self-expression.

Butler's theory helps explain why this change is important. Gender rules are repeated through everyday acts, but repeated acts can also expose the limits of those rules. Tripathi's continued use of feminine appearance challenges the belief that only one kind of body can legitimately express femininity. The act of appearing as herself becomes a way of questioning the social rule that asks her to hide.

Empowerment in this autobiography is therefore not simply becoming famous or successful. It means gaining the ability to speak, work, form relationships, participate in public life, and express gender without constantly being punished for it. Red lipstick becomes a simple symbol of this larger right to visibility.

CONCLUSION

Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's Red Lipstick: The Men in My Life presents both her personal struggle and the wider social challenges faced by transgender people. Her journey shows how gender expectations begin in childhood and continue through family, society, relationships, and institutions. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity helps explain how Tripathi challenges these expectations through her clothes, language, makeup, and public identity.

Her red lipstick becomes more than a cosmetic choice; it becomes a symbol of identity, visibility, and resistance. Her statement that "gender is nothing but an unromantic box" reflects the limitations created by fixed gender categories, while her belief in fighting for one's "personal truth" shows her movement towards empowerment. Thus, the red lipstick represents Tripathi's journey from marginalisation to self-acceptance, freedom, and empowerment.

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Nature and Ecological Consciousness in Kalidasa's Abhijnanashakuntalam

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Abstract— *Literature and nature have long had a deep and intimate connection. From classical poetry and drama to modern literature, authors have portrayed nature as an essential component of human existence and civilization rather than just as a decorative backdrop. The multidisciplinary field of ecocriticism studies the connection between literature and the natural world. The study of the connection between literature and the environment is the focus of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism in literature focuses on both human and non-human social life and current environmental challenges. The rapidly developing field of ecocriticism in recent years has given academics, critics, and scholars a new avenue for investigation and inquiry. Abhijnanasakuntalam by Kalidasa presents ecological ideas to its readers, such as the interdependence of man, nature, and the dominant culture. From an ecocritical standpoint, this essay examines how nature and ecological consciousness are portrayed in Kalidasa's traditional Sanskrit drama Abhijnanasakuntalam (The Recognition of Śakuntalā). Despite being a work of ancient Indian literature, the play's depictions of rivers, woods, animals, plants, seasons, and human interactions with the natural world provide important insights for modern ecological theory. The Kaṇva hermitage is portrayed as an organic community where people, animals, birds, trees, and other natural elements live in harmony. An ethical connection between human life and the natural world is demonstrated by Shakuntala's close interaction with the forest and its inhabitants. The shift from an environmentally balanced area to a more socially and politically ordered world, on the other hand, is reflected in the journey from the forest to the royal palace. The argument made in this study is that Abhijnanasakuntalam can be considered an early literary manifestation of ecological consciousness. The drama questions a strictly anthropocentric vision of nature through its depiction of the sacred forest, non-human life, seasonal cycles, and the emotional bond between Shakuntala and her natural surroundings. It implies that the health of the natural environment and human well-being are closely related.*

Keywords— ***Ecocriticism, Ecology, Nature, Beauty, Character, Forest, Ecological Consciousness***

Introduction

Ecocriticism is also known by a number of titles, including "green studies," "environmental literary criticism," and "literary ecology," but the primary objective of all these works is to understand and explore the relationship between literature and the natural world. Ecocriticism encompasses the ecosphere, which includes both human and non-human realms. Ecology is a fundamental aspect of the world that emphasizes human interaction with the natural environment.

The relatively new phrase "ecocriticism" comes from the word "ecology." Ecology's primary focus is on how organisms interact and depend on one another and their natural surroundings. In a similar vein, nature and humans are interdependent and have an impact on one another rather than being distinct or isolated. Ecocriticism extends this ecological perspective to literary studies by examining how literature portrays the natural world and how human interactions with the physical environment are reflected in literary texts. (Phillips; Zapf)

Ecocriticism can be used to analyze a variety of literary genres, including poetry, fiction, drama, and other forms of cultural expression. It has developed into a broad, interdisciplinary field. It examines how writers portray landscapes, animals, plants, natural resources, changes in the environment, and human perceptions of the non-human world. Scholars like Michael P. Branch, Glen A. Love, Cheryll Glotfelty, Simon C. Estok, Harold Fromm, William Howarth, William Rueckert, Suellen Campbell, and others have made significant contributions to the development of ecocritical thought. In his 1978 essay "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism," William Rueckert first used the term "ecocriticism." But ecocriticism did not start to systematically emerge as a distinct area of literary study until the 1990s. But the connection between literature and the natural world existed before ecocriticism was acknowledged as a valid academic discipline. Literary writers and critics have investigated nature, the landscape, the surrounding environment, and human relationship with nature in great detail. Ecocriticism is essentially an interdisciplinary approach that integrates literary studies with fields such as cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, psychology, ecology, and environmental science. It examines how people perceive nature and how social and cultural actions impact the environment. Related titles like ecopoetics, green cultural studies, and environmental literary critique also define various facets of this new field. (Beecroft; Coupe; Scott)

Furthermore, ecocriticism encompasses more than just the use of ecological ideas in literature. It examines the complex connections between nature, human civilization, culture, and, in some situations, the spiritual or paranormal facets of the natural world. It looks into how environmental ideas are communicated through literary language, imagery, narrative, symbolism, and scholarly discourse. Ecocriticism thus provides a framework for understanding literature as a cultural sphere that reflects, questions, and reassesses human attitudes toward nature. Ecology and literature are closely related since they both study human interactions with their environment. Through literature, we are able to see the environment not just as a backdrop but as a living force that interacts with human life. Through novels, poems, and essays, many writers have conveyed the importance of preserving the environment and respecting the natural world. Ecocriticism, the study of the connection between literature and ecology, is concerned with how writers portray nature and environmental issues.

Through literature, readers develop a deeper emotional connection with the land. For example, writers portray rivers, forests, and animals in a way that makes it clear how important they are to our peace and well-being. Indian literature often portrays nature as celestial and sacred. Many local poems and stories express the idea of coexisting peacefully with nature rather than mistreating it. Ecology, on the other hand, is the scientific study of how organisms interact with their environment. When combined with literature, it generates a thorough understanding that takes into account both cognitive and emotional perspectives. This combination allows people to see environmental challenges not just as scientific problems but also as moral and cultural ones. (Dash; Beecroft)

Literature and ecology work together to remind us of our responsibilities to the natural world. By reading and considering ecological literature, we may become more conscious of the importance of protecting our planet and ensuring a sustainable future for all living creatures. Nature and literature have always been closely related since authors and poets from all cultures have used the natural environment to express human experiences, emotions, goals, and worries. In literary works, forests, rivers, plants, animals, seasons, and landscapes are frequently portrayed not just as settings but also as important elements that foster the development of ideas and characters. The relationship between humans and nature has grown in importance in modern academia since ecological degradation and environmental challenges have emerged as significant issues in all fields of study. By studying ecology and literature, literary critics can thus examine how texts portray the interaction, interdependence, and reciprocal relationship between human existence and the natural world. People's increasing awareness that literature may assist people in understanding ecological ideals and their responsibility to the natural world is reflected in the growing significance of ecocriticism. (Phillips; Schneider)

Ecological issues have been reflected in literary traditions from many nations and historical periods. Literary representations of nature often reflect changing human views about the natural environment, especially in contexts impacted by societal development, technological advancement, colonial expansion, and increased resource exploitation. Thus, ecocriticism emphasizes the relationships between nature, ecology, culture, society, and human behavior while analyzing literature from the perspective of the relationship between humans and nature. Nature photography, animal and plant representations, gender and ecological interactions, cultural activities, travel, and human attitudes toward the environment can all have broader ecological ramifications when analyzed from an ecocritical standpoint. (Scott)

The Indian literary tradition provides particularly rich opportunities for such a study because of its longstanding relationship to forests, rivers, mountains, animals, plants, seasons, and the interconnectedness of human and non-

human existence. India offers a wide range of natural habitats, from the eastern wetlands to the dry landscapes of the west, and from the Himalayan region to the southern plateaus. However, exploitation of natural resources, human-centered development, and population growth are putting a lot of strain on these ecological systems. Literature always responds to these changing human-nature relationships because it is a reflection of human civilization and culture.

Examining ecological ideas in Indian literature can be done in a number of ways. Even though ecological and environmental concerns are the primary subject of some literary works, they are nevertheless intimately linked to broader subjects such as human relationships, culture, spirituality, identity, society, and ethics in others. From this perspective, Kalidasa's Abhijnanasakuntalam offers an important literary arena for researching nature and ecology. The forest hermitage, plants, animals, rivers, seasons, and other elements of the natural world are all closely related to the lives of the protagonists. Therefore, an ecocritical reading of the play could demonstrate how Kalidasa represents ecological balance, human-nature interaction, and ecological consciousness within the framework of traditional Indian literature. (Dash; Mehta)

Ecocriticism in Abhijnanasakuntalam by Kalidasa

One of the most well-known works of world literature is Kalidasa's masterwork Abhigyanashakuntalam, which profoundly and harmoniously captures the interaction between humans and the environment. The play becomes an old model for ecological consciousness when viewed through the prism of ecocriticism, a literary framework that investigates the relationship between humans and the natural world. Instead of portraying nature as a passive backdrop, Kalidasa shows it as an active, living entity that feels, communicates, and coexists with mankind. Abhigyanashakuntalam is a powerful ecocritical assessment of today's ecological problems. It runs counter to the post-industrial philosophy, which sees nature as merely a source of raw resources for human progress. By depicting plants and animals as family members and urging people to give up exploitation and return to a state of ecological stewardship, Kalidasa foreshadows modern concepts like deep ecology and ecofeminism. (Mehta; Miller)

With the exception of the fifth act, almost all of Kalidasa's Abhijnanasakuntalam takes place in natural environments, where human existence appears to cohabit happily with the non-human world. Rather than merely providing a stunning setting for the dramatic action, nature actively advances the plot and reflects the characters' emotional states. Through forests, trees, creepers, animals, rivers, birds, and the changing of the seasons, Kalidasa illustrates an integrated picture of existence in which humans and nature are interconnected. From an ecocritical perspective, the play thus offers an important example of ecological interconnectedness.

The ecological concept of the play is established early on. The Nāndī, a benedictory statement, invokes Śiva in all eight of his manifest manifestations, including cosmic forces and natural elements.

> "May the Lord protect you in all eight of his visible forms: water, fire, the sacrificer, the sun, the moon, ether, earth, and air." (Kalidasa)

The invocation is significant because nature and the sacred are inseparable. The sun, moon, fire, water, earth, air, and ether are all representations of the divine. Consequently, the play begins with an awareness of the material and spiritual significance of the natural world. This intimate connection between people and the natural environment is further established in the first act. King Duṣyanta is immediately prevented from killing an animal that is a part of the hermitage as he goes into the forest to hunt deer. The hermits warn him:

> "O King, this buck belongs to the monastery; do not kill it." (Kalidasa)

The ascetic also compares the deer's frailty and tenderness to the lethal power of the king's weapon: (Kalidasa)

> "Where are your arrows, hard and sharp-striking like a thunderbolt, and where is the exceedingly sensitive and restless life of these unhappy deer?" (Kalidasa)

The event is significant from an ecological perspective because it draws a moral line between wasteful animal harm and justifiable protection. Because the deer is not just an object of the royal hunt but also a part of the hermitage's peaceful natural community, its life is valued and protected.

The hermitage itself represents an ideal ecological environment in which humans, animals, plants, and spiritual life coexist together. In the tranquil natural environment, even the animals feel fearless. Kalidasa claims that the young deer graze without fear: (Kalidasa; Mehta)

> "These young fawns graze slowly in the grove where the darbha grass tips have been clipped, their concerns gone." (Kalidasa)

The description claims that the hermitage acts as a refuge where human actions do not disturb the natural order. Because of this, nature plays a crucial role in the hermitage's moral, spiritual, and educational ambiance.

Kalidasa also demonstrates that he recognizes the value of the forest. Fruits, plants, grasses, and medicinal materials are not only supplied for their aesthetic worth but also as

resources that sustain human life. Consequently, the forest becomes a source of spiritual well-being, health, nutrition, and wisdom. This understanding of the forest as a living, sustaining ecosystem anticipates a fundamental principle of ecological theory: the preservation of the natural world is closely related to human welfare.

The artistic and emotional bond between people and nature is particularly evident in the portrayal of Shakuntala. She is shown as a daughter of nature, having grown up surrounded by trees, creepers, birds, and animals. Instead of being possessive, her love for plants is kind. Kalidasa emphasizes her compassion for the trees in the famous parting scene. Kaṇva describes her feelings regarding the plants as follows:

> "That same Śakuntalā is now on her way to her husband's house; your first flowering was a festival; she adored decorations but would not pluck a sprout out of devotion for you; she would not sip water before you had drunk." (Kalidasa)

This passage is particularly important for an ecocritical reading. Sakuntalā sees the trees as more than just lovely objects or a source of flowers to adorn her. She views them as living companions who ought to be cherished and looked after. By refusing to drink water before watering the plants, she demonstrates a reciprocal and responsible relationship. Similarly, she reveals an ethical limitation toward the non-human world by refusing to harvest their fragile shoots, not even for aesthetic reasons.

When Sakuntalā relocates from the hermitage to her husband's home in Act IV, Kalidasa further blurs the distinction between human feeling and natural existence. It appears that her alienation has an impact on the entire natural world. As stated by Kaṇva

> "The female deer have dropped their mouthfuls of Darbha grass, the peacocks have stopped dancing, and the creepers seem to be crying as they shed their pale leaves." (Kalidasa)

In this case, Shakuntala's emotional experience personifies nature as a sentient element. The creepers appear to weep, the deer cease grazing, and the peacocks cease dancing. Therefore, the natural world's behavior is a reflection of human emotions. Nature and mankind cease to exist as separate domains and instead become deeply entwined.

Sakuntalā's close relationship with the trees makes them her "relatives" and grants her freedom to leave. According to the drama :

> "The trees, who were her family while she lived in the woods, have let Sakuntalā go." (Kalidasa)

The term "forest relatives" is very significant. It suggests that kinship in the play includes trees and other living things in addition to humans. This representation challenges a wholly anthropocentric understanding of the universe by allowing the forest to be perceived as a community of interrelated beings.

Shakuntala also incorporates elements of nature into its decoration. Instead of primarily depending on artificial decoration, she is associated with flowers, creepers, and other forest products. Because of this, her beauty and the natural environment in which she grew up are closely related. Rather than simply being placed in nature, she is portrayed as the outcome of its compassionate influence. She acquires qualities like tenderness, compassion, and innocence as a result of her intimate relationship with the monastery.

Kalidasa also adds an emotional and sensual dimension to natural elements. In Act III, Duşyanta responds to the cool forest breeze.

> "You can welcome the lotus-scented breeze that carries drops from the waves of the Mālinī River." (Kalidasa)

One significant component of the atmosphere is the breeze. By transporting the aroma of flowers and the moisture of the river, it unites numerous elements of the ecosystem. Air, water, plants, and human sensation are all united in one poetic vision. These narratives reveal Kalidasa's extraordinary sensory and ecological understanding of the natural world. (Beecroft; Zapf)

Additionally, the performance illustrates how human behavior can alter in natural environments. The calm atmosphere of the hermitage encourages self-control, empathy, and introspection. The fierce bond between hunter and hunted is momentarily suspended in the sacred woodland. The peace of the hermitage even attracts Duşyanta, a hunter who wanders into the forest more and more. Consequently, the forest functions as both a physical site and an ethical context that may influence human behavior.

In the final act, the ecological aspect of the drama reaches yet another crucial point. It's important to keep in mind that the scene involving the young Sarvadamana and the lion cub occurs in Act VII, not Act V. At the hermitage of Māricā, the brave youngster is seen playing with a lion cub. The scenery paints a stunning picture of harmony between human childhood and the wild surroundings. Sarvadamana interacts with animals fearlessly, and the natural world is not only viewed as something under human control. The child's relationship with the lion cub reflects the environment of the hermitage, where humans and animals coexist without the typical barriers of fear and hostility.

Thus, Abhijnanasakuntalam portrays nature as an active and important presence throughout the dramatic framework. The forest provides refuge, food, medicine, education, and spiritual tranquility; animals become friends; rivers and breezes enhance the sensory richness of life; trees and creepers engage in human emotions; and natural aspects are included in the play's sacred imagination. Thus, Kalidasa's portrayal of the hermitage suggests a cohabitation paradigm in which human prosperity depends on respect for the greater community of life.

Because of this, the play could be viewed from an ecocritical perspective as providing a non-anthropocentric image in which humans are not separated from nature but rather deeply intertwined with it. Sakuntalā's relationship with the trees, the hermitage deer's protection, the forest's emotional response to her departure, and the peaceful coexistence of humans and animals all contribute to an all-encompassing ecological imagination. As a result, nature in Abhijnanasakuntalam is more than just a picturesque setting; it is a living force that shapes human nature, participates in emotional experiences, and preserves the moral and spiritual order of the world.

CONCLUSION

Abhijnanasakuntalam is a prominent literary example of Kalidasa's profound comprehension of nature. The drama portrays nature as an active and significant presence that is intimately related to human existence, emotions, and values rather than just as a beautiful setting. The characters' relationships and experiences are influenced by the forest's tranquility, beauty, and healing properties. Rebirth, fairness, harmony, and compassion are all strongly linked to nature. Kalidasa thus develops into a poet who closely observes how people engage with the natural world. Instead of isolating nature from human culture, their dramatic settings show humans and their surroundings as parts of an interconnected organic whole. Their portrayals suggest that both non-human natural elements and living things have intrinsic value and ought to be respected and cared for. Such a perspective aligns with contemporary ecological theory, particularly the concepts of ecological balance and environmental justice. The portrayals of forests, plants, animals, rivers, seasons, and landscapes in these works also emphasize the close connection between moral conscience, human emotions, and the natural world. Nature not only responds to human conduct but also influences human behavior and spiritual development. Through this connected representation, both dramatists encourage viewers to recognize the need for cooperation over control. (Mehta; Dash; Phillips)

Therefore, it may be advantageous to view Abhijnanasakuntalam from an ecocritical perspective. Their celebration of ecological interconnectedness, natural beauty, compassion, and peaceful coexistence offers principles that are still relevant in light of contemporary environmental challenges. Their writings encourage more responsible interactions between people and the non-human world and serve as a reminder of the close connection between environmental well-being and human ethical and social well-being. (Beecroft; Phillips; Zapf)

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A Study of Multimodal Metaphor in the Film *Deep Sea* from the Cognitive Perspective

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Abstract— *Grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and the multimodal metaphor framework, this study examines 58 valid multimodal metaphors identified in the 2023 Chinese animated film Deep Sea. Adopting a mixed-methods approach of quantitative statistics and qualitative case analysis, it categorizes the metaphors, describes their distributional features, and explores how pictorial, linguistic, and sonic modalities collaborate to construct metaphorical meaning. The findings show that ontological metaphors account for the largest proportion (52%), followed by structural and orientational metaphors (24% each). Pictorial modality serves as the fundamental carrier, while pictorial-linguistic and pictorial-linguistic-sonic combinations are the dominant realization patterns. The synergy of multiple modalities visualizes the protagonist's inner psychological state and enhances audience empathy. This study extends the application scope of multimodal metaphor research to animated film discourse and provides cognitive insights for animation production and mental health communication.*

Keywords— ***cognitive linguistics; multimodal metaphor; animated film; Deep Sea; conceptual mapping***

I. INTRODUCTION

Metaphor is widely acknowledged as a core cognitive mechanism shaping human thought and language, rather than a mere rhetorical device (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). With the development of multimodal discourse analysis, metaphor research has extended from purely linguistic texts to multimodal media such as animated films, which integrate visual, linguistic and sonic resources to construct narratives and convey emotions (Forceville & Urios-Aparisi, 2009).

The 2023 Chinese animated film *Deep Sea* has drawn extensive public attention for its innovative visual style and profound thematic exploration of adolescent depression. However, existing studies on this film mainly focus on its visual artistry and color design (Dong, 2023; Jiang, 2023), with scarce systematic investigation into its multimodal metaphorical mechanisms from a cognitive perspective. To address this research gap, this study explores the classification, distribution and meaning construction of multimodal metaphors in *Deep Sea*, aiming to reveal how multiple semiotic modalities work collaboratively to convey abstract psychological themes. This paper is structured into five sections: introduction, theoretical foundation, methodology, results and discussion, and conclusion.

II. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1 Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) posits that human understanding of abstract concepts is essentially grounded in the mapping of concrete, embodied experiences from a source domain to an abstract target domain. That is, people comprehend unfamiliar, intangible concepts by projecting structural features of familiar, tangible concepts onto them. Based on their cognitive functions, conceptual metaphors are categorized into three core types: ontological, structural, and orientational metaphors.

Ontological metaphors treat abstract concepts such as emotions, events and psychological states as tangible entities or substances, enabling people to quantify, identify

and comprehend intangible experiences. Structural metaphors organize abstract concepts using the structured logical framework of concrete concepts, establishing systematic correspondences between the two domains. Orientational metaphors project spatial orientations derived from bodily experiences (e.g., up-down, in-out) onto abstract concepts such as emotional states and social status, forming metaphorical expressions rooted in universal physical experience.

2.2 Multimodal Metaphor Framework

Building on CMT, Forceville and Urios-Aparisi (2009) extend metaphor research to multimodal contexts, defining multimodal metaphor as a metaphor whose source and target domains are predominantly or exclusively represented through two or more semiotic modes. They identify nine modes involved in multimodal communication, among which three are most salient in film discourse: pictorial (visual images, character design, scene composition), linguistic (dialogues, subtitles, narration), and sonic (background music, sound effects).

Unlike monomodal linguistic metaphors, multimodal metaphors rely on the synergy of multiple sensory channels to construct meaning, enhancing the vividness and emotional impact of metaphorical expressions. This study adopts this three-mode analytical framework to examine the multimodal metaphorical system in *Deep Sea*, focusing on how the three modalities interact to complete cross-domain mapping.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Questions

This study addresses three interrelated research questions:

1. What are the primary types of multimodal metaphors in the animated film *Deep Sea*?

2. What is the distribution pattern of these metaphor types and their modal realizations?

3. How do pictorial, linguistic, and sonic modalities interact to construct metaphorical meaning from a cognitive perspective?

3.2 Data Collection

The research corpus is the full-length 2023 Chinese animated film *Deep Sea*, with a runtime of approximately 112 minutes. The researcher watched the film repeatedly and carefully to identify potential multimodal metaphors, following the three identification criteria proposed by Forceville (2009): first, the source and target domains belong to distinct categorical domains; second, the two domains form an "A is B" metaphorical structure that enables feature mapping from source to target; third, the metaphor is manifested through at least two semiotic modes.

After screening and verification, a total of 58 valid multimodal metaphors were identified. Screenshots of typical metaphorical scenes were captured, and corresponding dialogues and soundtrack information were transcribed and recorded for further in-depth analysis.

3.3 Analytical Procedures

This study combines quantitative and qualitative analytical approaches. Quantitatively, the 58 identified metaphors are classified into three categories based on the CMT classification standard, and the frequency of each subtype and their modal realization patterns are counted and summarized. Qualitatively, representative cases from each metaphor category are selected for in-depth analysis, focusing on how each modality contributes to cross-domain mapping, and how the interaction of multiple modalities completes the meaning construction of metaphors and exerts narrative and expressive functions.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Classification and Distribution of Multimodal Metaphors

Based on the three-way classification of CMT, the 58 identified multimodal metaphors are divided into three categories: ontological metaphors, structural metaphors, and orientational metaphors. The specific distribution is elaborated below.

Multimodal ontological metaphors are the most frequent type, accounting for 52% of the total, followed by structural and orientational metaphors, each making up 24%. The predominance of ontological metaphors aligns with the core thematic focus of *Deep Sea*: visualizing abstract psychological concepts such as depression and spiritual redemption. Among ontological metaphors, person metaphor ranks first (21%), as the film extensively uses anthropomorphic marine creatures to reflect real-world social groups and human traits. Entity metaphor (14%) and container metaphor (8%) also account for considerable proportions, serving to materialize invisible emotions and construct spatial cognitive frameworks respectively. For structural metaphors, journey metaphor (10%) is the most prominent, as the entire narrative is built upon the framework of a sea voyage. For orientational metaphors, down metaphor (10%) and up metaphor (9%) are widely used to imply changes in consciousness and emotional states.

Regarding modal realizations, statistical results show that pictorial modality is present in the source domain of all 58 multimodal metaphors, indicating that visual images

serve as the fundamental carrier for metaphorical meaning in animated films. Two-mode and three-mode combinations are the dominant realization forms: pictorial-linguistic (PL) and pictorial-linguistic-sonic (PLS) combinations each account for the largest proportion, while pictorial-sonic (PS) combinations are also common. Single pictorial mode accounts for the smallest proportion, as visual information alone may cause ambiguous interpretation without the anchoring of linguistic or sonic modalities. Specifically, linguistic modality plays a role in clarifying metaphorical reference and eliminating ambiguity, while sonic modality mainly functions to enhance emotional atmosphere and strengthen the perceptual impact of metaphors.

4.2 Meaning Construction Through Multimodal Interaction

4.2.1 Multimodal Ontological Metaphors

Ontological metaphors transform intangible psychological concepts and abstract states into perceivable entities, which is the primary way the film visualizes the protagonist's inner world. Three typical subtypes are analyzed below.



Picture 1



Picture 2

The most representative person metaphor is CATFISH IS A PICKY HUMAN CUSTOMER. In the film, the catfish guests at the Deep-Sea Hotel are designed with human-like facial features and postures: they hold mobile phones, show disdainful expressions, and make complaints about the hotel's service, which constructs the source domain of "rude, picky human customers" through pictorial modality. Linguistic modality reinforces this mapping through the character's line, "Then I have to leave a negative review", which explicitly associates the catfish's behavior with that of dissatisfied human consumers. Through the synergy of pictorial and linguistic modalities, this metaphor not only shapes vivid character images in the fantasy deep-sea world, but also implicitly reflects the snobbish and indifferent social groups in reality, laying a cognitive foundation for understanding the protagonist Shen Xiu's sense of alienation.



Picture 1



Picture 2

The representative container metaphor is VISUAL FIELD IS A CONTAINER, embodied in the scene where Shen Xiu first wakes up in the fantasy world. When Shen Xiu floats on a small yellow swimming ring, her field of vision is limited to the scope surrounded by the ring, which takes the swimming ring as the boundary of a container and constructs the source domain of "closed container space" through pictorial modality. As the camera pulls back, Shen Xiu's field of vision expands, and the full view of the fantasy deep-sea world gradually unfolds, visually presenting the "expansion of the container". Sonically, the melodious and grand background music rises as the vision expands, synchronizing with the visual information to enhance the immersive feeling of "entering a new world". This container metaphor constructs the audience's cognitive perspective consistent with the protagonist, allowing the audience to experience the transition from reality to fantasy world through Shen Xiu's perspective.



Picture 1



Picture 2

The most functionally significant entity metaphor is DEPRESSION IS A STICKY RED MONSTER, which visualizes the abstract concept of depression into a tangible entity called the "Downcast Wretch". Pictorially, the Downcast Wretch is presented as a mass of sticky red substance that constantly chases Shen Xiu and wraps her tightly when it catches her. The red color carries the symbolic meaning of danger and suffocation, and the enveloping form intuitively presents the oppressive feeling of depression, turning invisible psychological pain into a visible external threat. Sonically, every appearance of the Downcast Wretch is accompanied by rapid, tense and depressing background music and sharp sound effects, which strengthen the sense of crisis and helplessness brought by depression through auditory stimulation. Linguistic modality names this entity "the Downcast Wretch" through character dialogues, explicitly anchoring the metaphorical target domain to depressive emotion. The tripartite collaboration of pictorial, sonic and linguistic modes completes the mapping from "tangible monster entity" to "abstract depression", providing the general audience with an intuitive cognitive approach to understand depression.

4.2.2 Multimodal Structural Metaphors

Structural metaphors use the structured framework of concrete things to organize abstract concepts, helping the audience understand complex psychological processes and

narrative logic through familiar experiential structures. Two typical subtypes are analyzed below.


Picture 1


Picture 2

The core structural metaphor throughout the film is SPIRITUAL REDEMPTION IS A SEA VOYAGE, which constructs the protagonist's process of psychological healing as a sea voyage to the Eye of the Deep Sea. Pictorially, a large number of voyage scenes form the complete source domain of "journey": the Deep-Sea Hotel ship sails through the *Deep Sea*, encounters storms and attacks by the Downcast Wretch, and finally heads for the Eye of the Deep Sea, corresponding to the stages of escaping from trauma, encountering inner resistance, and approaching spiritual liberation respectively. Sonically, the soundtrack changes with the voyage process: passionate music during smooth sailing, tense and urgent music when encountering obstacles, and soothing music when approaching the destination, which strengthens the rhythm of the journey through auditory cues. Linguistic modality explicitly points out the "Eye of the Deep Sea" as the final destination through character dialogues, and anchors its metaphorical meaning of "untying the heart knot and ending the nightmare". Through the structural mapping of journey to redemption, the film transforms the abstract and complex psychological healing process into a familiar voyage experience, greatly reducing the cognitive difficulty of understanding abstract psychological themes and enhancing the audience's emotional resonance.


Picture 1


Picture 2

The business metaphor NAN HE'S INNER WORLD IS A FAILING HOTEL BUSINESS reveals the spiritual state of Nan He, the owner of the Deep-Sea Hotel. Pictorially, the dilapidated hotel facilities, Nan He's busy but frustrated operation state, and customers' disgusted expressions together present the image of a failed businessman, constructing the source domain of "unsuccessful business operation". Linguistic modality reinforces this structure through dialogues: customers complain about the terrible dishes, and Nan He tries every means to make money to pay off debts. These business details are mapped to Nan He's psychological level: the poorly managed hotel corresponds to his barren inner world, and his fawning attitude towards customers corresponds to his disguise of true self in real life. Sonically, the sad and low background music sets off the bleakness of the business situation, and also implies the depression and helplessness hidden under Nan He's optimistic appearance. This metaphor not only enriches the character depth of Nan He, but also reveals that he is also a person trapped in spiritual predicament like Shen Xiu, making the mutual salvation between the two characters more logically convincing.

4.2.3 Multimodal Orientational Metaphors

Orientational metaphors are rooted in human bodily spatial experience, projecting spatial orientations such as up-down and in-out onto abstract psychological and social concepts. Such metaphors are implicit but widely distributed, playing an important role in shaping emotional atmosphere.


Picture 1


Picture 2

The in metaphor SAFETY IS INSIDE A CLOSED SPACE is based on the spatial experience of "inside = safe, outside = dangerous", and extends to the social and psychological level. In the cruise ship scene at the beginning of the film, pictorial modality presents the cruise ship as a closed, warm and bright space, where families gather happily and interact closely, forming the source domain of "inside the safe group". In contrast, the sea outside the ship is dark and unpredictable, symbolizing danger and isolation. Linguistic modality presents the lively social interaction inside the ship through the noisy conversations and laughter of other passengers, highlighting the sense of security brought by group integration. However, Shen Xiu is always excluded from the group, wandering on the edge of the "inside" space. This orientational metaphor connects spatial experience with psychological security silently, and uses implicit spatial coding to shape the protagonist's lonely and isolated psychological state.


Picture 1


Picture 2

The down metaphor UNCONSCIOUSNESS AND DESPAIR ARE GOING DOWN is consistent with the universal cognitive experience summarized in CMT that "down = low emotion, unconsciousness". When Shen Xiu falls into the sea and sinks into the deep-sea vortex, the

picture tone turns dark and blurred, and her body keeps falling, which constructs the source domain of "sinking down" through pictorial modality, corresponding to her gradual loss of consciousness and entry into the fantasy world. When she floats back to the sea surface, the picture becomes brighter, corresponding to her partial recovery of consciousness. Sonically, the music becomes deep, slow and depressing during the sinking process, and becomes clear and bright when floating up, forming an auditory echo with the spatial orientation. This metaphor relies on the audience's universal embodied experience, enabling them to naturally perceive the change of the protagonist's consciousness state without explicit explanation.

4.3 General Discussion

Overall, the multimodal metaphor system in *Deep Sea* presents a clear hierarchical structure, with different types of metaphors undertaking differentiated narrative and expressive functions. Ontological metaphors, as the most frequent type, undertake the core function of visualizing abstract psychological concepts and building the basic fantasy world view. Structural metaphors provide an organizational framework for the narrative and psychological growth line, making the abstract redemption process easy to understand. Orientational metaphors, as the underlying cognitive schema, implicitly shape emotional atmosphere and character states.

In terms of modal interaction, the three modalities form a complementary and collaborative cognitive system. Pictorial modality provides intuitive source domain images and is the core carrier of metaphor construction. Linguistic modality plays an anchoring role, clarifying metaphorical reference and avoiding semantic ambiguity, especially for metaphors with relatively implicit visual meaning. Sonic modality is responsible for emotional enhancement, strengthening the emotional connotation of metaphor through auditory stimulation and triggering the audience's emotional resonance. The synergy of multiple modalities not only improves the efficiency of meaning transmission, but also enhances the aesthetic and artistic effect of the film. The findings confirm that CMT has strong explanatory power for multimodal metaphor phenomena in animated films, and the cognitive mechanism of cross-domain mapping is still applicable in multimodal contexts.

V. CONCLUSION

This study systematically analyzes the multimodal metaphors in the animated film *Deep Sea* from a cognitive linguistic perspective. The main findings are as follows: first, ontological metaphors account for the largest proportion among the three types of multimodal metaphors, serving as the main tool to visualize adolescent depression; second, pictorial modality is the foundational carrier of all metaphors, and multi-modal combinations are the dominant realization forms; third, the synergy of pictorial, linguistic and sonic modalities completes cross-domain mapping and constructs metaphorical meaning together.

Theoretically, this study enriches the empirical research of multimodal metaphor in animated film discourse and expands the application scope of CMT. Practically, it provides cognitive reference for domestic animated films to express abstract psychological themes through multimodal design. This study has limitations in the subjectivity of metaphor identification, and future research can expand the corpus and adopt more standardized analytical frameworks to improve research reliability.

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Synchronic re-grammaticalization: The translation of modal adjuncts in Chinese government-regulatory academic discourse

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Abstract— *Although considerable research has been devoted to the translation of modality from Chinese into English, existing studies have focused predominantly on individual modal lexical items or localized translation phenomena, with relatively limited attention to the systemic transformation mechanisms of modal adjuncts within Chinese social-science academic texts. Drawing on Halliday and Matthiessen's Systemic Functional Linguistics theory of modality, this study examines the English rendering of modal adjuncts in government-regulatory academic discourse, based on a self-built small-scale Chinese-English parallel corpus from a monograph chapter on Chinese regulatory theory. The findings demonstrate that the translation of modal adjuncts in academic texts is not a matter of straightforward formal adverb-for-adverb matching, but rather a target-language-oriented process of synchronic "re-grammaticalization". In this translational process, modal adjunct translation necessitates cross-categorial shifts in grammatical realization, alongside the reconstruction of semantic prosody to fit English academic stylistic conventions. Such cross-categorial adjustments are realised via predicate absorption, nominalization, adjectivization, prepositional-comment constructions and referential-pragmatic calibration. This study sheds light on the mechanisms through which modal-adjunct meanings are reconstructed in cross-linguistic outbound academic translation, and may offer practical implications for the international dissemination of Chinese-characteristic social-science academic discourse.*

Keywords— ***modal adjuncts; Systemic Functional Linguistics; synchronic re-grammaticalization; government-regulatory discourse; academic outbound translation***

I. INTRODUCTION

Scholarly work internationally has explored modal semantics, writer stance in academic discourse and grammaticalization (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004; Hyland, 2005), with several studies addressing cross-linguistic realisations of modal meanings (Traugott, 2003). Early Chinese-oriented translation research on modality focused largely on modal semantic discrimination and word-level source-target correspondences. In recent years, with increasing interdisciplinary dialogue between Systemic Functional Linguistics and translation studies, more scholars have adopted functional perspectives to investigate modality in outbound academic translation, discussing translation strategies, semantic reconstruction and

pragmatic realisation.

Constrained by typological heterogeneity between Chinese and English modal systems, existing scholarship tends to concentrate on discrete modal lexemes and isolated local translation phenomena. Systemic examinations of holistic transformation for modal adjuncts in social-science academic texts remain scarce, and few studies have systematically investigated cross-linguistic synchronic re-grammaticalization of modal-adjunct meanings.

Against this backdrop, this paper integrates Systemic Functional Linguistics and translation-studies insights to examine synchronic re-grammaticalization and its translational manifestations for modal adjuncts in outbound academic translation. It seeks to deepen understandings of cross-linguistic modal-adjunct transfer and explore meaning-reconstruction pathways, providing references for the international communication of Chinese social-science academic discourse.

This exploratory case study draws on a self-built small-scale Chinese-English parallel corpus from a 13 000-character regulatory-theory monograph chapter. It focuses exclusively on modal adjuncts, leaving modal verbs and modal orientation for separate analysis. Two research questions guide the inquiry:

RQ1 What syntactic and pragmatic-semantic challenges arise in translating Chinese modal adjuncts embedded in government-regulatory academic prose?

RQ2 What compensatory translational operations enable synchronic re-grammaticalization of modal-adjunct meaning while reconstructing appropriate semantic prosody for English-language academic publication?

Observations cannot be universally generalisable across genres but deliver practical heuristics for related translation practice.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Modal adjuncts within Systemic Functional Linguistics

Halliday and Matthiessen (2004, 2014) define modality as the intermediate semantic zone situated between positive and negative polarity. Within SFL, modality is split into two broad categories: modalization deals with probability and usuality for propositional statements, while modulation concerns obligation and inclination within proposals. Crucially, modal meaning is not exclusively realised by finite modal operators. Modal adjuncts, separated into mood adjuncts and comment adjuncts, constitute essential interpersonal-metafunction resources (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Mood adjuncts modify probability, usuality or deontic force and tend to cluster close to finite verbal elements. By contrast, comment adjuncts operate at a higher clausal rank, offering metadiscursive commentary over the complete proposition rather than modifying a single verb.

This original SFL classification was primarily developed for English-language data. When applied to typologically distinct languages such as Chinese, researchers have repeatedly pointed out important structural divergences (Li, 2007). English mood adjuncts enjoy relatively flexible syntactic mobility; they can appear pre-finite, post-finite or in clause-initial positions without breaking grammatical acceptability. In Chinese politico-academic and institutional writing, however, modal adjuncts exhibit strong positional fixation: they overwhelmingly occur immediately before the main predicate verb and enter into tight semantic bonding with that verb (Li, 2007). This structural property cannot be simply mapped onto English grammatical norms, and it creates persistent translational difficulty that descriptive translation research has yet to fully unpack.

Building upon this typological observation, the present study introduces the analytical construct of predicate-adjunct fusion to capture varying strengths of syntactic-semantic bonding between modal adjunct and main predicate:

1. **High fusion**: The adjunct forms an indivisible semantic unit with the following predicate. Removing or detaching the predicate substantially weakens or even eliminates the modal-evaluative force carried by the adjunct. Typical examples from Chinese institutional-regulatory discourse include *bìrán* (必然), *shìbì* (势必), *jiānjué* (坚决). These adverbial markers cannot function as independent propositional commentators when isolated from their host predicate.

2. **Medium fusion**: The adjunct habitually co-occurs with predicates in normal prose, yet under specific rhetorical conditions can be syntactically detached via punctuation without total loss of modal meaning. Items such as *jījí* (积极) belong to this group: while normally pre-verbal, they

can occasionally be fronted as separate commentary.

3. **Low fusion**: The adjunct occupies sentence-initial or parenthetical slots, semantically decoupled from the main predicate and functioning purely as proposition-level metacommentary. Disjunct-style markers signalling general inference or judgement represent this category.

Corpus-driven descriptive work on English academic prose demonstrates that Anglophone scholarly writing actively avoids heavy stacking of pre-verbal adverbs (Biber et al., 1999). Evaluative and modal-interpersonal meaning tends to be dispersed across main-verb semantics, nominal groups, adjectival predicates and prepositional circumstantials instead of being compactly packaged inside adverbial slots. This well-documented stylistic-typological mismatch generates recurring translational friction when transferring Chinese high-fusion predicate-adjunct chunks into target-language academic prose. Even if denotational dictionary equivalence can be found for each individual adverb, mechanical literal transfer often produces stylistic awkwardness and unwanted shifts in semantic prosody (Louw, 1993). It is worth emphasising that stylistic awkwardness is not merely a cosmetic problem. In academic outbound translation, distorted semantic prosody may reshape how international readers judge argument strength, certainty levels and institutional stances of the source-language scholarly text (House, 2015).

2.2 Synchronic re-grammaticalization in translational settings

Classic grammaticalization scholarship centres on diachronic, language-internal change, whereby lexical items gradually develop grammatical marker functions over extended historical timescales (Traugott, 2003). The analytical construct synchronic re-grammaticalization deployed in this paper must be sharply distinguished from natural diachronic grammaticalization. It describes a translator-driven, cross-linguistic translational phenomenon: semi-grammaticalized source-language modal meanings cannot retain their original lexicogrammatical carrier in the target-language system and therefore must relocate to alternative syntactic resources in order to preserve interpersonal-pragmatic function and source-text semantic prosody (Olohan, 2009).

This conceptualisation draws upon established descriptive-translation-studies thinking that treats translation as systemic lexicogrammatical remapping rather than word-for-word replacement (Chesterman, 2016; House, 2015). Source-language semi-grammaticalised modal-evaluative meanings lose their preferred surface-structure realisation in the target language, but their pragmatic-interpersonal functions remain relevant for the requirements of outbound academic publication. In the case of Chinese high-fusion modal adjuncts, evaluative-modal meaning is compactly packaged in pre-verbal adverb positions. In English academic writing, this evaluative weight cannot simply be transplanted as stacked pre-verbal adverbs; it must be redistributed onto main verbs, nominal groups, adjectival or prepositional structures. This carrier-shift does not erase original source-text inferences, institutional advocacy or evaluative judgements; it repackages those pragmatic-modal meanings using target-language-compatible lexicogrammatical resources. This repackaging operation constitutes synchronic re-grammaticalization within translational contexts.

A critical theoretical boundary needs to be highlighted. Synchronic re-grammaticalization in translation is not spontaneous natural language evolution. It is a deliberate translator-mediated reconstruction constrained by dual sets of demands: source-text pragmatic-evaluative requirements, on the one hand; target-genre academic stylistic norms, on the other (Olohan, 2009). Confusing translational restructuring with genuine diachronic grammaticalization would misapply grammaticalization theory far beyond its original domain of historical language change.

This study further operationalises synchronic re-grammaticalization via a two-tier compensation model, drawing on Chesterman's (2016) descriptive understanding of translation compensation. Compensation here does not mean adding explanatory footnotes or extra metatextual commentary. Instead, it refers to target-text internal translational adjustments designed to repair anticipated pragmatic-semantic losses. The two tiers consist of form-oriented compensation (cross-categorial grammatical-carrier reshuffling) and meaning-oriented referential-pragmatic calibration (restoring context-specific evaluative import). Both tiers must work in tandem to realise successful synchronic re-grammaticalization for modal-adjunct meanings.

III. TRANSLATIONAL CHALLENGES FOR CHINESE MODAL ADJUNCTS IN REGULATORY ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

Seventy valid modal-adjunct instances were manually screened from the source-text regulatory-theory chapter after corpus KWIC retrieval and manual human filtering. Non-modal descriptive adverbs were systematically excluded from the token set. Among these seventy valid tokens, 61 instances show high predicate-adjunct fusion, six show medium fusion, and only three instances fall into the low-fusion category. The imbalanced distribution itself is text-specific: government-regulatory Chinese academic prose heavily relies on high-fusion predicate-adjunct configurations to encode institutional evaluation, policy advocacy and causal-inferential judgements. Only 23 tokens (32.86 %) allow largely unproblematic literal adverb-for-adverb rendering. A substantial majority of tokens, 67.14 %, demand grammatical-carrier restructuring in translation. Two inter-connected major translational risks emerge from this corpus observation: syntactic form-mismatch, and pragmatic-semantic erosion accompanied by distorted semantic prosody (Louw, 1993). Semantic prosody denotes the consistent evaluative "aura" attached to lexical items through recurring collocational patterns; distorted prosody means the target text develops evaluative leanings not intended by the source-text author (Louw, 1993).

3.1 Syntactic form-mismatch: transplanting high-fusion "adjunct + predicate" chunks

Chinese government-regulatory academic writing frequently employs compact "modal-adjunct + predicate" surface-structure chunks. When these tightly fused chunks are mechanically transferred into English, sequences of pre-verbal adverbs appear. Such patterns clash against well-documented Anglophone academic stylistic conventions that discourage dense pre-verbal adverb stacking (Biber et al., 1999). Individual adverb lexemes may carry correct denotational dictionary glosses, yet stylistic dislocation takes place, and the target text bears traces of source-language interference, a well-known phenomenon within descriptive translation studies (Chesterman, 2016).

Example 1

Source Text (ST): 反之，监管监督体系繁杂、职责混乱，功能边界模糊，势必会导致监管监督的局部真空。

Literal Target Text (TT): Conversely, if the oversight system is cumbersome, responsibilities chaotic, and functional boundaries blurred, it will inevitably lead to local vacuums of oversight.

Shìbì is a high-fusion mood adjunct tightly semantically bonded to the predicate phrase expressing causal outcome. Lexically speaking, the adverb *inevitably* provides a plausible dictionary-level match. Nevertheless, the collocation *will inevitably* combines future-tense prediction with absolute necessity. As a result, a conditional high-probability inference from the source text is transformed into unconditional deterministic certainty. This transformation distorts the original cautious academic-inferential semantic prosody. It is worth noticing that this distortion is not a simple lexical mistake. It emerges purely from mechanically preserving the source-language high-fusion adjunct-predicate syntactic configuration in target-language output. Many student translators and even professional practitioners produce this type of rendering, misled by dictionary-based one-to-one lexical expectations.

3.2 Pragmatic-semantic erosion and semantic-prosody distortion

A large proportion of Chinese modal adjuncts in institutional-regulatory discourse carry institution-embedded pragmatic import that extends well beyond decontextualized dictionary-based literal glosses. Adjunct items may signal institutional reform momentum rather than individual psychological positivity; some markers signal illustrative evidentiary revelation instead of quantitative exhaustiveness; others emphasise substantive policy outcomes instead of generic factual "reality". If translators rely exclusively on isolated dictionary equivalents, governance-specific pragmatic nuance gets stripped away, and unintended semantic-prosody reshaping occurs (House, 2015). This type of loss is often harder to detect than obvious lexical mistranslation, because sentence denotation can remain superficially intact, while subtle evaluative-pragmatic meaning shifts go unnoticed during proof-reading.

Example 2

ST: 近年来，长春、济南相继出现震惊全国的假疫苗、假药品案，充分暴露出政府在相关领域的监管失灵。

Literal TT: In recent years, shocking cases of fake vaccines

and counterfeit medicines in Changchun and Jinan have fully exposed regulatory failures in these areas.

Within this evidentiary-illustrative context, the Chinese adjunct does not mean "exhaustive, quantitatively complete evidence". Its pragmatic-rhetorical function is to state that these high-profile real-world cases vividly lay bare pre-existing regulatory malfunction. Rendering it as *fully exposed* mis-frames the source-text rhetorical purpose and generates over-assertive semantic prosody. The literal translation misleadingly suggests that these two case examples constitute exhaustive, definitive proof of regulatory failure, a claim the original Chinese text never advances. For international academic readers, this shift may make the source-text author appear to overstate empirical findings, damaging the perceived scholarly credibility of Chinese regulatory-theory writing in outbound dissemination.

IV. COMPENSATORY TRANSLATION STRATEGIES FOR MODAL-ADJUNCT SYNCHRONIC RE-GRAMMATICALIZATION

To mitigate syntactic form-mismatch and pragmatic-semantic erosion, translation requires dual-layer compensatory handling: form-oriented compensation carries out cross-categorial grammatical-carrier shifts; meaning-oriented referential-pragmatic calibration restores context-specific evaluative import and appropriate semantic prosody. Only joint deployment of both analytical tiers can achieve synchronic re-grammaticalization for modal-adjunct meanings (Chesterman, 2016). It should be stressed that these strategies are not rigid mechanical rules for every lexical token. Translators must always refer back to co-text and institutional-discourse pragmatic context before making final rendering choices.

4.1 Form-oriented compensation: cross-categorial grammatical-carrier shifts

4.1.1 Predicate-absorption compensation (for high-fusion causal-evaluative adjuncts)

When high-fusion adjunct-predicate chunks encode strong causal or deontic evaluative force, translators may select main predicates inherently saturated with the corresponding modal weight. Modal-evaluative import originally residing inside the Chinese adverb is absorbed into English main-verb semantics. This removes the need for separate pre-verbal adverb markers and avoids adverb-stacking stylistic problems.

Example 3

ST: 没有监督的权力必然导致腐败，没有监督的监管不仅会腐败，而且是低效的。

Revised TT: The absence of supervision over power guarantees corruption; regulation without supervision breeds both corruption and inefficiency.

Analysis: The source-text adjunct *bìrán* is high-fusion and causally bonded with the predicate "lead to". The revised translation employs semantically heavy predicates *guarantees* and *breeds*. Causal-modal force migrates from the Chinese adverb slot into English main-verb semantics. Synchronic re-grammaticalization is accomplished, adverb stacking is avoided, and source-text causal-evaluative semantic prosody is fully preserved. This strategy works best for causal-deterministic high-fusion chunks. It would be inappropriate for purely subjective evaluative commentary, where predicate-absorption could over-solidify debatable judgements as inherent properties of entities.

4.1.2 Nominalization / adjectivization compensation (for potential-attribute meanings)

For adjuncts signalling latent potential or inherent attribute readings, translators may abandon adverbial form entirely and shift modal import into adjective-nominal bundles. Dynamic clausal evaluation is recast as static property description, consistent with well-known nominalising tendencies within English social-science prose (Biber et al., 1999).

Example 4

ST: 不同行业、阶层和地域的公民都可能对纳入政府监管的自己感兴趣的、利益相关的事务发表意见、形成舆论。

Revised TT: Citizens from different industries, social strata, and regions are potential contributors to public opinion formation when they express views on government-regulated matters of interest or related to their own interests.

Analysis: The source-text marker *kěnéng* operates as a low-fusion mood adjunct marking objective situational potential, rather than personal agentive ability or permission. A literal translation using modal verb *can* carries high risk

of pragmatic misreading, encouraging readers to interpret the clause as describing individual personal capability. Transferring potential-modal semantics to the adjective-noun collocation *potential contributors* relocates modal meaning away from adverb position and evades that pragmatic distortion. It is worth noting that nominalisation compensation must be handled cautiously: excessive nominalisation may produce overly dense, abstract English prose, so translators need to balance target-language nominalisation preference against readability requirements.

4.1.3 Fixed modal-phrase compensation (for conditional-probability inferences)

For adjuncts signalling high-probability conditional inference, English academic convention favours multi-word modal phrases over isolated single adverbs. This preserves strong inferential strength while maintaining the scholarly epistemic caution expected in academic argumentation (Hyland, 2005).

Example 5

ST: 反之，监管监督体系繁杂、职责混乱，功能边界模糊，势必会导致监管监督的局部真空。

Revised TT: Conversely, if the oversight system is cumbersome, responsibilities unclear, and functional boundaries blurred, a vacuum in certain areas of oversight is highly likely to emerge.

Analysis: The source-text item *shìbì* encodes high conditional probability rather than absolute deterministic inevitability. The fixed multi-word modal phrase *highly likely to emerge* retains strong inference yet avoids the categorical over-commitment produced by isolated adverb *inevitably*. This strategy aligns with Hyland's (2005) observation that Anglophone academic writers favour multi-word epistemic bundles over isolated adverbs for hedged high-probability claims.

4.1.4 Prepositional-comment-structure compensation (medium- / low-fusion policy-advocacy adjuncts)

Policy-advocacy-type adjuncts with partial syntactic detachability can be recoded into prepositional-phrase or sentential-comment structures. Modification formerly tightly attached to the predicate verb is upgraded to event-level circumstantiation modifying the whole institutional-building process, not merely the single predicate verb.

Example 6

ST: 积极建立各监督主体之间的工作联系制度，形成政府监管监督工作联系会议机制……

Revised TT: A working liaison system among all oversight actors shall be established in a proactive manner, which will institutionalize regular joint oversight meetings…

Analysis: The source-text adjunct *jījí* conveys institutional-level reform impetus, not individual human psychological enthusiasm. Rendered as the prepositional phrase *in a proactive manner*, it modifies the whole institutional-building event instead of merely the single verb *established*. The strategy fits medium-fusion policy-advocacy markers; for high-fusion causal markers, predicate-absorption usually delivers better stylistic outcomes.

4.2 Meaning-oriented compensation: referential-pragmatic calibration

Form-oriented compensation selects appropriate target-language syntactic homes for modal meaning. It must be complemented by referential-pragmatic calibration: translators need to diagnose what the adjunct actually evaluates within its immediate co-text, instead of mechanically importing static dictionary definitions (House, 2015). Even with correctly chosen grammatical carriers, if pragmatic-contextual function is misjudged, semantic-prosody distortion will still take place.

4.2.1 Evidentiary-argumentative calibration

Example 7

ST: 近年来，长春、济南相继出现震惊全国的假疫苗、假药品案，充分暴露出政府在相关领域的监管失灵。

Revised TT: In recent years, shocking cases of fake vaccines and counterfeit medicines in Changchun and Jinan have laid bare regulatory failures in these areas.

Analysis: As discussed earlier, in this evidentiary-illustrative co-text, *chōngfèn* marks vivid factual revelation via high-profile cases, not exhaustive evidential quantity. The verb-phrase *laid bare* captures that specific pragmatic function and rejects the literal gloss *fully*, which would exaggerate evidential completeness and skew argumentative prosody.

4.2.2 Outcome-oriented pragmatic calibration

Example 8

ST: …… 推动监督从被动向主动、从人力向科技的转变，以信息科技切实提高监督实效。

Revised TT: … promoting the shift of supervision from

passive to active and from manpower-based oversight to technology-enabled oversight, so that information technology can deliver real improvements in the effectiveness of supervision.

Analysis: The source-text adjunct *qièshí* stresses tangible policy-governance outcomes rather than generic abstract factuality. Rather than generic adverb equivalents such as *substantially*, *deliver real improvements in the effectiveness of supervision* focuses attention on tangible governance results, matching the source-text performance-centred policy-related semantic prosody.

4.3 Strategy-selection boundaries

Compensation strategies are not mechanically mapped onto individual lexemes. Selection depends jointly on two interacting dimensions: predicate-adjunct fusion grade plus context-specific pragmatic function:

- High-fusion causal-deontic evaluation → priority: predicate absorption
- Latent potential or attribute reading → priority: nominalization / adjectivization
- Conditional high-probability inference → priority: fixed modal-phrase restructuring
- Policy advocacy with partial syntactic separability → priority: prepositional-comment structures

Meaning-oriented referential-pragmatic calibration operates as an indispensable final quality-control check for all form-oriented adjustments, guarding against pragmatic distortion triggered by decontextualized dictionary glosses (Chesterman, 2016). No single strategy is universally superior; co-text, discourse genre and target-text publication expectations must always weigh in on translational decision-making.

V. DISCUSSION

Translational difficulties surrounding Chinese modal adjuncts stem from fundamental typological divergence between Chinese and English modal systems (Palmer, 2001; Li, 2007). Chinese politico-academic regulatory discourse frequently packages evaluative-modal meaning into compact pre-predicate adverbial slots, producing large numbers of high-fusion predicate-adjunct semantic chunks. By contrast, Anglophone social-science prose disperses interpersonal evaluative meaning across main verbs, nominalizations and prepositional-phrase resources (Biber et al., 1999; Hyland, 2005). Therefore translation involves meaning relocation: modal-evaluative import departs its source-language adverbial carrier and seeks alternative lexicogrammatical realisations within the target-language system. This relocation constitutes the core defining process of synchronic re-grammaticalization within translational contexts (Olohan, 2009).

This study enters into dialogue with existing SFL-informed Chinese-English translation scholarship. Much prior descriptive translation research drawing upon Systemic Functional Linguistics has concentrated heavily on modal-verb calibration. Modal adjuncts, by comparison, remain comparatively underexplored interpersonal-system components within Chinese-English outbound-translation studies. Corpus statistics from the present exploratory study demonstrate that over two-thirds of collected modal-adjunct tokens cannot safely retain adverb-for-adverb literal rendering. Mechanical literal transfer simultaneously generates target-text stylistic dislocation and erosion of governance-embedded pragmatic nuance. Predicate absorption, nominalization, fixed modal phrases and prepositional-comment structures constitute form-oriented synchronic re-grammaticalization tools; referential-pragmatic calibration secures preservation of context-bound evaluative import. Only combined deployment of both compensation tiers can reconcile English-academic stylistic norms with source-text argumentative-evaluative positions and appropriate semantic prosody (House, 2015).

It is theoretically vital to reiterate the conceptual boundary between translational synchronic re-grammaticalization and natural diachronic grammaticalization (Traugott, 2003; Olohan, 2009). The lexicogrammatical carrier remapping observed in this paper is translator-initiated synchronic cross-linguistic reconstruction. It is not spontaneous, language-internal historical evolutionary change. Maintaining this conceptual distinction prevents over-extension of classic grammaticalization theory beyond its original domain of long-term language-internal historical development.

This investigation carries several clear empirical and methodological limitations, which should be acknowledged explicitly for journal peer-review. First, the corpus dataset is confined to a single chapter of regulatory-theory

monograph writing. Fusion-grade token-distribution patterns will certainly vary across different politico-academic genres such as official white papers, policy speeches or news commentary. For that reason, the compensatory strategies presented in this paper constitute exploratory practical heuristics, not universal, universally applicable translation rules. Second, the source corpus contains very few pure comment-adjunct tokens (low-fusion instances only three out of seventy tokens). Future research built upon expanded multi-genre parallel datasets could deepen scholarly understanding of sentence-level metadiscursive comment-adjunct translation (Hyland, 2005). Third, evidence in this paper derives from translator-centred qualitative case-plus-corpus analysis; no target-audience reader-response experimental data are included. Follow-up research could adopt reader-response test instruments to empirically measure real-world persuasive-evaluative effects generated by alternative translation compensation choices.

For translation practitioners working on Chinese government-regulatory outbound-academic texts, this analysis advocates a deliberate two-step analytical workflow when processing Chinese politico-academic modal adjuncts. Step one: systematically assess predicate-adjunct fusion grade in source text to anticipate stylistic and pragmatic risks originating from mechanical literal adverb transfer. Step two: deliberately bracket dictionary-isolated glosses and diagnose concrete co-text-bound pragmatic function: causal inference? institutional-level policy advocacy? evidentiary-illustrative revelation? Functional-pragmatic diagnosis should logically precede selection of English lexicogrammatical carriers, rather than translators searching for direct adverb-for-adverb lexical equivalents. Such two-step reasoning facilitates complete synchronic re-grammaticalization of modal-adjunct meaning and protects source-text pragmatic-evaluative import during outbound academic translation.

VI. CONCLUSION

Modal adjuncts within Chinese politico-economic regulatory-academic texts realise multi-layered interpersonal-modal meanings including causal inference, institutional-level policy advocacy and factual-evidential evaluation. The widespread high-fusion "modal-adjunct + predicate" syntactic pattern creates two recurrent translational risks: syntactic stylistic mismatch on the surface level, together with erosion of institution-specific pragmatic import and distorted semantic prosody at the deeper pragmatic-rhetorical level.

From the synchronic re-grammaticalization analytical perspective, translating Chinese modal adjuncts consists in relocating semi-grammaticalized evaluative-modal meanings away from Chinese adverbial slots towards suitable alternative lexicogrammatical carriers within English academic prose. Practitioners can deploy a complementary two-tier compensatory analytical toolkit. At the level of form-oriented compensation, predicate absorption, nominalization/adjectivization, fixed modal-phrase restructuring and prepositional-comment constructions accomplish necessary cross-categorial grammatical-carrier shifts. At the level of meaning-oriented compensation, referential-pragmatic calibration restores context-driven evaluative import and semantic prosody, guarding against pragmatic distortions produced by over-reliance on decontextualized dictionary definitions.

This exploratory single-chapter-corpus-based case study yields micro-level practical operational heuristics for outbound translation of Chinese governance-focused social-science academic texts. Future research directions include enlarging parallel-corpus coverage across diverse politico-academic genres, and potentially incorporating reader-reception experimental testing to empirically measure real-world communicative and rhetorical impact brought by different modal-adjunct translation compensation strategies.

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Exile, Identity, and Postcolonial Consciousness in V. S. Naipaul's Fiction

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Abstract— *V. S. Naipaul is regarded as one of the foremost expatriate authors with direct colonial experience. Most of his novels address socio-cultural dilemmas in postcolonial contexts, providing a clear depiction of the inherent intricacies among marginalised communities. He outlines the challenges faced by Indian immigrants, including their difficulties and struggles in a rapidly evolving environment. His writings reveal the torment of an expatriate; the struggles of an individual seeking purpose and selfhood, an audacious spirit who has endeavoured to investigate legends and penetrate illusions. This academic paper will examine the socio-cultural themes in the works of V. S. Naipaul. This concerns the Caribbean societies as depicted by the diverse characters in the works of V. S. Naipaul. Nobel laureate Naipaul holds a significant position in postcolonial literature. His work Half a Life chronicles his experiences of exile and illustrates the interplay between subjectivity, geography, and language in relation to a multicultural and flexible identity. The current study will also investigate the emotional and cultural dialectics experienced by expatriates, drawing on specific works of V.S. Naipaul.*

Keywords— ***marginalised, exile, expatriate, illusions, postcolonial, Caribbean***

V. S. Naipaul was born into destitution in a rural Hindi-speaking region of Trinidad. His grandfather, an accomplished Brahman, offered his services from India to instruct Indian cane labourers in Trinidad. Seepersad Naipaul, father of V. S. Naipaul, was a journalist from the countryside and an author of short narratives. Seepersad Naipaul acquainted his son with profound literature and ingrained in him the belief that he ought to pursue a career in writing. He secured a Trinidad governmental scholarship in 1948. In 1950, he departed from Trinidad to pursue literary studies at Oxford University and has been in England ever since. He has composed various literary forms: the short story, the novella, the novel, the travelogue, the essay, the historical narrative, and the autobiographical piece. He has received numerous literary awards, such as the Booker Prize in 1971 and the Nobel Prize in 2001. Naipaul possesses various origins with which he only partially identifies.

This makes it harder for Naipaul to locate a place of belonging. The character of colonial schooling predisposed Naipaul to the tenets of English civilisation. In contrast, he is conscious of his Indian background and adopts a Hindu moral position in his works. Equally profound is his recognition of himself as a colonial subject. His colonial identification maps out the sites of his travels. For example, when visiting postcolonial countries, Naipaul reflects on not only the postcolonialism of those countries but also his own position. But Naipaul is not entirely of any of those backgrounds. And so, he goes around in circles looking for his roots. The diversity of her backgrounds leads to inconsistency and ambiguity in Naipaul's work.

Therefore, he discloses a persistent duality in his conception of imperial history: he views colonial rule both as an odious exploitation and as an obsolete ideal of order; he sees the metropolitan centre as both gratifying and treacherous. The author emphasises the importance of

rootlessness, mixed heritages, multiculturalism and ambiguous belonging. Cultural dislocation caused by imperialism leaves Naipaul feeling unsafe and without a secure identity. Naipaul embodies the effects of imperialism and the postcolonial age. This particular obsession was something V. S. Naipaul had experienced and always expressed in his literary work. He has spent his entire existence longing for a place to be connected. He has tried to discover himself through genealogy exploration, particularly in his native Caribbean, and pursuing his cultural heritage in India, culminating in his educational journey in England. V. S. Naipaul's cultural background is diverse, being of Indian descent, born in Trinidad and educated in England. As a colonial subject, he has consistently endeavoured to establish his identity in the world via the art of writing. His abundant and discerning literary works express colonial anxieties in his quest for self-identity. For him, journeying serves as a means of self-discovery and personal illumination.

In *In Finding the Centre*, V. S. Naipaul makes travel a crucial part of the process of self-discovery. He described the trip as luxurious, he said, 'Travel presented unexpected challenges for me as a person and writer, and perhaps for that reason, it quickly became a big source of inspiration. It broadened my outlook; it showed me a world in motion and freed me from my colonial shackles; it was a replacement for the profound social and cultural understanding, the heightened consciousness of a community, that my upbringing and life circumstances denied me'. In *Half a Life*, the protagonist Willie embarks on a quest for self-identity, developing his subjectivity through exploration, much like Naipaul. Like Naipaul, Willie leaves his native India as a teenager for England in search of his identity.

Afterwards, he traverses Africa and Germany to discover his rightful position in the world. Ultimately, he can boldly face his identity crisis and embrace his forthcoming existence. *A House for Mr Biswas*, examined through the lenses of societal, cultural, and existential dislocation and identity turmoil. It recounts the quest for autonomy and selfhood of a Brahmin Indian residing in Trinidad. The narrative takes place in Trinidad and chronicles the tale of three generations. The narrative closely connects to the contemporary issue of identity crisis. It depicts an individual's quest for genuine identity. The narrative delineates the persona of Mohun Biswas, the central character, as he endeavours to escape his sense of dislocation and attain a personal home. The 'home' represents one's identity and self-worth. It signifies an individual's heritage and cultural background.

Global cultural, economic, and political transformations led to the rise of Diaspora literature by prominent authors including Derek Walcott, Margaret Atwood, and V. S. Naipaul. These writers were of the generation who faced the problems of the collapse of colonial power and the consequent social chaos. Among all the above-mentioned diasporic authors, Naipaul appears to be unique in representing the common diasporic experiences in the famous post-colonial novels.

In his early works, V. S. Naipaul presents immigrants as broken and uprooted between their own and the foreign culture, and at the same time, entranced by the cultured world of the West. The text exposes the ambivalent nature of East-Indian expatriates in Trinidad seeking a sense of belonging and connection in the West. But the cultural disarray that seems to be present has been of interest to diasporic literature; however, Naipaul's depiction of these people who are on the margins of society is drawn from his experiences and is therefore especially authentic. Jasbir Jain explains:

> There is need to realize the significance of the cultural encounter which takes peace in diasporic writing, the bicultural pulls and creation of a new culture which finally emerges …. Diasporic writing has developed … a double vision …. The expatriate as he moves from one culture to another may need to locate … in relation to the centre. (15-16).

A House for Mr Biswas is a single story, but it is also an ethnic and social story. Simultaneously, it narrates a tale shaped by the author's exile. The exile and the need to rationalise it give rise to the novel's ethnic groups and social settings, as a critic has pointed out sharply, "One suspects that the world of *A House for Mr. Biswas* is one modelled upon a society from which the author has himself wished to escape, and that this attitude is the source of some of the over-emphasis in the construct" (Ramchand 46). The story is a communal history of the group of indentured labourers from India who replaced the freed Black slaves after the elimination of slavery in England in 1833. The story focuses on their ongoing isolation, commitment to traditional culture, and adherence to the principles of Hindu life.

Naipaul discusses Indian civilisation while neglecting the ancient wealth of Indian society, focusing instead on mundane aspects such as individuals defecating in public spaces. Consequently, he articulates:

> Indian defecates everywhere. They defecate, mostly besides the railway tracks. But they also defecate on the beaches; they defecate on the hills, they defecate on the riverbanks, they defecate on the streets, they never look for cover... These

> squatting figures... are never spoken of; they are not mentioned in novels or stories... But the truth is that Indians do not see those squatters. (178)

Naipaul gives us another insight into the Indian character by connecting it with what he calls 'the undeveloped'. In India, he says, caste and class are more than kinship; they define a person totally. The person is never alone; he is part of his community, subject to complex systems of laws, rituals and taboos. He especially points out the defined use of hands in India for different tasks, stating that the left hand is for intimate sexual intercourse, and the right hand is not. To him relationships are structured and rooted in religion, religious rituals, magic and animistic ideas.

Naipaul concerns about mimicry, asking Indians to break away from their culture and assert their independence. He also notes that people tend to make a connection between Hinduism and the caste system. The caste system is more a social than a religious institution. Naipaul regarded Mahatma Gandhi as ineffective, though he had been a campaigner for religious tolerance, the elimination of untouchability and a change in Hindu attitudes. He criticises Gandhi for protesting untouchability but maintaining silence regarding the caste system. Gandhi turned his attention to the disadvantaged and the untouchables, attacking the social malady at its roots.

The Indian commitment to traditions, which they rigorously observe due to their antiquity, significantly troubles Naipaul. This Indian perspective is articulated in the following manner, "Customs are to be maintained because they are felt to be ancient. This is continuity enough; it does not need to be supported by a cultivation of the past, and the old, however hallowed, be it a Gupta image or a string bed, is to be used until it can be used no more" (228). While contrasting India with Trinidad, he articulates that "caste was not such a big issue there, 'it had no meaning', whereas in India this concept was totally different, here caste played a major and decisive role" (289).

In India, individuals were often influenced by their caste, particularly when this was declared in advance, whether positively or negatively. However, the caste system in India differed significantly from Naipaul's experiences in Trinidad. In Trinidad, caste held little significance in our everyday existence; the caste he sometimes engaged with only recognised inherent traits, providing reassurance akin to that given by a palm reader or handwriting analyst. In India, it signified a harsh stratification of labour, and at its core, as he had previously overlooked, resided the humiliation of the latrine cleaners. In India, the caste system was distasteful; I had no desire to ascertain a person's caste.

Naipaul's characters endeavour to achieve European supremacy and wealth by imitating European cultural standards. By imitating Western society, individuals abandon their genuine identities without regret. Ralph Singh adopts a new identity solely to appear exceptional and compete with the Deschampsneufs. His true name is Ranjit Kripal Singh. He modifies his true name, Ranjit Kripal Singh. He partitioned Kripal Singh into two, included Ralph, and endorsed his name as R. R. K. Singh. Consequently, he metamorphosed into Ralph Singh. This undertaking of self-baptism exemplifies his attempts to transform both his destiny and his persona. The municipality, referred to as 'Kripalville' and named in honour of his father, is also misrepresented as 'crippleville'. He possesses knowledge of various facets of living in London. Ralph is a third-generation Hindu from Trinidad; the erosion of conventional values resulted in his estrangement. Ralph Singh attains political influence by dismantling the previous regime.

In conclusion, certain behaviours are universal due to their close connection to human psychology, which itself exhibits universal expressions. Cultural conflict occurs because of a radical difference in the beliefs of the people involved. That platform is offered by Diaspora. Exile, voluntary or involuntary, does create differences culturally. Naipaul describes the hardships of the expatriates. The difficulties of survival for these victims of the Diaspora are greatly increased, for a large part of their lives is spent on adapting themselves to an alien environment.

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Engagement Functions of AI-Generated Text from the Perspective of Appraisal Theory

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Abstract— *Within the framework of Appraisal Theory, this corpus-based study investigates the use and functions of engagement strategies in human-written and AI-generated academic discourse. A total of 190 academic texts (95 human-written from the BAWE corpus and 95 generated by DeepSeek-V3) were analyzed. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, involving both quantitative and qualitative analyses of Dialogic Expansion and Dialogic Contraction strategies. The results show that human writing contains significantly more engagement resources than AI-generated texts overall. This difference holds for both Dialogic Expansion and Dialogic Contraction. AI-generated texts also exhibit frequent vague Attribution and localized overuse of Proclaim resources. These patterns are associated with weaker stance construction, less effective dialogic negotiation, and weaker reader-oriented persuasion. Based on the observed differences, this study offers implications for academic writing instruction and human-AI collaboration.*

Keywords— ***Appraisal Theory, Engagement system, AI-generated text, academic writing, corpus-based study***

I. INTRODUCTION

Large Language Models (LLMs) have advanced rapidly in recent years, demonstrating substantially enhanced capabilities in language-intensive tasks such as translation, literary creation, and text polishing. Yet questions remain about their interpersonal and dialogic meaning-making in academic discourse. Even when state-of-the-art large language models produce grammatically fluent and logically coherent texts, readers can still discern subtle differences between AI-generated text and human writing.

The measurement of such differences takes two principal experimental approaches: human judgment and machine detection. Human-based methods typically present AI-generated and human-written texts to raters of varying academic proficiency for identification or scoring. Findings are markedly divided. Some scholars argue that the boundary between AI-generated and human language is increasingly blurred, and that AI can achieve levels indistinguishable from human writing (Köbis & Mossink, 2021). Even professional reviewers find it nontrivial to distinguish between the two (Casal & Kessler, 2023). Other scholars contend that AI writing actually surpasses human performance in academic contexts, yielding higher overall scores and overwhelming advantages in lexical richness, syntactic complexity, discourse cohesive devices, and grammatical error rate (Herbold et al., 2023). Still others maintain that AI texts are easily identifiable, as they exhibit serious defects both at the surface linguistic level (Turós et al., 2026; Qiu & Pan, 2026) and in pragmatic effects (Pütz & Esposito, 2024). This Turing-test-style "authenticity

judgment" is participants' subjective judgments. It does not focus on measurable linguistic features but relies heavily on subjective perceptions.

Machine detection, by contrast, employs tools to identify AI-generated texts through methods such as traditional machine-learning classifiers, BERT/RoBERTa fine-tuning, and perplexity-based detectors like GPTZero, achieving identification accuracy close to 99% (Berber Sardinha, 2024; Barrot & Aranda, 2025). Compared with human detection, these methods can detect AI-involved writing very precisely. Such studies have found that AI-generated texts feature higher frequencies of special symbol usage, greater lexical complexity, and longer and more complex sentences, but lack rhetorical and emotional expression (Zhang & Crosthwaite, 2026). These approaches do not interpret textual meaning; they cannot unpack the underlying intellectual substance of a text. In essence, they extract surface-level linguistic features from the text to classify its category. The linguistic difference between AI and human writing thus becomes a detection criterion, yet the underlying reasons for the difference remain unexplained. In other words, these detection methods answer the question "Was this written by AI?" rather than "Why does AI writing not read like human writing?" Addressing the latter question requires an analytical tool that can penetrate the linguistic surface and reach the communicative functions beneath.

From the perspective of Systemic Functional Linguistics, language fulfills three metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual (Halliday, 1985). AI texts generally convey propositional content fluently, although their factual accuracy may vary. However, AI-generated texts still exhibit deficiencies in interpersonal meaning-making, where authorial stance is required. Existing research has mostly focused on surface-level linguistic features such as lexical complexity, part-of-speech patterns, collocation, and sentence length, only a small number of studies have examined AI texts from the perspective of Appraisal Theory.

Against this backdrop, the present study draws on Martin and White's Appraisal Theory framework(Martin & White, 2007) to compare the use of engagement resources between AI-generated and human-written texts, with particular attention to whether these resources perform their communicative functions at specific discourse locations. The following research questions are addressed:

(1) What differences exist between AI-generated and human-written academic texts in terms of the realization of engagement?

(2) What patterns do these differences exhibit?

(3) What implications can be drawn from these patterns?

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Appraisal Theory represents a development in the study of interpersonal meaning within Systemic Functional Linguistics. The engagement system is concerned with the dialogic relationships among different voices in discourse. Through dialogic expansion and dialogic contraction, it regulates the dialogic space between the author's stance and other voices (Martin & White, 2007). Dialogic expansion and contraction directly address how writers acknowledge or suppress alternative positions, how they leave dialogic room for readers and other voices, and how they construct the multi-voiced negotiability that academic discourse should possess—which corresponds precisely to the interpersonal metafunction in Systemic Functional Linguistics.

Writers deploy engagement resources to express their own stance and, as members of a particular community, build a communicative bridge with readers. Texts that rely predominantly on monoglossic assertions with limited engagement resources tend to restrict heteroglossic dialogic space, and may fail to realize the negotiability expected in much academic argumentation. Monoglossic statements are themselves a legitimate rhetorical option in academic writing; the concern in AI-generated texts lies in their over-reliance on monogloss with insufficient heteroglossic negotiation. From the perspective of the Appraisal Theory, the most salient difference is that human-written texts typically carry richer interpersonal meaning, especially in terms of engagement resources. Compared with AI texts, humans use more diverse multi-voiced resources, for example, entertain and acknowledge, with a more balanced distribution of dialogic expansion and contraction, and with stronger reader-oriented stance expression.

Within the engagement system, which centers on heteroglossic voices, Dialogic Contraction strategies serve to close down or constrain dialogic space, while Dialogic

Expansion strategies open up space for alternative voices. contraction includes disclaim (deny and counter) and proclaim (pronounce, concur, and endorse), whereas Expansion includes entertain and attribute (acknowledge and distance), see Fig.1. This framework provides the analytical tool for examining how writers position themselves vis-à-vis alternative positions and how they negotiate the dialogic space of academic argumentation.

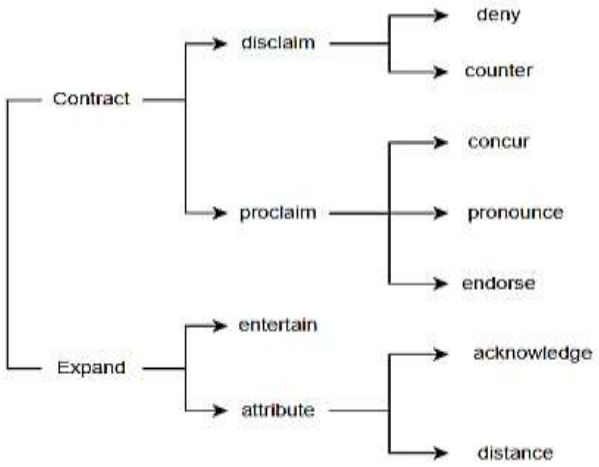


Fig.1: Engagement System

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars have explored engagement in academic writing primarily from two theoretical perspectives. The first is Martin and White's (2007) Appraisal Theory model, and the second is Hyland's (2005) interpersonal interaction model. Existing research has drawn on both models to investigate how academic writers position themselves in relation to readers, texts, and the academic discourse community. For instance, Jiang and Hyland (2025a), taking metadiscourse nouns as their analytical point of entry, found that ChatGPT prefers to use way nouns to describe research methods, processes, or forms, while students use state nouns for evaluative reasoning and evidential nouns to establish empirical foundations. This suggests that AI tends to describe "what is" rather than evaluate "how it is." Subsequently, Jiang and Hyland (2025b) compared ChatGPT-generated argumentative essays with those written by British university students and found that ChatGPT texts performed well in structural coherence and logical organization, but exhibited significantly lower frequencies of interactional metadiscourse, with marked reductions in hedges, boosters, and attitude markers. As a result, AI texts presented an impersonal expository tone, whereas student texts demonstrated stronger rhetorical engagement and reader interaction awareness.

A study of academic book reviews similarly confirmed that ChatGPT overall uses interactive metadiscourse more frequently, but this frequency stems from the overuse of attitude markers, while hedges and self-mentions are significantly insufficient. AI texts thus rely on overt evaluative language but lack nuanced deliberation and authorial presence (Yao & Liu, 2025). Cross-disciplinary abstract research has likewise noted that AI's weakness in interactive metadiscourse manifests as "limited stance modulation and reduced personal involvement," coupled with insufficient sensitivity to disciplinary rhetorical norms (Zhang & Zhang, 2025). These studies consistently point to the rhetorical shortcomings of AI texts: a bias toward expository expression, weakened authorial stance, and inadequate deployment of dialogic engagement strategies.

Although the interpersonal interaction model provides an effective analytical tool for examining authorial voice construction and reader engagement in academic texts, Martin and White's (2007) Appraisal Theory framework offers a more comprehensive account of engagement phenomena. It encompasses a rich repertoire of strategies and sub-strategies that can more fully interpret the author–reader interaction. Engagement is a key component of discourse construction: writers rely on engagement to conduct dialogic negotiation, establish credibility, and shape persuasive tone, thereby accomplishing meaning construction. Engagement research within Appraisal Theory examines how writers deploy linguistic resources to realize dialogic expansion and dialogic contraction, so as to participate in the academic discourse community.

Among existing studies on AI-generated texts, those specifically investigating engagement resources remain scarce. The present study compares engagement markers in human-written and AI-generated academic argumentative essays, focusing on Dialogic Expansion and Dialogic Contraction strategies.

IV. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Data Collection

This study examines whether the engagement and appraisal linguistic features invoked by AI-generated texts can serve

the interpersonal and persuasive communicative functions of the target texts.

First, a parallel comparable corpus was constructed. Human-written texts were drawn from the British Academic Written English (BAWE) corpus. A stratified sampling method was used to select 95 academic texts, covering 20 disciplinary themes and encompassing genres such as argumentative essays, critical reviews, expository texts, case studies, and research reports. The disciplinary range spans humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, medicine, and various applied sciences. Considering that large language models have been extensively used for academic text assistance since 2022, and to exclude interference from AI rewriting or polishing, all human-written texts were completed before 2022, thereby constructing a sub-corpus of pure human writing free from AI-assisted elements.

The DeepSeek-V3 model was selected to generate the AI sub-corpus. This model possesses strong language processing capabilities and can effectively capture internal logical relations and semantic features, enabling high-quality text generation under complex tasks and ensuring the stability and reliability of the corpus output. The AI sub-corpus follows the principle of parallel corpus construction, matching the human corpus one-to-one in terms of disciplinary theme, genre type, text number, and length. Standardized prompts were designed; taking a linguistics text as an example, the prompt is shown as below:

You are a student majoring in Linguistics (Discipline). Please compose an essay (Text-type) on the topic of "Chimpanzees can use signs but do they have language?" (Topic), with a word-count requirement of 500 (Word Count).

4.2. Data Coding

After the two sub-corpora were constructed, the UAM Corpus Tool was used as the annotation tool. Drawing on the engagement system within Martin and White's (2007) Appraisal Theory, lexical and grammatical forms of various engagement resources were retrieved and annotated, forming an initial engagement resource marker list. The engagement system focuses on dialogic relationships among different voices in discourse, primarily including Dialogic Expansion and Dialogic Contraction. To avoid misclassification based solely on surface forms, the annotation process was guided by Martin and White's (2007) distinction between engagement resources and propositional content, with each case judged individually in its specific discourse context.

Ten texts were randomly sampled from the two parallel corpora as a reliability-check sub-sample. Two graduate students in linguistics conducted independent annotation. The Cohen's Kappa coefficient was calculated as $k = 0.76$, indicating a high level of coding agreement.

4.3. Data Analysis

Following formal annotation, the study conducted a functional validity analysis of every engagement marker in both corpora. Each marker was examined for whether its claimed function was actually realized in context, thereby exploring how effectively the engagement resources generated by large language models function in actual academic communication.

V. RESULTS

Table 1 presents the basic information of the two corpora constructed in this study. Table 2 shows the raw and normalized frequencies of engagement resources across the two corpora. In terms of frequency data, the normalized frequency of engagement markers in human writing is 21.98 per 1000 words, compared with 12.69 in AI-generated texts. The difference is highly significant ($LL = 191.02$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that AI-generated texts deploy engagement resources considerably less frequently overall.

Table 1: Corpus Information

Corpus	Number of texts	Word count
Human-written	95	74016
AI-generated	95	74998

When broken down by subsystems, Dialogic Contraction resources in AI texts amount to only 3.97 per 1000 words, compared with 9.25 in human writing ($LL = 162.60$, $p < 0.001$), while Dialogic Expansion resources also occur significantly less frequently in AI texts (8.72 vs. 12.73 per 1000 words, $LL = 56.94$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, AI-generated texts are deficient in both dialogic expansion and contraction resources, with the shortage of contraction resources being particularly pronounced: AI contraction resources amount to only 42.9% of those in human writing, whereas expansion resources reach 68.5% of the human level.

Table 2: Frequencies of Engagement Resources

	Human raw count	Human normalized (/1000 words)	AI raw count	AI normalized (/1000 words)	LL	p
Engagement	1627	21.98	952	12.69	191.02	$p < 0.001$
Expansion	942	12.73	654	8.72	56.94	$p < 0.001$
Contraction	685	9.25	298	3.97	162.60	$p < 0.001$

VI. DISCUSSION

However, frequency differences alone cannot reveal functional differences. The core function of engagement resources lies not in their formal occurrence, but in whether they are grounded in a genuine anticipation of readers' knowledge states, reading difficulties, and potential questions, and whether they perform a real dialogic function at specific discourse positions.

6.1. Weakened Stance Construction

In academic discourse, the primary function of engagement resources is to help writers construct a recognizable and locatable academic stance. Whether through Attribution resources that introduce external voices, self-mention that marks the writer's research actions and judgments, or Dialogic Contraction resources that express degrees of certainty, the fundamental purpose is to enable readers to perceive "where the author stands." However, AI-generated texts exhibit a systematic weakening of this function, consistent with the overall scarcity of engagement resources observed in the corpus data (12.69 vs. 21.98, $p < 0.001$).

The most prominent manifestation is the extreme scarcity of first-person engagement. First-person engagement is the core means by which authors explicitly refer to themselves in discourse and project the self as an academic subject. Human writers use "I conducted semi-structured interviews" to mark research actions (Example 1), use "I don't believe" to express personal judgment (Example 2), and use "we can see that" to invite readers into shared reasoning (Example 3). Together, these resources construct an academic subject with a stance, a judgment, and dialogic awareness. AI, by contrast, almost entirely avoids first person, preferring "It is believed that" over "I believe that," and dissolving authorial presence through passive voice and impersonal structures. From the perspective of the engagement system, "It is believed that" is an acknowledge resource that attributes the proposition to a vague collective voice; while formally introducing an external voice, it substantively dissolves the author's own stance expression.

(1) I conducted semi-structured interviews with…

(2) Whilst there have been famous cases of chimps being taught to produce signs, I don't believe it can be said that chimpanzees have language.

(3) When looking at these design features with reference to chimpanzees, we can see that the sign language they are using does indeed confer to the rules of duality of patterning.

The inadequacy of attribution resources further weakens stance construction. Human writers typically specify the author, year, and content of the cited view, thereby introducing a genuinely identifiable dialogic partner into the discourse. AI, by contrast, frequently relies on vague attributions such as "Some scholars contend that" or "Research has shown that" (Examples 4 and 5). While such expressions formally introduce an external voice, they often fail to establish a substantive dialogic relationship with the actual academic community. Consequently, the academic foundation of the author's stance becomes less secure.

(4) For decades, primatological research has confirmed that…

(5) Some scholars contend that…

6.2. Illusory Multi-voiced Dialogic Negotiation

Academic discourse is essentially a site of multi-voiced negotiation. When advancing knowledge claims, writers need to acknowledge alternative positions and establish the legitimacy of their own views through dialogic engagement. Within the engagement system, Dialogic Expansion and Dialogic Contraction resources are precisely the linguistic mechanisms that realize such multi-voiced negotiation. In AI-generated texts, however, this function is markedly weakened.

The first manifestation is the overall scarcity of dialogic negotiation resources. As the frequency data show, AI texts deploy fewer engagement resources across the board (12.69 vs. 21.98, LL = 191.02, $p < 0.001$), indicating that AI-generated academic discourse is comparatively monologic. Within this overall scarcity, Dialogic Contraction resources are disproportionately depleted: AI contraction resources amount to only 42.9% of those in human writing (3.97 vs. 9.25, LL = 162.60, $p < 0.001$), while Dialogic Expansion resources reach 68.5% of the human level (8.72 vs. 12.73, LL = 56.94, $p < 0.001$). This pattern reveals that the multi-voiced negotiation of AI texts is doubly deficient: it lacks both the dialogic space opening provided by expansion resources and the dialogic space management provided by contraction resources. Yet the contraction deficit is more severe, meaning that AI writers are especially poor at deploying Proclaim and Disclaim resources to negotiate the boundaries of dialogic space.

A second manifestation is the functional imbalance within contraction resources. Although AI uses fewer contraction resources overall, the proclaim resources it does deploy are often misdirected. As Example (6) illustrates, the proclaim resource "remarkably profound" assigns an inappropriately high evaluative intensity to an ordinary experimental limitation, constituting clear overstatement.

(6) This experimental limitation brings remarkably profound influences to the research paradigm.

The force of the tone is grossly disproportionate to the importance of the proposition itself, failing to reflect the actual argumentative context. From the engagement system perspective, "remarkably profound," as a proclaim strategy within Dialogic Contraction, should function "to strengthen the certainty of a proposition on the basis of sufficient evidence." However, the proposition here merely describes an experimental limitation and does not possess the argumentative necessity that warrants such strengthening. This excessive contraction produces an unnecessary compression of dialogic space, preventing readers from perceiving the author's prudent assessment of the proposition's certainty. Moreover, the entertain and proclaim resources triggered by AI result in convoluted sentences with unclear focus, creating "tone noise" that interferes with readers' information reception.

The "pseudo-dialogue" of Attribution resources further hollows out multi-voiced negotiation. Examples (4) and (5) retain the formal attribution frame but provide no specific source, failing to fulfill the dialogic function that acknowledge resources are supposed to perform in the engagement system. Such pseudo-attribution creates an illusion of multi-voicedness without actually introducing an identifiable, answerable external voice; the dialogic negotiation thus loses its real adversarial counterpart. Such an acknowledge resource not only traces the information source but also introduces a genuinely identifiable dialogic partner into the discourse, laying the groundwork for subsequent negotiation, counterargument, or extended discussion.

The absence of coordination between first-person engagement and multi-voiced negotiation resources leaves multi-voiced negotiation without a subject to sustain it. Human writers use "I don't believe" to refute while acknowledging the opposing view, demonstrating the coordinated operation of Dialogic Contraction and Expansion. AI texts as a whole present monologic contraction: the dialogic space is occupied by a single voice, and multi-voiced negotiation exists in name only.

6.3. Failed Reader-oriented Rhetorical Persuasion

The ultimate orientation of engagement resources is the reader. Academic writing is a special form of dialogue in which authors, through engagement resources, anticipate readers' knowledge states, reading difficulties, and potential questions, and accordingly select rhetorical strategies to achieve persuasion. In Martin's terms, this anticipatory orientation can be captured through the notion of the putative reader—the reader position that a text construes for itself through its deployment of engagement resources. AI-generated texts exhibit a clear failure in this function.

The reduced overall frequency of Entertain resources in AI texts (8.72 vs. 12.73, $p < 0.001$) already signals a weakened capacity to acknowledge readers' possible alternative positions. Yet functional examination reveals that even the entertain resources that do appear in AI texts are not grounded in genuine reader anticipation. Human writers' use of Entertain resources is grounded in anticipation of readers' psychological states—adding hedges where readers may be skeptical, inserting reminders where

attention may wander, and deploying rhetorical questions where critical thinking is stimulated. AI's entertain resources are more a probabilistic matching of high-frequency modal and evidential patterns from training data than context-sensitive communicative behavior. The resources appear, but reader awareness is not genuinely present.

The absence of rhetorical questions is a typical manifestation of this persuasion failure. In Example (7), the human author constructs a multi-voiced negotiation dialogic space through consecutive questions: "Then what are the effects…?" prompts reader reflection, "Is it really so beneficial…?" challenges an existing stance, and "Or to what extent…?" further opens up the possibility of alternative positions. These rhetorical questions, as entertain strategies within Dialogic Expansion, acknowledge the existence of alternative positions and guide readers into evaluating those positions through questioning.

(7) Then what are the effects of transformational leadership in practice? Is it really so beneficial as 'indispensable' for organizational effectiveness? Or to what extent can it be viewed as 'unnecessary' and even potentially 'a dangerous curse'?

By contrast, AI writing more often adopts impersonal objective statements and avoids rhetorical questions. AI is monologic in essence: it has no genuine dialogic interlocutor. This means that although AI texts may be information-dense, they lack the warmth of genuine exchange and the spark of intellectual collision.

The failure of persuasion is also evident in the disconnection between Dialogic Contraction and reader anticipation. Proper Dialogic Contraction should be grounded in the anticipation of potential reader objections—where writers anticipate that readers will raise objections, they respond with evidence and argument, thereby accomplishing persuasion. AI's proclaim resource usage is not grounded in such anticipation but in probability-driven over-assertion. When AI does deploy contraction resources, it tends to use them where they are unwarranted, while failing to deploy them where they would genuinely persuade, that is, at points where readers are likely to object.

VII. CONCLUSION

Regarding the first research question, the study finds that AI-generated academic texts deploy engagement resources significantly less frequently overall than human-written texts, and this scarcity cuts across both Dialogic Expansion and Dialogic Contraction, with the contraction deficit being more pronounced. On the positive side, AI can construct well-layered textual structures and convey information with a surface neutrality that readers may find efficient. However, these advantages operate only at the linguistic formal level and still require human verification. In terms of actual communicative function, the deployment of AI engagement resources is not consistently effective and frequently reveals problems such as hollowed-out acknowledge, misdirected proclaim, formalistic entertain, and deficient first-person engagement. The reason lies in the fact that AI has not yet acquired human theory-of-mind reasoning and academic subjectivity; relying solely on statistical probabilities to replicate engagement resource templates cannot establish a genuine dialogic connection between engagement resources and discourse content, nor can it fully reproduce the speculative core and communicative value embodied in human writing.

In terms of the second research question, AI engagement resources generally exhibit the characteristic of formally replicating human usage while functioning within limited bounds, forming a distinctive style of AI discourse—namely, overall underuse of engagement resources, disproportionate contraction deficit, vague attribution, misdirected Proclaim, low person reference, and weak multi-voicedness. AI language need not be regarded as a clumsy copy of human language; it may gradually develop its own independent style. When humans use it, they should treat it as a resource rather than a substitute, and must not abandon verification and judgment merely because the output is fluent and neat.

For the third research question, the differences between AI and human engagement resource usage offer implications for student academic writing and AI-assisted writing. First, for student academic writing, the use of engagement resources should not mechanically replicate template expressions but should be deployed in context as needed. Students should be aware that both expansion and contraction resources are essential for building a credible

academic stance and negotiating with readers; an overall scarcity of engagement resources results in monologic, impersonal prose. Second, in AI-assisted academic writing scenarios, the human–machine collaboration model requires users to develop discriminatory awareness. One should leverage AI's efficiency advantages in text structuring and preliminary information integration, but must remain vigilant regarding the information AI outputs, especially its tendency to underuse dialogic negotiation resources and to deploy Proclaim where it is unwarranted. AI can provide scaffolding for text structuring and language polishing, while humans undertake the core tasks of academic judgment, logical reasoning, stance construction, and reader-oriented communication. AI excels at formal-level text organization; humans excel at context-sensitive speculation and interpersonal dialogue. Each has its strengths; the relationship is not one of simple substitution but of complementary collaboration.

From a human-centered perspective, people aspire to anthropomorphize artificial intelligence. They hope that the internal mechanisms and representational forms of models will emerge toward a "human-like mind," pursuing more human-like experiential expression and perceptual capacities. However, artificial intelligence currently cannot fully simulate the human mind, and therefore a certain gap remains between its linguistic expression and human expression. We cannot directly equate a higher degree of "anthropomorphism" in AI language with good language quality. Even humans cannot serve as a single gold standard. The present study's examination from the engagement perspective is primarily intended to reveal differences rather than to judge good or bad. As technology continues to develop, AI's human-like cognition, emotional expression, and reader awareness may strengthen, and generating texts indistinguishable from human writing is not impossible. The closer that day comes, the more humans must maintain critical scrutiny—benefiting from its efficiency while safeguarding the responsibility, judgment, and dialogicality inherent in language.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, AI texts were generated solely by DeepSeek-V3 with standardized prompts, so findings may not generalize to other LLM architectures or prompting regimes. Second, human texts were sampled from the pre-2022 BAWE corpus, restricting diversity in writer backgrounds and genres. Third, annotation focused only on explicit lexical-grammatical engagement realizations; implicit engagement and overlaps between the Engagement and Graduation systems were left unexamined. Fourth, functional validity evaluations are interpretive. Although inter-annotator agreement for formal marker annotation was satisfactory, this measure derives from a relatively small subsample and does not apply separately to functional validity coding.

Future research could extend this work by adopting multiple LLMs and varied prompting regimes to test the generalizability of engagement-related patterns. It would also be fruitful to incorporate human blind-rating experiments to link textual linguistic features to readers' real-world perceptions.

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From Human to Divine: The Transformative Dimensions of Love in Gitanjali by Rabindranath Tagore

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Abstract— *This article "From Human to Divine: The Transformative Dimensions of Love in Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali" examines love as a dynamic and multidimensional experience that moves progressively from the human and mundane toward the spiritual and divine. Rather than presenting love as a single, fixed emotion, Tagore explores its varied manifestations through affection, innocence, sacrifice, longing, loss, nature, universal compassion and transcendence. The article particularly examines maternal love and the innocence of childhood, highlighting the self-negating and selfless dimensions of a mother's love. It further explores the presence of the Divine in nature, where the material world becomes a medium through which spiritual love is experienced. The recurring themes of love, loss, separation and longing are examined through Tagore's representation of the beloved, whose identity remains deliberately ambiguous between a human lover and the Divine. This ambiguity enables the poems to move fluidly between earthly and spiritual registers of love. The article also considers the expansion of personal affection into love for all humanity, suggesting a movement from individual attachment toward universal love and spiritual fellowship. Finally, it examines Tagore's treatment of death as a transformative experience through which the boundaries between life and eternity are transcended and union with the Divine becomes possible. The study argues that in Gitanjali, love is not merely an emotion but a transformative spiritual force that enables the individual to move from the mundane to the divine, from the self to the universal, and ultimately from separation to transcendental union.*

Keywords— ***Transformative dimensions of love, ambiguous beloved, universal love, death and transcendence, divine union.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali often understood as a collection of "song offerings" presents love as a complex and evolving experience that moves between the human and the spiritual. Rather than restricting love to romantic affection, Tagore explores its diverse shades through romantic, philosophical, maternal, devotional and selfless forms of love. The poems reveal a gradual movement from the individual and the personal towards the universal and divine. Human affection, desire, Innocence become starting points for a deeper spiritual quest, in which the boundaries between the self and the Divine begin to dissolve. Tagore's vision is grounded in the conviction that God is not confined to a distant or abstract realm but is present in the world around us – in nature, in human relationships, in ordinary experiences and in the rhythms of life. Thus ,the mundane becomes a site of spiritual revelation, and earthly love acquires a transcendental dimension. The beloved in Gitanjali, consequently remains deliberately ambiguous, at times the language suggests a human beloved, while at other moments the beloved clearly assumes the presence of the Divine. This ambiguity enables Tagore to weave romantic and devotional sensibilities together and to present love as a continuum between human experience and spiritual realization.

At the heart of Gitanjali lies the idea of yielding and surrender. The speaker repeatedly seeks to overcome the limitations of the individual self by offering himself to the Divine, transforming love from an act of possession into an act of self-giving. The "song offerings" become symbolic of this process of yielding- the human self offers its desires, pride, attachments and ultimately its very existence to the Beloved. In this movement, love gradually expands from love of the self and the individual other to compassion for all and finally to universal love. Tagore's treatment of death forms the culmination of this transformative journey. Death is not represented merely as an end or a source of fear; instead it can become the final act of surrender through which separation is overcome and union with God is imagined. Love therefore becomes a bridge between life and death, the finite and the infinite, the human and the divine. Gitanjali, ultimately suggests that love cannot be reduced to a single emotion, it is a transformative spiritual force through which he self moves from attachment to surrender, from the personal to the universal, and from the human toward the Divine.

The Earthly Dimensions of Love

Tagore initially locates love within the realm of human experience, presenting it as physical, intimate, emotional and deeply rooted in desire. The human heart experiences love through attachment, attraction, longing and the intense desire for the presence of the beloved. At this level, love remains essentially earthly rather than explicitly spiritual. The beloved is perceived as someone whose physical and emotional presence is continually desired and separation creates a sense of incompleteness within the lover. Such love belongs to the ordinary experiences of the laity grounded in the emotions and desires that shape human relationships. Tagore does not dismiss this earthly dimensions of love, rather he acknowledges their intensity and their capacity to occupy the consciousness of the individual. The craving for the beloved's presence reveals the vulnerability of the human heart, which seeks fulfillment through intimacy and emotional connection.

The experience of earthly love in Gitanjali is therefore characterized by a persistent tension between presence and absence, fulfillment and longing. The lover's desire is not satisfied merely by the knowledge that the beloved exists; what is sought is an immediate and intimate presence. The beloved becomes the centre of emotional attention, while, separation heightens desire and deepens attachment. In this sense, physical love represents the most immediate form of human longing; it emerges from the senses, the emotions and the individual's need for closeness. Yet this intense craving for the beloved also provides the foundation for Tagore's larger exploration of love. The emotional vocabulary of earthly affection - desire, intimacy, attachment, absence and longing - gradually acquires a deeper significance as the poems move beyond the merely physical. The human heart's craving for the beloved thus becomes the starting point for a transformative movement in which earthly love can eventually open itself to a more expansive and spiritual understanding of love.

From Physical Longing to Divine Yearning

In Gitanjali, love is deeply intertwined with loss, separation, absence and yearning for the beloved. The absence of the beloved produces a profound emotional devastation, revealing the vulnerability of the lover who constantly craves the presence pf the beloved. At the initial level, this yearning is rooted in physical and emotional desire, the lover longs to see, approach and experience the beloved through intimate presence. However, Tagore gradually transforms the earthly craving into a spiritual quest. The absence of the beloved does not merely intensify the desire for physical reunion; instead it turns the lover inward and awakens a deeper awareness of a presence that transcends physical form. The longing for the physical beloved thus becomes a longing for the invisible Divine. What begins as a desire for physical proximity gradually develops into an awareness of spiritual presence, where the Divine is experienced even in moments of apparent absence. Separation, therefore, assumes a paradoxical significance in Gitanjali, although it create pain and emotional loss. It also becomes a means of spiritual awakening. The earthly lover's yearning ultimately exceeds the limits of the physical and moves towards Divine communion transforming love from personal attachment into spiritual longing.

The Ambiguity of the Beloved

One of the most distinctive features of Gitanjali is the ambiguous identity of the beloved which allows Tagore to move fluidly between romantic and spiritual modes of love. Throughout the poems the beloved is represented through language of intimacy, desire, absence and longing that may initially suggest a human or romantic relationship. Yet the emotional intensity directed towards this beloved gradually raises a question: is the lover addressing a human beloved or the Divine? This uncertainty is central to Tagore's poetic vision. The beloved can be understood simultaneously as a figure of human affection and as a manifestation of God, allowing physical and spiritual dimensions of love to coexist. The romantic lover consequently begins to resemble a devotee, while the language of personal desire acquires a personal desire acquires a devotional significance. What appears at

first to be a longing for the presence of another human being gradually becomes a longing for the presence of od. The ambiguity is therefore not a weakness or uncertainty in Tagore's poetry: rather, it becomes a deliberate poetic strategy through which the boundaries between human and divine love are dissolved.

The transformation of the beloved also corresponds to a transformation in the nature of desire itself. At the human level, love may originate in the urge to possess, physical attraction and the pursuit of personal pleasure, but in Gitanjali the desires gradually moves towards a higher form of spiritual love. The lover's desire to possess the beloved gives way to the desire to surrender to the beloved, marking the transformation from romantic attachment to devotion. Physical longing is not thus simply rejected,it is sublimated and redirected towards spiritual fulfillment. The lover becomes a devotee whose deepest aspiration is no longer possession, but communion with the Divine. Personal desire expands into a more selfless form of love in which the beloved is valued not as an object of gratification but as the source of spiritual realization. In this movement from lover to devotee, possession to surrender, physical pleasure to devotion, and personal desire to divine communion, Tagore demonstrates how earthly love can become a pathway to a higher level of spiritual experience.

Surrendering the Self: Love and Spiritual Awakening

In Gitanjali, the transformation of love is closely connected with the dissolution of the ego. At the beginning of the lover's journey, love may be accompanied by the desire to possess the beloved and assert the self through attachment. However, as love moves from the physical and personal towards the spiritual, the impulse to possess gradually gives way to the willingness to surrender. The individual comes to recognize that the self, with its pride, desires and claims of possession, cannot attain higher spiritual fulfillment through self-assertion. Tagore presents surrender as an acknowledgement of a reality greater than the individual self: there is a Divine presence above and beyond the limited "I" The supreme ego, therefore cannot remain at the centre of existence. Through humility and self-surrender, the individual begins to overcome the illusion of separateness and recognizes the presence of the Divine within and beyond the self. Love becomes transformative precisely because it changes the lover from one who seeks to possess into one who is willing to yield.

This surrender involves a profound movement from self-centredness to spiritual awareness. The individual realizes that true fulfillment cannot be achieved through pride, possession or the assertion of personal will, but through the relinquishment of the ego before God. The yielding or prostrating oneself before the Divine symbolizes the complete submission of the individual self and the recognition of a higher spiritual reality. In this sense surrender is not an expression of weakness but a means of liberation: by releasing the limitations of the ego, the individual becomes capable of experiencing a deeper relationship with the Divine. The transformation from the desire to possess the beloved to the desire to surrender to the Beloved marks a decisive shift from physical love to spiritual devotion. Thus, in Gitanjali, love becomes a force that dissolves pride, replaces self-centredness with humility, and enables the lover to move beyond the limited self towards Divine consciousness.

Nature as the manifestation of the Divine

Nature occupies an important place in Tagore's vision of love in Gitanjali, where the natural world becomes a visible expression of an invisible Divine presence. The speaker gradually moves beyond merely admiring the beauty of the natural world to recognizing God within and through it. Flowers, birds, rivers, sunlight, seasons, the sky and the changing rhythms of the earth become sources of divine inspiration, solace and comfort. Nature is therefore not presented merely as anaesthetic backdrop but as a living medium through which the individual encounters the sacred. In this respect, Tagore's treatment of nature may be compared with appropriate qualification to the pantheistic or nature-spiritual vision associated with William Wordsworth, in which the natural world can reveal a spiritual presence beyond its physical appearance. Yet Tagore's emphasis is particularly devotional: nature becomes an embodiment or reflection of Divine love, enabling the human being to experience God's presence in the ordinary world. The beauty of nature thus becomes inseparable from the beauty and love of the Divine.

The speaker's relationship with love consequently develops from that of an admirer of natural beauty to a seeker of Divine presence within nature. The physical world becomes a point of contact between the finite self and the infinite, allowing the individual to move from sensory appreciation to spiritual communion. Nature functions as a mediator between the physical and the divine, its visible forms awaken an awareness of invisible reality. The contemplation of a flower, the movement of a river, the light of dawn or the song of a bird can therefore become an occasion for recognizing the presence of the Beloved. In this transformation, love of nature becomes a form of love of God, because the natural world is perceived as permeated by the Divine. Tagore thus dissolves the rigid distinction between the material and the

spiritual, suggesting that the path to God need not lie outside everyday existence; rather the Divine can be encountered in and through the world itself/Nature becomes both a source of emotional consolation and a spiritual pathway, guiding the lover the appreciation of the physical world towards communion with the Divine.

The Divine in the Other

The transformation of personal love into Divine love ultimately extends beyond the relationship between the individual and the beloved to embrace all living beings. Once the presence of the Divine is recognized not merely in the beloved but in the world at large, love acquires q universal dimension. The individual begins to perceive every human being as equally created an sustained by God, thereby weakening the distinctions created by ego, status wealth and social position. Personal attachment gradually gives way to compassion, and selfish desire is replaced by an awareness of the interconnectedness of all existence. In this sense Tagore's conception of divine love is not confined to private communion with God. Spiritual realization finds its fullest expression in an active concern for others, particularly those who are neglected. marginalised and deprived. The movement from love of the beloved to love of humanity demonstrates that the Divine cannot be fully encountered through isolated spiritual experience, rather the recognition of God in others becomes an essential dimension of genuine devotion.

Tagore therefore presents service to humanity as an extension and fulfillment of spiritual love. Love becomes complete only when the individual sheds the ego and turns outward towards the needs and suffering of others. Compassion, service and fellowship become ways of experiencing the Divine in everyday life. The purpose of spiritual existence is consequently not merely to seek personal salvation or remain absorbed in a private relationship with God, but to discover God through service to humanity. By serving others without selfish expectation, the individual transcends the boundaries of the isolated self and experience a deeper sense of spiritual fulfillment. The underprivileged and marginalized thus become significant within Tagore's spiritual vision because responding to their suffering becomes an act of love towards the Divine itself. To love humanity is to love God manifested in humanity, and to serve humanity is to participate in that Divine love. The journey of love therefore reaches its mature form when personal desire has been transformed into compassion, ego into selflessness, and devotion into service. In Tagore's vision , the satisfaction of the spiritual quest lies not in possessing God but in finding the Divine through loving and serving others.

The Journey beyond the Mortal

In the poems love ultimately extends beyond the boundaries of earthly existence and finds its highest expression in the acceptance of death. Tagore does not portray death simply as an end or the annihilation of the individual; rather death is imagined as a return to the Maker, a homecoming to the source from which life originates. The intense attachment to earthly existence and the fear of separation gradually give way to acceptance when the individual recognizes death as a passage towards the Divine. The beloved who has been sought through human relationships, nature, longing and devotion is finally encountered in a realm beyond physical existence. Death thus becomes another dimension of the lover's journey, carrying the individual away from the limitations of the earthly world and towards the embrace or lap of God. The language of return suggests that the individual does not simply cease to exist but moves towards a higher state of spiritual fulfillment.

The acceptance of death also represents the culmination of the dissolution of ego and the surrender of the self. Having learned to relinquish possessiveness, pride and attachment, the individual becomes prepared to surrender the final possession - the self itself. The fear of death diminishes because death is no longer perceived as separation but as a possible moment of union with the Supreme. The finite self seeks to merge with the infinite, transforming death from a fearful termination into an experience of transcendence. In this sense love and death are closely connected; love teaches the individual to surrender, while death becomes the ultimate act of surrender through which earthly limitations are overcome. The journey from human love to divine love therefore reaches its final stage in the movement from life towards transcendence. Death becomes the threshold between the finite and the infinite, separation and union, earthly existence and spiritual fulfillment, allowing the lover to return to the Divine source and complete the transformative journey of love.

The Universalization of Love

The different shades of love explored in Gitanjali reveal a gradual movement from individual and personal love towards universal love. The journey begins with the human self and its experiences of affection, desire, attachment and longing, but gradually moves beyond the boundaries of the individual. Physical and emotional love becomes a starting point for a deeper spiritual experience in which the beloved is no longer perceived merely as an individual but as a manifestation of the Divine. The

recognition of God's presence in nature, in human relationships, and in all forms of life expands the meaning of love beyond personal attachment. Thus the lover's initial concern with the self and the individual beloved is transformed into an awareness of a large spiritual unity. Love is no longer directed towards one particular person but towards the world and all beings within it. The movement from physical love to spiritual love therefore represents not a rejection of earthly affection but its gradual expansion into a more inclusive and transcendent form.

This transformation reaches its fullest expression through devotion, surrender and selflessness. As the individual becomes conscious of the Divine presence everywhere, the desire to possess or claim the beloved gives way to the willingness to surrender the self. Devotion becomes a means of overcoming ego, selfishness and the limitations of the individual identity. The lover gradually recognizes that true spiritual fulfillment lies not in possession, but in yielding oneself to the Divine and embracing a universal bond with all creation. The journey from individual love to universal love therefore parallel the movement from self to other, physical to spiritual, possession to surrender and individuality to Divine unity. At its highest stage, love transcends even the distinction between lover and beloved, as the individual seeks to merge with the Supreme. In this sense Tagore presents love as a transformative spiritual force through which the isolated self expands into universal consciousness and ultimately moves toward union with God.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of love in Rabindranath Tagore's Gitanjali reveals that love cannot be understood as a single fixed emotion. It is a dynamic and transformative experience that passes through several stages beginning with individual and earthly affection and gradually expanding into spiritual, divine and universal love. The different shades of love -physical and emotional attachment, longing and separation, maternal affection, love of nature, devotion, compassion and selfless service - are interconnected within a larger spiritual journey. What begins as a desire for the presence of an individual beloved gradually develops into an awareness of the Divine presence in nature, humanity and existence itself. The ambiguous identity of the beloved enables Tagore to dissolve the rigid distinction between human and divine love, allowing the romantic lover to evolve into the devotee. Thus physical desire is transformed into spiritual longing, personal attachment into universal compassion and possession into surrender.

The culmination of this transformative journey lies in the dissolution of the individual self and the transcendence of its boundaries. Through surrender, humility, selflessness and devotion, the ego gradually loses its claim to separation and possession. The lover no longer seeks merely to possess the beloved but seeks to surrender the self and become united with the Divine. Even death, within this vision is transformed from an ending of a passage towards transcendence and union with God. Love consequently becomes the force though which the boundaries between self and othe, human and divine, individual and universal, life and death are gradually overcome. Gitanjali ultimately presents love as a movement from the self to the Divine, from the Divine to all creation and from separation to union. Tagore/s vision therefore establishes love not merely as an emotional experience but as a profound spiritual process through which the individual transcends the limitations of the self and moves towards the realization of universal love and ultimate communion with God.

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Historiographic Metafiction, Paratext and the Politics of Retelling in the Bharat Novels of Ashwin Sanghi

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Abstract— *This paper approaches Ashwin Sanghi's Bharat Collection not primarily as an instance of mythological fiction, as most existing criticism does, but as a body of historiographic metafiction in Linda Hutcheon's sense: fiction that is at once self-consciously artificial and insistently anchored to verifiable historical and mythic referents. Reading Chanakya's Chant, The Krishna Key and The Ayodhya Alliance through this lens, the paper identifies a recurring palimpsest structure in which a modern character or plot is laid, almost stencil-like, over an ancient one, so that the present is legible only as a repetition or completion of the past. It further examines the paratextual apparatus author's notes, bibliographies, acknowledgements of historians and archaeologists through which Sanghi stakes a rhetorical claim to historicity that his fiction's postmodern self-reflexivity simultaneously destabilises. The paper argues that this tension between claimed authenticity and acknowledged invention is the central, productive contradiction of Sanghi's project, and that it is this contradiction, rather than mythological content alone, that accounts for both his popular success and his ambiguous critical standing as the writer often labelled 'the Indian Dan Brown.'*

Keywords— ***historiographic metafiction, Ashwin Sanghi, palimpsest, paratext, Linda Hutcheon, self-reflexivity, Indian English fiction, Chanakya's Chant***

I. INTRODUCTION

Ashwin Sanghi is routinely described in the Indian press and by his own publishers as an author who blends "history and mystery" the phrase used, for instance, as the title of a widely circulated interview in which Sanghi discusses his research method a formula that captures the genre expectations his readers bring to the Bharat Collection but says little about the specific formal mechanism by which that blend is achieved. Popular accounts of his work tend to stop at content-level description: they note that he "weaves historical events and mythological stories into his novels" and that his style relies on "multiple perspectives and timelines" and "incorporation of real historical and mythological texts," but they treat these as inventory items rather than as parts of a coherent formal strategy. This paper proposes that the strategy is best understood through the critical vocabulary of historiographic metafiction, and that attending to it shifts the interpretive question away from what myths and histories Sanghi retells the question that has dominated existing scholarship on his mythological content, including the euhemerist and 'Bharati Fantasy' readings that situate him alongside Amish Tripathi and Anand Neelakantan towards how his fiction manages the always-uneasy relationship between its claim to historical truth and its status as invented narrative.

This distinction matters because Sanghi's own public self-presentation actively courts the ambiguity the paper investigates. In interviews he emphasises a research process that can run to six or nine months before a single chapter is written, and his novels close with author's notes that carefully separate documented fact from narrative invention; yet the plots those notes accompany are unabashedly speculative, hinging on causal links between

ancient events and modern conspiracies that no historian would endorse. A purely content-focused account of Sanghi's mythological borrowings cannot explain this dual gesture of scholarly claim and open invention, because the gesture is not made at the level of content but at the level of form in the way each novel is structured, framed and footnoted. Historiographic metafiction, as a critical term coined precisely to describe fiction that performs this doubled relationship to the historical record, therefore offers a more precise instrument than genre labels such as 'mythological thriller' for analysing what Sanghi's novels actually do.

The paper proceeds in four stages, drawing its primary examples from three novels spanning the length of Sanghi's career Chanakya's Chant (2010), The Krishna Key (2012) and The Ayodhya Alliance (2025) chosen because each pairs a well-documented historical or scriptural source with an explicit, structurally foregrounded modern parallel. The paper first outlines Linda Hutcheon's concept of historiographic metafiction and considers its applicability to popular, rather than strictly literary, postmodern fiction, a question Hutcheon's own account leaves more open than is often assumed. It then identifies a recurring 'palimpsest' structure across these novels, in which ancient and modern characters are mapped onto one another almost point for point, such that the modern plot becomes legible only as an overwriting of the ancient one. Third, it examines the paratextual devices author's notes, bibliographies, and public statements about research method through which Sanghi asserts historicity even as his plots foreground invention, treating these paratexts as evidence in their own right rather than as mere marketing. Finally, it considers the gendered and national dimensions of this palimpsest structure, before concluding with an assessment of what the historiographic-metafiction lens contributes that a purely mythological reading of Sanghi's fiction does not.

II. HISTORIOGRAPHIC METAFICTION AS A CRITICAL FRAME

The term historiographic metafiction was coined by the Canadian theorist Linda Hutcheon in her 1988 study A Poetics of Postmodernism, and elaborated further in her contemporaneous essay of the same name.

Hutcheon's foundational formulation describes the mode as encompassing *"well-known and popular novels"* that are *"intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages"* (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 5). Two features of this definition deserve emphasis for the present argument. First, Hutcheon explicitly locates the mode within "well-known and popular" fiction rather than confining it to an avant-garde literary elite, which licenses the extension of the term, attempted in this paper, to a commercially oriented conspiracy-thriller writer such as Sanghi rather than restricting it to the more obviously experimental novelists Salman Rushdie, Michael Ondaatje, John Fowles, E. L. Doctorow, A. S. Byatt and Umberto Eco among them through whom the category is most often illustrated in the critical literature. Second, the definition insists on a paradox rather than a compromise: historiographic metafiction does not moderate between fiction and history by softening its claims to either, but holds the two claims that the text is self-consciously invented, and that it is nonetheless bound to a real historical record in simultaneous and unresolved tension.

Hutcheon elsewhere characterises this tension as a form of 'installing and then subverting' conventions of both realist historical fiction and pure textual self-reflexivity, so that the boundary between the two is repeatedly drawn only to be blurred. Canonical instances of the mode identified in the subsequent critical literature the novels of Rushdie, Ondaatje and Eco prominent among them tend to enact this tension at the level of narrative voice: through unreliable or multiple narrators, through explicit authorial intrusion questioning the reliability of the very history being narrated, and through footnotes, bibliographies or invented documents inserted to parody the apparatus of professional historiography. It is this voice-level self-reflexivity, more than the fact of historical reference as such, that most criticism treats as the diagnostic feature of the mode, and it is also this feature that appears, at first glance, to be largely absent from Sanghi's prose.

Sanghi's fiction sits at a productive distance from this canonical, voice-centred model. His narrators are not unreliable in the modernist or high-postmodern sense; his prose does not foreground doubt about what happened, does not stage competing versions of the same event, and rarely interrupts its own storytelling to comment on the constructedness of history as such. Read only at the level of sentence and narrating voice, then, Sanghi's novels would seem to fall outside Hutcheon's category altogether, more properly classed with the straightforwardly realist historical thriller than with the self-conscious historiographic metafiction of Rushdie or Eco. Yet this paper argues that Sanghi's novels reproduce the defining Hutcheonian paradox at a different level of textual organisation the level of structure rather than voice. Each Bharat novel insists, through its dual-timeline architecture, that a specific historical or mythic event actually occurred substantially as narrated, while simultaneously admitting, through author's notes, acknowledgements and interviews,

that the causal chain connecting that ancient event to the present-day conspiracy plot is the novelist's own invention. The self-reflexive admission of fictionality that Rushdie or Ondaatje builds into the sentence, in other words, Sanghi builds into the seam between his two timelines and into the paratext that frames them.

Sanghi's fiction is, in this sense, best described as historiographic metafiction adapted to or transplanted into the register of the popular conspiracy thriller. This generic transplantation helps explain two otherwise puzzling features of his reception: the mass readership his novels command despite tackling material (Vedic cosmology, Zoroastrian migration, Mauryan statecraft) that might seem to demand a more literary register; and the relative inattention his fiction has received from academic critics trained, by the very canon Hutcheon helped establish, to look for metafictional self-reflexivity in the sentence and the narrating voice rather than in the architecture of the plot and the apparatus of the paratext. The remainder of this paper develops that structural and paratextual analysis in detail.

III. THE PALIMPSEST STRUCTURE: MAPPING THE PAST ONTO THE PRESENT

The clearest instance of this structural self-reflexivity is Chanakya's Chant, in which the ancient narrative of Chanakya's tutelage of Chandragupta Maurya is mapped almost point-for-point onto a contemporary narrative of the political fixer Pandit Gangasagar Mishra grooming the politician Chandini Gupta for supreme office. The modern characters' names echoing ‘Chandragupta’ and gesturing towards Chanakya's own legend signal to the reader that the two plots are to be read as versions of a single recurring pattern rather than as separate stories linked by theme alone. A comparable, if less onomastically explicit, mirroring structures The Krishna Key, where the contemporary investigators' path through clues embedded in Krishna's biography effectively re-enacts, in decoding form, the mythic narrative itself; and The Ayodhya Alliance, where the modern seekers Aditya Pillai and Somi Kim occupy the structural position of contemporary claimants to a secret first entrusted, in the ancient strand, to Lakshmana by the dying Ravana.

Table 1. The palimpsest structure: ancient figures and their modern mirrors

Ancient Strand	Modern Mirror	Shared Function	Novel
Chanakya, the strategist-mentor	Pandit Gangasagar Mishra, the political fixer	Architect of a ruler's rise from obscurity to supreme power	Chanakya's Chant
Chandragupta Maurya, the chosen ruler	Chandini Gupta, the mentored politician	The protégé who inherits the mentor's design for power	Chanakya's Chant
Krishna, the strategist-avatar	Contemporary investigators decoding his legacy	The past life read as an instruction manual for the present	The Krishna Key
Ravana, keeper of the Dvaitalingam secret	Aditya Pillai and Somi Kim, present-day seekers	Guardianship and pursuit of forbidden or lost knowledge	The Ayodhya Alliance

This palimpsest technique performs the core operation of historiographic metafiction identified by Hutcheon: it ‘installs and then subverts’ the boundary between the historical and the invented. The ancient strand is presented with the trappings of historical or scriptural authority, while the modern strand, built from wholly fictional characters, borrows that authority by structural resemblance rather than factual claim. The reader is thus asked to hold both a historicist and a fictive attitude towards the same underlying pattern precisely the double consciousness Hutcheon identifies as constitutive of the mode.

IV. PARATEXT AND THE RHETORIC OF AUTHENTICITY

Sanghi reinforces this double consciousness through an extensive paratextual apparatus. His novels characteristically conclude with author's notes distinguishing historically attested material from invented plot elements, and his public statements consistently emphasise a lengthy, near-scholarly research phase by his own account, six to nine months of research preceding any writing that lends his fiction the rhetorical authority of non-fiction even as the plots themselves remain openly speculative. This paratextual strategy can be read as a popular-fiction analogue to the scholarly apparatus (footnotes, bibliographies, archival citation) that historiographic metafiction in its literary-canonical form

often parodies or partially adopts; where a Rushdie or an Eco tends to deploy such apparatus ironically, Sanghi deploys it largely in earnest, as a genuine warrant of diligence aimed at a readership that, as his publishers' own marketing repeatedly stresses, wants to feel it is learning real history and mythology while reading a thriller.

The effect is a peculiar and commercially productive instability: the paratext asks to be trusted as scholarship, while the plot openly announces its own invention. Sanghi's frequent designation in the Indian press as "the Indian Dan Brown" captures exactly this instability, since Brown's fiction is popularly associated with precisely the same claim-and-disclaim relationship to historical and religious fact that this paper identifies as Sanghi's structural signature.

V. GENDER, NATIONAL ALLEGORY AND THE LIMITS OF THE PALIMPSEST

The palimpsest structure is not ideologically neutral. In Chanakya's Chant, the substitution of a female protégé (Chandini Gupta) for the historical Chandragupta Maurya while retaining a male mentor figure in the Gangasagar Mishra role stages an implicit argument about the persistence of older, patriarchal structures of political tutelage even as the gender of the ruling figure changes the pattern of power is shown to be more durable than the identity of any single actor within it. More broadly, because each Bharat novel ties a mythic or ancient secret to the present-day fortunes of the Indian nation-state its politics in Chanakya's Chant, its defence capability in The Ayodhya Alliance the palimpsest technique functions as a form of national allegory, in which the recurrence of ancient patterns in modern plots implicitly naturalises a continuous, essentialised national character stretching from itihasa to the present. This allegorical dimension is where the historiographic-metafiction lens developed here most directly complements, rather than replaces, existing euhemerist readings of Sanghi's mythological content: the palimpsest is the formal technique, and the civilisational-continuity thesis is the ideological payload it delivers.

VI. CONCLUSION

Reading Ashwin Sanghi's Bharat Collection as historiographic metafiction rather than as mythological fiction alone brings into focus a structural signature the point-for-point mapping of ancient figures onto modern ones, reinforced by a paratextual rhetoric of scholarly authenticity that is easy to overlook when criticism focuses only on which myths a given novel retells. This palimpsest technique allows Sanghi's fiction to claim historical seriousness and to enjoy the freedoms of invention simultaneously, a double move that this paper has argued is the true source of both his mass popularity and the persistent critical uncertainty about how seriously to take his historical claims. Future work might extend this analysis through close comparison of Sanghi's author's notes across the full Bharat Collection, tracking how explicitly he demarcates fact from invention as the series' civilisational ambitions grow, and through comparative study of paratextual strategy across other practitioners of the global historical-conspiracy thriller.

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Pluralistic Heritage and Cultural Diversity in Literary Landmarks of Shashi Tharoor

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Abstract— *India is a land of diverse culture, language, religion and multiple regional and indigenous identities which define the country as Unity in Diversity. All these existing identities in the nation are connected with each other through a shared democratic history and as per Tharoor they more or less appear like a platter of various dishes. Tharoor's core idea emphasizes the thought that India and its essence of Indianism is defined purely by the idea of embracing multiple identities. He popularly uses the term thali to represent India as a harmonious whole. The idea if India's unique multiculturalism has been reinforced in his works Riot and India: From Midnight to Millennium. The present research paper is an attempt to reflect Tharoor's perspective of Pluralism and Cultural Diversity in his literary landmarks reflecting the Pluralistic concept of Hinduism and Cultural Inclusivity of India.*

Keywords— ***Cultural Diversity, Multiculturalism, Pluralism, Identity***

The idea of India is not based on language,
not on geography, not on ethnicity and not on religion.
The idea of India is of one land embracing many.

On the global platform India has been reputed to represent a parallel universal power balance but internally the idea seems to be shattered and shaken by the disorders and petty conflicts ion nation on casteism and class discrimination fired by sudden religious and communal riots. In most of the speeches delivered by Shashi Tharoor India's greatness having a majestic past and a promising future of the challenges and global opportunities has been signified. However the destiny of the nation takes a to and fro step every time when there is a question of Pluralism and cultural diversity working together to achieve as a whole. At this instant the think to wonder about it is that how India will foresee its future in the midst of dystopia fuelled by massacres and massive annihilation. As Tharoor puts up strongly in his own words in *India: From Midnight to Millennium*:

> We were brought up to take this for granted, and to reject the communalism that had partitioned the nation when the British left. In rejecting the case for Pakistan, Indian nationalism also rejected the very idea that religion should be a determinant of nationhood. We never fell into the insidious trap of agreeing that, since Partition had established a state for the Muslims, what remained was the state for the Hindus. To accept the idea of India, you had to spurn the logic that had divided the country.

The idea is the basis of Tharoor's lifetime literary mission where he strongly believes in embracing rather than accommodating and assimilating. Tharoor has emphasized cultural confrontation and interaction to learn and grow and this has always been his idea of the global vision. His work Riot has the central theme of the contrasting features of the west and the east culture where the American protagonist of the novel Priscilla Hart falls in love with an Indian District Magistrate Lakshman. Both Priscilla nd Laxman represent the two diverse cultural attitudes towards love, sex and marriage along with their struggles to achieve identities as Indians and individuals in Indian society.

Laxman is quite comfortable to lead his entire life with Priscilla but he is unable to forgo completely his Indian identity which makes him, conscious of the cultural gap existing between him and Priscilla along with a vast difference in their outlook towards life and values. This represents a strong cultural clash between the east and the West, but Tharoor neither gives preference to East nor to west and in fact he focuses his entire attention on the diversity of Pluralistic Indian and its realities in Postcolonial India.

Throughout the novel he restricts to be judgemental and shapes the novel as an unprejudiced work. The idea of cultural riot has been reflected through the characters of Laxman and Priscilla as on one hand Priscilla is indifferent towards Laxamn's past and present and she is least concerned about the cultural differences despiet which she madly loves Laxman but it is Laxman who seems to be torn between his family responsibility and love for Priscilla. Laxman is haunted by Priscilla's past which she does not hide and tells him very honestly. He reflects : *"It was not lightness I felt at her revelations. I had known all along that her life must have been something like this, an American Life" (82).* Laxman goes through the loss of sense of selfhood and insecurity due to which he is unable to accept Priscilla. Laxman is torn between his cultures and despite his efforts he remained knitted to the Indian culture.

Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* by Shashi Tharoor speaks of past , present and future existence . The novel is an account of the pre independent and post independent history which begins with the arrival of Gandhi on the political stage along with his moral politics and ends finally with the moral degradation of his followers and successors . Through the novel Tharoor tries to emphasize the roles played by various political figures and thoughts in evolution of Indian culture and the formation of Indian nation what people see today. Tharoor admits that for this novel he had taken Mahabharata as the basis as he strongly believed that it was a secular narrative that consisted of intriguing characters reflecting human flaws like greed, jealousy, resentment, power play and deceit which one can witness in every political scene (Geeta Pandey).

The concept and ideology of Pluralism is strongly connected with the liberal democracies in which it speaks against the concentration of power in any elite or group of elites and believes that power must be dispersed equally among a variety of economic and ideological pressure groups so that it can be enjoyed by functional and cultural groups within a diversity. Pluralism was a reaction against Capitalism by group of writers Frederic Maitland, Samuel G Hobson , Harold Laski and Howard Cole who spoke for the alienation of the individuals under Capitalism. They felt the necessity for integrating the individuals in the social context to give them a sense of community.

As per the concepts of modern economy Tharoor views India as hybrids that is managing and balancing the market forces or capital powers with social welfare or socialism. Therefore he always advocates for pragmatic approach which should make best use of Capitalism to generate growth and ensure social justice and equality. Tharoor is not purely an idealist and he firmly believes that the lived experience of the people is far more important than the theories of socialism and capitalism therefore he envisions a society where less people fall through the cracks. Not only India is a cultural hybridity but also an economic hybridity for him and as per his own words it is an amalgam of market forces and state intervention. On a historical perspective Tharoor explains that Indian nationalists did not trust Capitalism as the British came to India for trade but later they stayed and ruled the nation , therefore capitalism is concentration of power in few hands that limits the freedom leading to economic exploitation.

Tharoor describes India as a land of belonging rather than that of blood. It is a nation which according to him has sustained a shared history and believes in Pluralistic Democracy. The secularism of the country is a profusion of religions and none of them are privileged by the state. Therefore the idea of a single religion is impossible in a culturally diverse state like India and as history knows this was only the main reason behind the Partition of the nation into separate states of Hindus and Muslims.

Throwing light upon the concept of Pluralism in India and the Pluralistic Democracy he speaks that this aspect allows citizens to hold multiple and non conflicting identities simultaneously like an individual can be a good Muslim, a good Keralite and also a good Indian at a time. Tharoor main idealism and message for the upcoming generations is to preserve Pluralism calling it essential for the nation's survival. He speaks:

> My generation grew up in an India where our sense of nationhood lay in the simple thought: That the singular thing about India was that you could only speak of it in the plural. This pluralism emerged from the very nature of the country; it was made inevitable by India's geography and reaffirmed by its history. There was simply too much of both to permit a single, exclusionist nationalism. (*India- From Midnight to Millennium*)

In his first hand article he writes that in India everything exists in countless variations and there is no single way of life and culture therefore Pluralism is acknowledged in the country in the way India arranges its all affairs whether it is taste, faith, religion or ideologies. Tharoor elaborates that India is not just a country but an adventure where all avenues are open and everything is possible. According to the British historian E P Thompson, *" There is not a thought that is being thought in the West or East that is not active in some Indian mind."*

Tharoor reflects that Pluralism emerges from the very nature of the country India therefore it is a synonymous thought which is an integral part of the nation. It has a deep impact of the British Raj, the vedic age and ancient Hindu times, Islam and Christianity and the result is unique . Many observers and thinkers in the west are greatly astonished at India's survival as a pluralist society. The name of the country itself has been derived from the River Indus that flows in Pakistan and was once the part of nation. There is an anomaly in this explanation and many other explanations also breed anomalies in them.

The singularity of India has always stood for peace and could be described as the very embodiment of peace in a war mongering war stricken world – an oasis in the desert of unending. India is a land where history, myth, and legend of so many different religious sects and philosophical themes overlap so much so that sometimes Indians themselves cannot tell the difference.

Since centuries, many saints from India across all religions have always advocated peaceful coexistence as the only key to many problems of the country. However, since the turn of last century there has been a nationwide wave of fanaticism and bigotry, open and fearless expressions of religious intolerance and hidden forces fully active creating deep rifts between hitherto peaceful communities.

One after the other, there or here, these or those incidents creeping up like catastrophic mushrooms further widening the old gaping wounds in the minds of two major religious groups of India both burdened with centuries of bitter memories and baying for the blood of each other. The tragedy is further aggravated by governmental lethargy verging on indifference leading to insidious support and encouragement to religious factions creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear psychosis.

The danger is so real and tangible yet officially brushed off as insignificant exaggerations. Added to this is the mounting tension at the borders shared with a hostile country that is absurdly provocative and unreasonably uncouth and hitching for a nuclear confrontation. Further exacerbating the situation is the fact that external mercenary groups working secretly underground to undermine the very integrity of the great nation. Add to this the uneducated and unqualified milieu of politicians and a hysteric media - that completes the picture of the ugly side of the modern India.

However, the actual image abroad of India and Indians is totally a different one in the present world. From the international perspective, India is a utopia of endless possibilities, the most promising land of future potentials and a unique nation that has the control to change the power balance of the planet. Tharoor explains in his own words what Secularism means for India and how with changing times its facets have changed in the nation:

Western dictionaries defined secularism as th absence of religion, but Indian secularism meant a profusion of religions, none of which was privileged by the state. Religion was too pervasive in the popular culture for unreligion to become public policy, despite the open agnosticism of Nehru. But the notion that religion had no *place* in public policy was easily accepted in India, where the distinction between God and Caesar had been enshrined since time immemorial.

Speaking upon the idea of minorities and majorities in India Tharoor puts up in very simple words that all are minorities in India and there is nothing like majority. Whether he is a typical Indian stepping off a train, a Hindi speaking individual from Uttar Pradesh might sometimes cherish that he is representing a majority but that is not true because as a Hindu he belongs to the faith adhered to by some 82% of the population, but a majority of the country does not speak Hindi; a majority does not hail from Uttar Pradesh; and if he were visiting, say, Kerala, he would discover that a majority is not even male. Worse. our archetypal UP. He reflects :

> How can one approach the India of snow peaks and tropical jungles, with seventeen major languages and 22,000 district "dialects" (some spoken by more people than Danish or Norwegian), inhabited by nearly 940 million individuals of every ethnic extraction known to humanity? How does one come to terms with a country whose population is 51% illiterate but which has educated the world's second-largest pool of trained scientists and engineers, whose teeming cities overflow while four out of five Indians scratch a living from the soil?

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Toxic Grounds, Stolen Lands: The Anthropocene, Industrial Dispossession, and Adivasi Resistance in Indra Sinha's *Animal's People* and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's *The Adivasi Wil Not Dance*

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Abstract— *The extractive logic of modernity has always rendered the landscapes and communities as sites of exploitation and destruction. Anthropocene, industrial capitalism and environmental destruction converge most smoothly at the margins, subjecting both the landscapes and the communities to the worst possible effects of this inextricable trio. This paper examines the convergence of anthropocene, industrial capitalism and environmental destruction in Indra Sinha's Animal's People and Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's The Adivasi will not Dance, arguing that the Anthropocene as a category of planetary crisis can be best understood in the post-colonial context where industrial extraction for human advancement takes the space of prime importance. Reading these two texts through the frameworks of Anthropocene theory and post-colonial ecocriticism, particularly Rob Nixon's concept of 'slow violence' and subaltern studies forwarded by Gayatri Spivak and others, this paper argues that both these narratives cannot be exclusively defined by anthropocentricism; rather can be best understood by the concept of 'stratified anthropocentricism' where the ecological catastrophes are borne by the marginalized castes and communities of the society. Both these texts stage the Adivasi and subaltern bodies as the site where the violence of industrial capitalism become visceral. Based on these frameworks, this paper contends that the 'toxic grounds' and 'stolen lands' are not incidental settings but active protagonists featuring the sad story of dispossession spearheaded by corporate and state powers. The paper also intends to explore how the texts resist reducing the communities to ecological ruins. Drawing on the theories of Anthropocene, environmental justice and Adivasi studies, this paper argues that these texts reframe the epoch not as a story of undifferentiated human agency but one of industrial dispossession, where resistance becomes a means of reclaiming land, story and selfhood.*

Keywords— ***Anthropocene, Industrial extraction, land dispossession, slow violence, ecological catastrophes, marginalized castes and Adivasi communities.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Ecocriticism as a theoretical perspective is based on the assumption that literature does not merely reflect environmental crisis but also actively participates in the cultural imaginaries that produce and sustain it. Where earlier literary criticism had nature as a backdrop or a metaphor, ecocriticism insists read nature as a space of contested meaning that is shaped by and continuously shaping the material relationship between human and non-human world. This paper studies this relation to examine how anthropocentricism, environmental destruction and industrial capitalism converge as both a lived crisis and a crisis of representation.

Anthropocentricism, in this context, can thus be read as a narrative habit that keeps the human world at the centrality and celebrating its superiority over non-human

world. Ecocritical scholarship has always argued that the narrative habit of prioritizing human world over the non-human is inseparable from the material logics of industrial capitalism which requires nature in its most passive form for its extraction. The clear forest and the voice less landscape are, in this sense, twin products of the same imaginative failure to grant the non-human world the space of superiority and agency.

Both the texts under consideration explicitly depict industrialization's dependence on resources for its continuation. Chemical feedstock and cheap labour in *Animal's People* and coal mines and land in "The Adivasi Will Not Dance" serve as the fuel for the rapid industrial progress as depicted in these texts. However, the texts work in binaries; they beautifully bring forth the resistance that the industrialization provokes in the community of the dispossessed. In this context the paper addresses composite theoretical framework combining Anthropocene with postcolonial studies and subaltern theory. It also offers a close reading of *Animal's People* as a narrative of slow violence and 'The Adivasi Will Not Dance' as a narrative of land, extraction and the politics of refusal. The study finally attempts to conclude with the converging and diverging points in these two texts' approaches to environmental destruction and resistance.

Research Objectives

The study aims to explore how both the texts under consideration depict anthropocentricism in post-colonial settings. It also endeavours to investigate how the marginalized sections are the worst affected because of such environmental exploitation, extensive mining and deforestation. It further aims to study how the marginalized communities face these challenges and respond to them. The study also aims to make a comparative study between the two texts to show how the marginalized and affected communities stage resistance against such exploitative postcolonial practices.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Anthropocene as an area of study has increasingly turned toward postcolonial literature, interrogating the concept's universal implications. Dipesh Chakraborty's foundational essay, "The Climate of History: Four Theses" (2009), frames Anthropocene as a phase that demands human beings to be considered as a single geological species. However, postcolonial eco-critics strongly challenge this inequality and aim at erasing this historical inequality. Ron Nixon in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (2011), argues that environmental harm in the Global South is usually 'slow violence', the impact of environmental harm is gradual, graded, slow and dispersed and hence hardly becomes visible to the naked eyes. Indra Sinha's *Animal's People*, in this context bears the witness of slow violence of the tragic industrial disaster and the leakage of toxic gas, the impact of which is still visible in the people and society even after two decades of the tragic incident.

Scholarship on Adivasi literature, however, approaches Anthropocene from a different disciplinary angle that is strongly rooted in subaltern and indigenous studies rather than ecocriticism as such. Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), remains the main theoretical bedrock for the critical interrogation of the impact of land mining and deforestation for a power plant in Hansda Shekhar's "The Adivasi Will Not Dance". Virinius Xaxa and Ramachandra Guha's extensive work on Adivasi land rights and the political ecology of Jharkhand provide the historical and material context for Sowvendra's short story. Contrasting Xaxa and Guha, the scholars of the North East Adivai literature argue that Adivasi literature engaging with the land rights of the Adivasis can not be categorised a 'nature writing', rather they should be read as assertion of 'cosmological and territorial sovereignty', the roots of which can be traced to Walter Mignolo's account of coloniality.

Comparative treatments of the two tests remain relatively sparse. Studies had been focused on urban industrial disaster as in Bhopal gas tragedy and rural land dispossession and Adivasi displacement as a part of postcolonial ecocriticism's engagement with corporate accountability and the latter into subaltern and indigenous studies' concern with land, cosmology and cultural erasure. This study tries to examine the impact of modern industrial progress that turns the human body as the site of slow violence, land dispossession and resistance against them.

III. METHODOLGY

3.1 Research Design

The study uses a qualitative comparative research design to analyse industrialization's dependence on resources for its continuation and evaluate how nature becomes a space of contested meaning that is shaped by and continuously shaping the material relationship between human and non-human world. The methodology that the study adopts is a comparative study of two texts to examine how anthropocentricism, environmental destruction and industrial capitalism converge as both a lived crisis and a crisis of representation and diverge in their ways of resistance.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

3.2.1Anthropocene and its Dissatisfaction

The term 'Anthropocene' as coined and popularised by Paul

Crutzen, is concerned with an epoch in which human industrial activity has left a permanent ecological imbalance. It highlights how industrialization, urbanisation, deforestation, fossil-fuel consumption, pollution, intensive agriculture and mass production have affected the natural eco system. Anthropocene scholarship also believes that while humans are responsible for this imbalance, it's the affluent population that owns and controls industrialisation have contributed disproportionately to the environmental change. In this sense, as postcolonial ecocritics have mentioned,' stratified' or 'differentiated' Anthropocene becomes an important point to consider. Both the texts indicate this stratified Anthropocene where it is not only Man extracting natural resources but also how human driven state and capital structures extract resources and land from tribal populations.

3.2.2 Subalternity and Epistemic Resistance

Subaltern theory examines the experiences, voices that are continuously suppressed and forms of resistance of social groups and their relation with dominant power structures. It deals on the key areas of voice and representation and enquires 'who gets to speak, who is heard and who represents whom'. The seminal essay of Gaytri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak "questions whether marginalised people can genuinely be heard by dominant power structures. Both the tests address this issue but stages them in different patterns. In *Animal's People*, the narrator, Animal's first narrative of the subaltern experiences that he addresses directly to the unnamed 'Eyes' is mediated, whereas in The Adivasi Will Not Dance", the narrator Mangal Murmu's voice is not mediated by any external interlocutor.

Besides these, Walter Mignolo's theory of coloniality and the 'colonial matrix of power' and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's account of partial representation of the dispossessed by research and representation further inform both the texts' attempt to decolonize narratives of environmental harm.

IV. DISCUSSION

4.1 Animal's People: Toxic Embodiment and the Grammar of Slow Violence.

In *Animal's People*, Sinha indicates the worst possible harm that a chemical factory can subject on the human world. Animal, the narrator, was affected by the release of the poisonous gas in the Bhopal Gas tragedy when he was in his mother's womb. Pre-natal exposure to the poisonous gas has crippled him so badly that he just manages to walk on his four limbs and that's how he is known as Animal. His very presence in the novel indicates the reach of the harmful gas and how man-made factories and industries can cause damage to the very fabric of human world; damaging the very foundation of human body, its cells, tissues and bones, thereby collapsing the difference between human and animals. Animal's story takes place in an imaginative land called Khaufpur that replicates the city of Bhopal where the gas tragedy had taken place. The novelist refrains from naming the central antagonist, Union Carbide, rather indicates it as the "Kampani", a generic name indicating the corporate capital. However, the Kampani abandons the factory, escapes any legal accountability and avoids all the responsibilities of the population that is affected by the poisonous gas.

The novels plot is organized around the survivors' battle for compensation and the American doctor who tries to conduct a survey on the health of the surviving population. The structure of the plot itself echoes Rob Nixon's slow violence, as the aftereffect of the one-day gas leakage lingers even after two decades of the incident in the form of contaminated water, unresolved litigations and new births with congenital or other perennial health issues.

4.2 Resistance in Animal's People

Resistance in Indra Sinha's Animal's People does not emerge through conventional heroism but through the body that becomes the site of colonial exploitation. Anima's body is twisted, degraded and has lost the mobility to have an upright posture that otherwise humans possess. Animal, whose spine is fused because of his exposure to the poisonous gas when he was in the womb, faces exile from humanity since his birth. In his conversation with others, he often mentions that he is not a man but an animal. Though to many who had interactions with him, it appears as his acceptance of his situation but that finally emerges as his refusal to accept sympathy and mercy that would indirectly categorize him as a victim of the gas tragedy. Animal, by claiming animality rather than disability, he negates to be pushed to the center of pity and suffering. His body emerges as the living indictment of the corporation whose negligence produced the tragedy, a walking archive of human led slow violence that can not be gathered in statistical data or compensation claims.

The novels' resistance also operates collectively, through the community's sustained struggle against the "Kampani" for not bearing the responsibility of the tragedy and provide them with clean drinking water and other adequate compensation. Though Animal stages a completely different order of resistance, Zafar becomes the voice of political resistance. He mobilizes all the victims of Kaufpur and organizes protests and hunger strikes against the Kampani induced damages that have stalled their everyday life. The novel beautifully presents the nuances of resistance in the novel. The community is divided in its

ways of resistance. Their demands are realistic and range from monetary compensation to safe rehabilitation and justice. However, they refuse to take token settlements and aids as they feel that their wound cannot be compensated by these petty offers made by the NGOs. The resistance as depicted in the novel is not an individual one but a collective one that is marked by presenting witnesses for unresolved issues and a refusal to have a closure. The resistance as framed by Sinha is not about victory but about their endurance; their resistance indicates their refusal to accept the industrial disaster to be forgotten, erased and have a closure.

4.3 The Adivasi Will not Dance: Environmental Destruction, Land and Mining Extractions

The Santhals, of the Chottanagpur plateau constitute one of the biggest Adivasi community. Belonging to have an area rich in minerals and forests, this Adivasi community also has a rich heritage of cultural identity. Their rich oral heritage is rooted in music, dance, storytelling and mythology. Their performances are deeply interlinked with seasonal festivities. They celebrate the festivals, agricultural cycles, religious traditions with their communal dances accompanied by tundak (drum), banam (bowed instrument). However, in postcolonial India, the mineral rich land and the dense forest become the site of extraction and industrial development. Shekhar Sowendra's story *Adivasi Will Not Dance* captures the tension, between the indigenous communities of the place, the modern industrialists, commodification of the indigenous body and heritage and ultimately the resistance to this fast paced post-colonial development.

The action takes place in an Adivasi village where their fertile land is acquired for setting up a coal based thermal power plant. Unlike Sinha's novel, Shekhar's story does not showcase any catastrophic event but the environmental destruction is marked by slow, legitimated transfer of agricultural and forest land of the Adivasis to a power company. The Santhal pargana's water tables and soil composition is badly compromised because of the mining, the community is left disintegrated and most of them displaced. The compensation offered to the Adivasis like in *Animal's People* is just an eye wash. The false hope of employment of the Adivasis in the power plant is never honoured, rather the displaced Adivasis are left uprooted trying to seek their connection with their land and culture in the new displaced space. Hence, many young men like Mangal's son leave the village to work as waged labour in the thermal plant. Besides this land and resources extraction, there is another layer of extraction and exploitation that Shekhar hints at. The Adivasi song and dance that is known for its cultural vibrancy, is used as a trope to celebrate the indigenous culture of the dispossessed community. However, the anger, feelings of betrayal show up in the inaugural function of the new project.

4.4 Resistance in "The Adivasi Will Not Dance"

Resistance in "The Adivasi Will Not Dance" is staged quite unexpectedly by Mangal Murmu in the presence of the dignitaries at the plant's foundation programme. An old man known for his indigenous music shows, was always critical of the Dikus who controlled the resources of the state of Jharjhand and have a dominating influence on the planning of educational and administration of the state. While Mangal Murmu, who had been invested with the responsibility of preparing for a cultural show on their folk tradition for the inaugural programme of the power plant, he realizes he cannot put the show when his own community people are evicted from their land in eleven villages in Godda district, beaten and put behind the bars. When the programme anchor announces the dance by the Adivasis as the opening item, Mangal Murmur comes forward, holds the microphone to speak, asks himself: How can Adivasis dance on a stage that is celebrating the displacement of Adivasis? (— The Adivasis Will Not Dance (Shekhar, 155). Soon he stages his resistance by declaring vehemently that the Adivasis will not dance. By a nuanced portrayal of Mangal and his community people who refuse to dance, Handa demonstrates resistance in the form of withholding their dance performance, as Mangal continues saying,

> We have nowhere to go, nowhere to grow our crops. How can this power plant be good for us? And how can we adivasis dance and be happy? Unless we are given back our homes and land, we will not sing and dance. We adivasi will not dance. (187)

The resistance is double layered as it is not only a resistance against the state sponsored eviction from their land but also against commodification of the Adivasi culture and body that will be soon exploited as waged labourer.

4.5 Convergences and Divergences in *Animal's People* and "The Adivasi Will Not Dance"

Both the texts under consideration share a common objective of protest and resistance against the intruding elements, Kampani in *Animal's People* and the power plant in "The Adivansi Will Not Dance" that act as anthropocentric agents. Both the texts also stage the extraction of resources in the form of either chemicals or mineral and land. Animal's refusal to narrate his sufferings and mangal's refusal to perform the community dance stage their resistance against the dominant power structures. Both the narratives are also concerned with the intergenerational transmission of the hazards of anthropocentric actions. Animal's twisted body carries the evidence of the effects of

the leak in generations after the disaster and Mangal's son's migration to city as waged labour indicates the aftereffect of dispossession and eviction for generations to come.

In spite of the many convergences, both the texts diverge in many different ways. *Animal's People* is built around the disaster of one fateful night when the gas leakage had occurred, whereas the plot in "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," is not developed around any one particular catastrophic event. However, both the texts display Nixon's slow violence and its aftereffects on the survivors and the generations to come. The exploitation, slow depletion of the land resources and the destruction of the eco system in both these texts lead to resistance in the forms never before thought by the capitalist sections of the society.

V. CONCLUSION

Sinha's Animal's People and Shekhar's "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," are narratives of exploitation and resistance, in spite of having a major difference in their authorship, one that emerges from the close observation of an empathetic person and the other by someone who had been a part of the community, reflect the anthropocentric nature of a developing country and the associated modes of resistance against anthropocentric commercialization and appropriation.

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Exploring a Task-Based Learning Framework for Enhancing Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW) Skills in the English Language Classroom

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Abstract— *The four macro-skills of English language learning Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW) are traditionally taught in isolation, a practice that limits learners' capacity to use language communicatively and adaptively. Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), grounded in the premise that language is best acquired through meaning-focused, outcome-oriented activity rather than explicit rule presentation, offers a pedagogically robust alternative. This paper synthesises the theoretical foundations of TBLT (Prabhu, 1987; Long, 1985; Skehan, 1998; Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996; Nunan, 2004) and proposes an integrated Task-Based Learning (TBL) framework designed specifically to develop LSRW skills in a coordinated, mutually reinforcing manner within the English language classroom. The framework operationalises three cyclical phases pre-task, task cycle, and post-task/language focus and maps each phase onto specific receptive and productive skill demands, supported by a skill-integration matrix and a set of classroom-ready task typologies (information-gap, opinion-gap, reasoning-gap, and problem-solving tasks). The paper further discusses pedagogical implications for lesson design, learner autonomy, and formative assessment, and critically examines implementation challenges such as large class sizes, assessment-driven curricula, teacher preparedness, and learners' first-language reliance. It concludes by outlining a research agenda for empirically validating the proposed framework across diverse classroom contexts. The paper is conceptual in nature, synthesising existing empirical and theoretical literature; no new primary data were collected.*

Keywords— ***Task-Based Language Teaching, LSRW skills, integrated skills instruction, English language classroom, communicative competence, task design***

I. INTRODUCTION

Proficiency in English is frequently equated with competence in its four interdependent macro-skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. In most secondary and tertiary classrooms, however, these skills continue to be taught as discrete units, each assigned its own period, textbook section, and assessment rubric. This segmentation contradicts the way language is used outside the classroom, where listening feeds into speaking, reading informs writing, and all four skills operate simultaneously and interdependently in real communicative exchanges (Oxford, 2001). The persistence of a skills-isolated model has been linked to learners who can pass grammar-based examinations yet struggle to sustain a conversation, follow authentic spoken discourse, or produce coherent extended writing (Richards, 2006).

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) emerged as a response to the limitations of both grammar-translation and narrowly structural communicative approaches. Rather than treating language forms as the primary syllabus content, TBLT organises instruction around tasks goal-oriented activities in which language is the vehicle for achieving a non-linguistic outcome (Ellis, 2003; Willis, 1996). Because a well-designed task typically requires learners to listen or read for information, negotiate meaning orally, and often report findings in speech or writing, TBLT is structurally

well suited to integrating LSRW skills rather than treating them as separate strands. Despite this theoretical affordance, much of the published TBLT literature addresses speaking and, to a lesser extent, writing, with comparatively less attention paid to a framework that explicitly and systematically integrates all four skills within a single task cycle.

This paper addresses that gap by proposing a Task-Based Learning framework purpose-built for the coordinated development of LSRW skills. The specific objectives of the paper are to: (a) synthesise the theoretical and empirical foundations of TBLT relevant to skills integration; (b) propose a classroom-applicable framework that maps LSRW demands onto the pre-task, task cycle, and language focus phases of a task-based lesson; (c) illustrate the framework with task typologies and a skill-integration matrix; and (d) critically discuss the pedagogical implications, implementation challenges, and directions for future empirical research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 LSRW Skills and the Case for Integration

Listening and reading are conventionally classified as receptive skills, while speaking and writing are productive skills; however, all four are cognitively and communicatively interdependent (Hinkel, 2006). Listening provides learners with comprehensible input and models of pronunciation, intonation, and discourse organisation that subsequently inform speaking. Reading exposes learners to lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical patterns that feed into writing. Speaking and writing, in turn, allow learners to consolidate and actively use language encountered receptively. Oxford (2001) argues that skill-integrated instruction more closely mirrors authentic language use and offers repeated, varied exposure to the same content across modalities, which supports retention. Meta-analytic and classroom-based studies of integrated-skills instruction report improvements in learner motivation and communicative fluency relative to skills-isolated instruction, although effect sizes vary considerably by context and task design (Hinkel, 2006; Richards, 2006).

2.2 Theoretical Foundations of Task-Based Language Teaching

TBLT's theoretical roots lie in Krashen's Input Hypothesis, Long's Interaction Hypothesis, and Swain's Output Hypothesis, which collectively argue that acquisition is driven by exposure to comprehensible input, negotiation of meaning during interaction, and the pushed production of output (Long, 1985). Prabhu's (1987) Bangalore Communicational Teaching Project was among the first large-scale implementations of a task-based syllabus, demonstrating that a focus on meaning through procedural tasks could support grammatical development without explicit form-focused instruction. Skehan (1998) subsequently proposed a cognitive-processing account of task performance, identifying the trade-off between fluency, accuracy, and complexity as central to task design and sequencing. Ellis (2003) offered a widely cited definition of a task as a workplan requiring learners to process language pragmatically to achieve an outcome, with a clearly defined communicative purpose and a primary focus on meaning rather than form.

2.3 Task-Based Frameworks and Skills Integration

Willis (1996) formalised a three-phase task-based lesson framework pre-task, task cycle (task, planning, report), and language focus (analysis and practice) that remains the most widely adopted structural model for classroom implementation. Nunan (2004) proposed a related pedagogical framework comprising schema-building, controlled practice, authentic listening/reading, focus on linguistic elements, provision of freer practice, and introduction of the pedagogical task, explicitly sequencing input-based (listening/reading) activity before output-based (speaking/writing) production. Bygate, Skehan and Swain (2001) further examined how task characteristics (e.g., planning time, task structure, familiarity of information) affect the language produced, providing an empirical basis for calibrating task difficulty to integrate multiple skills without overwhelming learners. Collectively, this body of work establishes that (i) tasks can be designed to require sequential or simultaneous use of more than one skill, and (ii) the three-phase lesson structure provides natural points at which receptive and productive skills can be deliberately paired.

While these frameworks provide the theoretical scaffolding for skills integration, few published models translate them into a classroom-ready structure that explicitly specifies which LSRW skill (or combination of skills) is foregrounded at each phase of the task cycle. The framework proposed in Section 4 addresses this gap.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK UNDERPINNING THE PROPOSED MODEL

The proposed framework draws on three converging theoretical strands. First, Long's (1985) Interaction Hypothesis provides the rationale for embedding listening and speaking within negotiated, information-gap tasks. Second, Swain's Output Hypothesis justifies the inclusion of a structured reporting or writing stage that pushes learners beyond comprehension toward accurate and coherent production. Third, Willis's (1996) three-phase

lesson structure supplies the organisational scaffold pre-task, task cycle, and language focus onto which the four skills are mapped. A fourth, complementary strand is Vygotskian sociocultural theory, which frames the collaborative, dialogic nature of many tasks (pair and group work) as the mechanism through which learners co-construct language within their Zone of Proximal Development (Lantolf, 2000). Together, these strands support a model in which LSRW skills are not sequenced as separate lesson segments but are functionally embedded within a single, coherent task cycle.

IV. PROPOSED TASK-BASED LEARNING FRAMEWORK FOR LSRW SKILLS

The proposed framework, termed the Integrated LSRW Task-Based (IL-TB) framework, adapts Willis's (1996) three-phase structure into four operational stages, each of which foregrounds a primary skill while requiring at least one supporting skill, so that all four macro-skills are exercised within a single task cycle rather than across separate lessons.

4.1 Stage 1 — Schema Activation (Listening/Reading-led)

The lesson opens with a short authentic or semi-authentic input text (audio recording, video clip, or short passage) related to the task theme. Learners complete a light-processing activity (prediction, gist question, or graphic organiser) that activates prior knowledge and pre-teaches essential vocabulary. The primary skill exercised is listening or reading; speaking is used minimally, for brief pair-checking of predictions.

4.2 Stage 2 — Task Cycle: Information Exchange (Listening–Speaking-led)

Learners undertake the core communicative task, typically an information-gap, opinion-gap, reasoning-gap, or problem-solving task (Prabhu, 1987) in pairs or small groups. This stage requires sustained listening to a partner's input and reciprocal spoken production to close the information gap, negotiate meaning, or reach a joint decision. The teacher monitors without correcting, noting recurrent language difficulties for the subsequent language-focus stage.

4.3 Stage 3 — Reporting and Reading Extension (Speaking/Reading-led)

Groups report their task outcomes to the class or to another group, either orally or by exchanging written notes that other groups must read and respond to. Where feasible, the teacher introduces a short related authentic text for learners to compare against their own task outcomes, reinforcing reading skill alongside oral reporting.

4.4 Stage 4 — Language Focus and Writing Consolidation (Writing-led)

Drawing on language difficulties observed during monitoring, the teacher leads a brief, inductive focus-on-form segment. Learners then complete a writing task that requires them to reformulate, extend, or reflect on the spoken task outcome (e.g., a summary report, an email, a short argumentative paragraph). This final stage pushes learners from oral fluency toward written accuracy and coherence, consolidating the language generated across the earlier stages.

4.5 Skill-Integration Matrix

Table 1 summarises the primary and supporting skills engaged at each stage of the IL-TB framework, together with an illustrative classroom task type.

Stage	Primary Skill(s)	Supporting Skill(s)	Illustrative Task Type
1. Schema Activation	Listening / Reading	Speaking (brief)	Prediction task; gist listening/reading with graphic organiser
2. Information Exchange	Listening & Speaking	—	Information-gap; opinion-gap; problem-solving task
3. Reporting & Reading Extension	Speaking / Reading	Listening	Group report-back; jigsaw reading comparison
4. Language Focus & Writing	Writing	Reading (models)	Guided summary; reflective paragraph; email/report writing

4.6 Task Typologies Supporting the Framework

- Information-gap tasks: each learner holds partial information and must communicate orally to complete a shared record, chart, or map (listening + speaking).
- Opinion-gap tasks: learners express and justify personal preferences or judgements on a given issue, requiring listening for counter-arguments and speaking to respond (listening + speaking + informal reasoning).

- Reasoning-gap tasks: learners derive new information from given information through inference or logical reasoning (e.g., solving a puzzle from clues), integrating reading/listening comprehension with spoken justification.
- Problem-solving and decision-making tasks: groups read/listen to a scenario and negotiate a joint decision, then produce a written recommendation or report (all four skills in sequence).

Across all typologies, task difficulty can be graded along the dimensions identified by Skehan (1998) and Robinson (2001): the amount of planning time, the familiarity and structure of information, and the number of task elements allowing the same IL-TB structure to be scaled from lower-proficiency to advanced classrooms.

V. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICE

Adopting the IL-TB framework has several implications for lesson planning, materials design, and classroom management. First, lesson planning shifts from a single-skill objective (e.g., 'students will practise the present perfect') to an outcome-based objective (e.g., 'students will negotiate and report a joint travel itinerary'), with language points identified inductively from what the task actually generates rather than pre-selected. Second, materials design requires the deliberate pairing of input texts (for listening/reading) with output tasks (for speaking/writing) around a shared theme, rather than treating a textbook's listening, speaking, reading, and writing sections as independent units. Third, the teacher's role shifts from presenter/controller to facilitator and monitor during the task cycle, intervening minimally during Stage 2 to preserve the communicative focus, and taking a more directive role only during the language-focus stage. Fourth, the framework naturally supports formative, task-based assessment for example, using task outcome, fluency, and the accuracy of the final written product as converging evidence of learning rather than relying solely on discrete-skill tests administered separately.

The framework also has implications for learner autonomy: because Stage 2 requires learners to sustain communication without teacher mediation, and Stage 4 requires independent written consolidation, learners are positioned as active users rather than passive recipients of language, which is consistent with self-determination accounts of L2 motivation (Ellis, 2003).

VI. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

Several practical constraints may limit the framework's implementation, particularly in large-class or examination-driven contexts typical of many South and Southeast Asian secondary and higher-education settings.

- Class size: Information-gap and problem-solving tasks depend on active pair/group interaction; classes exceeding forty to fifty learners strain monitoring capacity and increase off-task first-language use.
- Assessment misalignment: Where high-stakes examinations privilege discrete grammar and reading-comprehension items, teachers may deprioritise integrated task-based lessons in favour of exam-focused drilling.
- Teacher preparedness: Facilitating an unscripted task cycle, and identifying language points inductively from learner output, demands a level of linguistic and pedagogical confidence that pre-service training does not always provide.
- Learner L1 reliance: In low-proficiency or monolingual classrooms, learners may default to the first language during the negotiation-heavy Stage 2 unless task design and monitoring actively discourage this.
- Time constraints: A full four-stage cycle requires more class time than a single-skill lesson, which can be difficult to accommodate within fixed-period timetables.

These constraints do not invalidate the framework but indicate that successful adoption is likely to require accompanying institutional support: teacher professional development in task facilitation, revision of assessment instruments to credit task-based performance, and flexible scheduling that allows extended lesson blocks.

VII. DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

As a conceptual paper, this work stops short of empirical validation, and this is offered as the primary avenue for subsequent research. Quasi-experimental classroom studies comparing the IL-TB framework against skills-isolated instruction, using pre/post measures across all four LSRW domains, would establish whether the framework yields the integration benefits it is designed to produce. Longitudinal studies could examine whether gains in integrated task-based classrooms are sustained over an academic year and transfer to standardised proficiency measures. Further research might also investigate teacher cognition and training needs for task facilitation, the framework's

adaptability to online and blended delivery, and its performance across proficiency bands (CEFR A2–C1) and first-language backgrounds. Mixed-methods designs combining task-performance analysis (fluency, accuracy, complexity measures per Skehan, 1998) with learner and teacher perception data would offer the most complete picture of the framework's classroom viability.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This paper has synthesised the theoretical foundations of Task-Based Language Teaching and proposed an Integrated LSRW Task-Based (IL-TB) framework that deliberately maps listening, speaking, reading, and writing onto a coherent four-stage task cycle: schema activation, information exchange, reporting and reading extension, and language focus with writing consolidation. Grounded in interaction, output, and sociocultural theories of second language acquisition, the framework offers English language teachers a structured yet flexible model for moving beyond skills-isolated instruction toward a more authentic, communicatively integrated classroom practice. While implementation challenges particularly class size, assessment misalignment, and teacher preparedness- are non-trivial, they are addressable through targeted institutional support. The framework is offered as a starting point for empirical validation across diverse classroom contexts, with the ultimate aim of equipping learners to use English as an integrated communicative resource rather than as four disconnected examination subjects.

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A Comparative Critical Discourse Analysis of News Discourses on China-Papua New Guinea and China-Solomon Islands Agricultural Cooperation

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Abstract— *Pacific Island nations are key participants in South-South cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative, with agricultural cooperation serving as a vital area for China's practical collaboration with these states. Adopting Fairclough's three-dimensional critical discourse analysis model, this study constructs two small corpora consisting of 68 news reports (2018-2026) from Papua New Guinea's Post Courier and three major Solomon Islands English-language newspapers. With the AntConc tool, it compares media narratives of China-PNG and China-Solomon Islands agricultural cooperation across textual, discursive-practice and social-practice dimensions.The results reveal that while both media outlets adopt state-centred narratives focusing on rice production and food security, they differ noticeably in framing. PNG media emphasizes technology-driven industrial projects, aid and bilateral trade, whereas Solomon Islands media highlights livelihood support, sovereign equality and local public benefits. At the discursive-practice level, indirect quotation is widely used. PNG reporting is dominated by official and elite voices, while Solomon Islands coverage incorporates ordinary citizens' viewpoints. Such discursive variations stem from differences in agricultural conditions, bilateral-cooperation maturity and regional geopolitics. This paper argues that Pacific Island local media are heterogeneous. Differentiated communication strategies should be adopted by China to deliver grassroots perspectives and manage geopolitical risks. It further demonstrates the value of corpus-assisted Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for studies on South-Pacific international cooperation.*

Keywords— ***Critical Discourse Analysis; Fairclough's three-dimensional model; Pacific Island Nations; Agricultural Cooperation; Corpus-Based Discourse Analysis; Media Narrative***

I. INTRODUCTION

The friendship between China and Pacific Island countries has a long-standing history despite vast geographical distances. In 2014 and 2018, Chinese President Xi Jinping paid state visits to Fiji and Papua New Guinea respectively, upgrading China-Pacific Island relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership built on mutual respect and shared development. Since then, bilateral and multilateral cooperative mechanisms have been broadened, and agricultural cooperation has gradually become an important area of practical cooperation (Lü , 2022). High-level platforms such as the China-Pacific Island Countries Agricultural Cooperation Forum and the China-Pacific Island Countries Agricultural Ministers' Meeting have been established, providing institutionalised channels for regional agricultural exchanges.

Therefore, this study selects Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands as comparative cases, which have

strong comparability. In terms of the time of establishing diplomatic relations, Papua New Guinea established diplomatic relations with China in 1976, and the Solomon Islands established diplomatic relations with China in 2019. The two countries have different starting points for diplomacy with China, which can be used to observe how the difference in the length of diplomatic relations affects media discourse narratives. In terms of strategic cooperation, Papua New Guinea is the first Pacific island country to sign a memorandum of understanding on jointly building the Belt and Road with China; after establishing diplomatic relations, the Solomon Islands also signed a memorandum of understanding on jointly building the Belt and Road in 2021. Both countries regard the Belt and Road framework as an important institutional carrier for cooperation with China, but there are obvious differences in the time nodes of signing bilateral agreements and the subsequent implementation progress . In the field of agricultural cooperation, both Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are South Pacific developing countries where agriculture occupies a fundamental position in the national economy. Agriculture is not only a pillar industry to ensure food security and improve people's livelihood, but also a key cooperation direction for China to carry out foreign aid, technology export and capacity building with the two countries. From December 24 to 29, 2023, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of China signed a memorandum of understanding on agricultural cooperation with the Solomon Islands; Papua New Guinea has carried out hybrid rice, vegetable planting, agricultural technology training and other projects with China earlier, and agricultural cooperation started earlier and the projects are more abundant. The two countries have similar resource endowments and development demands, but there are differences in the pace and scale of cooperation with China. Therefore, comparing the domestic media coverage of China-Papua New Guinea and China-Solomon Islands agricultural cooperation can help examine how the duration of diplomatic relations and the maturity of cooperation influence the discursive construction of island country media, and provide case references and practical insights for China to further promote the Belt and Road cooperation with Pacific Island countries, optimise the layout of agricultural cooperation, and improve international communication.

From a linguistic perspective, exploring the representational content and methods of national media news coverage is an extremely important means of understanding the national government's attitude and perception toward the reported events (Shi & Jin, 2021). Linguistic scholars have conducted numerous studies on news coverage related to the Belt and Road Initiative from a linguistic standpoint, yielding significant research findings. Existing studies mainly draw on Critical Discourse Analysis, Appraisal Theory, and Transitivity analysis as theoretical frameworks, and their research objects mostly focus on mainstream media in Europe, the United States, Australia and China. However, empirical discourse studies focusing on the local media of South Pacific Island countries are relatively scarce, and there is even less research on specific cooperation areas such as agriculture. This research gap motivates the present study.

Based on this, this study adopts Critical Discourse Analysis as the theoretical framework, selects news reports on China-Papua New Guinea and China-Solomon Islands agricultural cooperation from Papua New Guinea's mainstream media *The Post Courier* and Solomon Islands' mainstream media *Solomon Star*, *Solomon Times* and *The Island Sun* as the corpus, and uses the AntConc corpus tool to conduct a comparative discourse analysis.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Definitions and Terminologies

Prior to reviewing existing academic studies, it is necessary to clarify the core terminologies adopted in this research. Accordingly, this section defines three fundamental concepts: discourse, news discourse, and agricultural cooperation discourse, with the aim of standardizing the analytical scope and theoretical boundaries of the present study.

2.1.1 Discourse and News Discourse

Discourse constitutes a core analytical category widely discussed in postmodern theories. Originating from linguistic research, contemporary discourse studies no longer confine their analysis to linguistic forms alone. Instead, they adopt interdisciplinary perspectives to explore how language interacts with social structures, historical backgrounds, cultural values, political mechanisms and institutional norms (Wang, 2004). In academic discussions, "text" and "discourse" often get mentioned in the same breath. But in many existing studies, the line between them is still pretty blurry. Some scholars have tried to separate the two, yet they haven't really managed to pin down what makes them fundamentally different (Huang & Xu, 2006).

A common way to distinguish text from discourse is to think in terms of product versus process. Brown and Yule (1983, p. 26), for example, put it quite plainly: textual materials are static records, whereas discourse is the dynamic communicative process in which writers or speakers use language to convey particular meanings and achieve communicative goals under given contextual

constraints. Van Dijk (1988, p. 29) takes this further, treating discourse not just as linguistic structure but as interactive social practice. Discourse, then, is not simply a set of isolated verbal expressions. It is embedded in broader cultural, historical, and political settings, and in that sense reflects dominant social perceptions and the workings of power (Van Dijk, 2008, p. 8). Widdowson (2007) makes a related point, stressing discourse's situated and practical character and treating it as context-bound social behavior. Overall, discourse can take many forms—disciplinary systems, positional stances within ideological fields, institutional language types, and the language practices of particular social groups (Angermuller, Maigneneau, & Wodak, 2014).

Within the wider field of discourse, news discourse stands out as a distinctive form of institutional discourse. In both function and structural features, it differs quite sharply from political, educational, and academic discourse. This definition is not meant to oversimplify how complex news production really is. Rather, it helps clarify the theoretical rationale for analyzing news texts from a discursive perspective. Seen this way, news is not just factual reporting; it is a complex social communicative activity, shaped by particular institutional cultures and ideological environments.

The theoretical claim behind "news as discourse" is that news texts are inevitably shaped by journalists' professional norms and by the institutional mechanisms within which they work. But the influence runs both ways: these standardized textual products also shape how news producers and audiences understand and interpret social events (Van Dijk, 1985, p. 70). Discourse analysis therefore sets out to examine text–context interactions, with the aim of uncovering the underlying connection between linguistic features and latent social ideologies.

Traditional journalistic research usually stresses describing events and summarizing content. The discursive analysis paradigm takes a different path: it brings together multidisciplinary insights from linguistics, social psychology, institutional communication, and critical social theory. It also offers methodological backing for Critical Discourse Analysis—the view that news reporting can never be entirely objective or neutral. As authoritative institutional practitioners, mainstream journalists help construct and interpret international relations, and in doing so, they subtly legitimize existing power structures. News discourse, then, inevitably carries implicit ideological leanings and helps reproduce hidden social power relations.

2.1.2 Agricultural Cooperation Discourse

Building on the definition of general news discourse, this study takes the discussion a step further by defining agricultural cooperation discourse as a specialised subcategory of international news discourse. Different from conflict-oriented, politically confrontational and crisis-focused news discourse, agricultural cooperation discourse focuses on pragmatic, livelihood-oriented and developmental bilateral interactions between sovereign states.

Agricultural cooperation discourse in this study specifically covers news narratives concerning cross-national agricultural technology assistance, crop cultivation cooperation, agricultural personnel training, food security governance and rural development collaboration. Such discourse does not merely record objective cooperative events; instead, it carries implicit diplomatic attitudes, developmental expectations and regional geopolitical perceptions constructed by local media.

Essentially, agricultural cooperation news reports seem neutral and fact-based on the surface. However, through lexical selection, quotation arrangement, thematic emphasis and narrative framing, local media in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands construct distinctive versions of bilateral cooperation reality. Therefore, agricultural cooperation discourse provides a valuable analytical object for observing how South Pacific island nations linguistically interpret China-assisted development projects and shape bilateral diplomatic perceptions.

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis and Previous Studies

2.2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) originated from "Critical Linguistics", which was put forward by Fowler et al. in 1979 in *Language and Control*. Critical Linguistics explores the intrinsic links among ideology, discourse, social structures and power. From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, Critical Linguistics evolved into Critical Discourse Analysis. The publication of Fairclough's *Language and Power* and Wodak's *Language, Power and Ideology*, the launch of the journal *Discourse and Society*, together with the Amsterdam conference on critical discourse analysis, marked the formal establishment of CDA.

Over decades of development, CDA has given rise to diverse schools, including Fairclough's socio-cultural analysis, Van Dijk's socio-cognitive analysis, Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach, and Positive Discourse Analysis. The discipline has further advanced into Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), with its paradigm shifting from Critical Linguistics to CDA and then to CDS.

This study adopts Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model for its wide application and operability. Treating

discourse as a form of social practice, the model distinguishes three dimensions: text, discursive practice and social practice. Text refers to spoken or written discourse; discursive practice covers the production, distribution and consumption of discourse; social practice includes social relations, culture, ideology and other social elements. Correspondingly, analytical procedures involve linguistic description of texts, interpretation of links between texts and discursive practice, and explanation of interactions between discourse and social processes.

Centered on Systemic Functional Linguistics, Fairclough's socio-cultural analytical approach integrates Bakhtin's dialogism, Kristeva's intertextuality and Foucault's ideas on discourse and power. It connects discourse analysis with social theory to examine both linguistic phenomena and socio-cultural changes (Ji , 2008). It represents a well-established theoretical paradigm within CDA (Ji & Xin , 2009).

Every discursive event can be seen as having three dimensions: text, discursive practice, and socio-cultural practice. Text emerges from discursive practice, which is both constrained by and serves socio-cultural practice. The analysis then moves from describing textual features, to interpreting the relationship between text and discursive practice, and finally to explaining how discursive practice links up with socio-cultural practice (Xin & Gao, 2013).

2.2.2 Review of Empirical Studies on CDA

Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical framework is one of the most canonical paradigms in CDA. Traditional CDA often leans on qualitative interpretation of small-scale texts, which makes its findings especially vulnerable to the researcher's own subjective experience. Corpus linguistics, by contrast, makes it possible to produce reproducible quantitative data—high-frequency words, collocations, index entries, semantic rhymes—and this helps offset the heavy subjectivity of purely qualitative analysis. Out of this has grown an empirical approach known as corpus-supported critical discourse analysis.

In recent years, a growing number of empirical studies within the Chinese academic community have brought Fairclough's three-dimensional framework together with corpus-based tools such as AntConc, Wmatrix, and KH Coder, as well as natural language processing techniques including LDA topic modeling, STM structural topic modeling, and principal component analysis. These methods are now widely used in studies of international communication concerning China, media discourse, and political discourse, helping researchers uncover the discursive constructions, power dynamics, and ideological biases that underlie different types of texts.

2.2.2.1 Country-specific Media and Cross-media Comparative Studies

Broadly speaking, many studies focus on mainstream news media at home and abroad, using horizontal comparisons to tease out how the same issue or cultural symbol is discursively produced in different media frameworks. In research on overseas coverage of China, for example, Lyu and Zhu (2026) built a thematic corpus from coverage by Japan's five major national newspapers of the "community with a shared future for mankind," then analyzed it with AntConc and LDA topic modeling. They found that mainstream Japanese media generally framed the concept through a security-oriented lens on China, using terms such as "logan" to achieve discursive othering. The newspapers also differed markedly in their source selection and thematic focus, and these discursive features were rooted in Japan's local media system, its perceptions of China, and structural tensions in the international landscape (Lyu & Zhu, 2026).

Zhang et al. (2025) turned to China-related reporting by Germany's two major mainstream outlets, carrying out an empirical analysis with STM structural topic modeling and deep-learning-based sentiment classification. German coverage ranged across international relations, economy and technology, and culture and environment, with predominantly neutral emotional tones; negative narratives were mostly concentrated on economic and technological competition. The media cited experts and scholars extensively as sources, ultimately shaping a contradictory image of China—one that is economically and technologically formidable yet also carries competitive risks (Zhang et al., 2025).

Li (2026) collects reports from overseas English-language media on *The Three-Body Problem* and its derivative works. The analysis moves across three dimensions—high-frequency textual themes, the intertextuality of source references, and socio-practical motivations—and argues that foreign media frame *The Three-Body Problem* as a complex cultural-industrial-political symbol. The cognitive inertia of international communication, the logic of global cultural capital dynamics, and political competition among major powers together shape the narrative framework these overseas media adopt (Li, 2026).

Some studies go further and compare Chinese and foreign media directly, in order to see how outlets with different political stances approach the same issue. Guo and Wang (2021), for instance, compared *The New York Times* and *China Daily* coverage of China's ethnic affairs between 2013 and 2021. Drawing on collocational analysis, index-line analysis, and semantic-rhyme analysis, they

found that the two outlets diverged sharply under the influence of their respective ideological and geopolitical positions: *The New York Times* tended to amplify conflict narratives and construct a negative image of China, while *China Daily*, grounded in local practices of ethnic governance, highlighted the developmental achievements of ethnic minority regions. The contrast in issue selection and semantic tone is striking, and it reflects a broader tendency among Western media to instrumentalize ethnic issues (Guo & Wang, 2021).

Liu et al. (2022) built an in-house corpus of Western media coverage of the Beijing Winter Olympics. Their analysis of keywords and index lines showed that such coverage has become more diverse than in the past, with economic and cultural symbols receiving greater attention. Even so, ideological bias remains deeply entrenched. These outlets often link human rights and environmental issues to the Olympic Games, and "hegemonic anxiety" continues to dominate the construction of narratives concerning China (Liu et al., 2022).

In studies of geopolitical conflict, Xu and Mo (2025) used corpus and semantic network analysis to compare how three mainstream outlets—from China, the United States, and the Philippines—covered the Ren'ai Reef incident. Their research reveals distinct narrative strategies: the Philippines focused on building a "victim" narrative; the United States used its image as a neutral third party to back its allies; and China grounded its reporting in legal and sovereignty-based perspectives. Through lenses such as news sources, high-frequency lexical collocations, and legal discourse, the study brings the power dynamics among the three into relief, showing how media can stake out positions through linguistic strategies in geopolitical conflict (Xu & Mo, 2025).

Another study turns the lens inward, examining the discursive subjectivity of domestic media. Xiong (2022) built a corpus from news coverage of oil price fluctuations by six Chinese media outlets and combined corpus-driven analysis with critical discourse analysis to trace how news subjectivity is generated across several dimensions—high-frequency keywords, lexical collocations, semantic patterns, news sources, and quotation strategies. The findings show that media positioning and market orientation directly shape fact selection, word choice, and source preferences. So even when covering the same objective event, different outlets use linguistic techniques to build different narrative positions (Xiong, 2022).

Beyond overseas media studies, some research also focuses on domestic external communication texts and on how third-party national media construct local images. Liu (2023), for example, draws on a corpus of *China Daily*'s climate change coverage from 2001 to 2020, combining KH Coder and Wordsmith with the LDA model and lexical co-occurrence networks for a multidimensional analysis. The study finds that *China Daily*'s climate change reporting mainly foregrounded China's policy actions and emission-reduction practices; the discourse also wove in traditional Chinese ecological ideas such as conscience, proximity, and restraint, opening a new angle for research on the construction of a domestic external ecological image (Liu, 2023).

Wang et al. (2025) examine *China Daily*'s external reporting on poverty governance. Using Wmatrix semantic annotation and principal component analysis in a diachronic design, they find that the thematic semantics of these reports lag behind actual policy developments by roughly one year. This suggests that journalistic discourse reflects social practice with a delay, and it sheds light on the interactive relationship between external news production and social reality (Wang et al., 2025).

Zeng et al. (2023) turn to reports about Hunan published by Sri Lankan mainstream media. Their analysis considers subject-predicate structure, voice, index lines, and semantic tone. They find that the Sri Lankan media collectively constructed a positive local image of Hunan. At the same time, because some content was reprinted from Western media sources, it was shaped by Western narrative frameworks and gave rise to cognitive biases—a pattern that shows how third-party regional media can be vulnerable to external discursive input (Zeng, 2023).

Zhang (2023) uses the NOW large-scale English online news corpus, with "Traditional Chinese Medicine" as the node word. The study integrates collocational strength (MI value), modal verbs, and index lines to dissect the media image of Traditional Chinese Medicine in English online media. By attending to the distribution of the modal system, it reveals the complex attitudes expressed in foreign media and offers micro-linguistic evidence for the international dissemination of Chinese traditional culture (Zhang, 2023).

2.2.2.2 Think Tanks, Policy-making, and Official Political Discourse Studies

A growing body of research is gradually moving beyond the traditional scope of news texts to include institutional texts such as think tank reports, legislative bills, and official government statements. By combining corpus-based tools with discourse-historical analysis, this approach looks at how positions are constructed, how power operates, and what ideologies lie beneath political discourse.

Tian (2026) offers a three-dimensional critical discourse analysis of 120 think tank texts dealing with the

"Rise of China." Reading them through vocabulary and materiality, intertextual sources, funding sources, and power relations, Tian shows that these think tanks often rely on vague anonymous sources to construct a negative image of China's "authoritarian expansion," using active voice and material processes to do so. Their discourse is not free-floating: it is constrained by donors' funding structures and serves the transatlantic narrative of competition with China (Tian, 2026).

Tan and Lu (2026) take the U.S. CHIPS Act as a case and place texts from three different power actors—think tank reports, news media, and legislative bills—within a single analytical framework. Using Wmatrix semantic annotation, they track how the semantic concept of "investment" travels and evolves. The three text types are semantically homogeneous in one respect: all reinforce semiconductor manufacturing and technological sovereignty. But they also diverge sharply. Think tanks treat investment as a tool for balancing security and efficiency in the U.S.-China competition over technological sovereignty; the media reduce investment to a symbol of addressing an economic crisis caused by supply chain shortages; and legislative bodies treat investment as compliance-driven behavior, prioritized for national security. This semantic divergence grows out of the different functional roles these actors play, and it reflects how a "security-first" logic pushes economic rationality aside in a technological competition environment (Tan & Lu, 2026).

Ding et al. (2021) gathered texts from U.S. and British think tanks on the "Belt and Road" initiative and compared them using Wmatrix semantic coding, collocation analysis, and extended semantic unit analysis. The contrast they found is striking. U.S. think tanks repeatedly drew on debt-related semantic categories to build a "debt trap" narrative, casting China as a source of risk. British think tanks, by contrast, adopted a more varied discourse—one that brought in multiple perspectives, leaned more heavily on neutral expressions, and stressed opportunities for Sino-British cooperation. These different discursive approaches stem not only from the think tanks' own positioning but also from the wider diplomatic stances of the United States and the United Kingdom toward China (Ding et al., 2021).

Yang and Shi (2021) combined Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA) with corpus-based methods. They built a separate corpus of official U.S. government discourse on the China-U.S. trade war and analyzed it through high-frequency thematic terms, intertextual strategies, and legitimizing discourse strategies. The U.S. side repeatedly used attitudinal markers such as "unfair" and, through intertextual means—including citations of legal provisions—portrayed China as an "unfair competitor" while positioning itself as a "just victim." In doing so, it legitimized its trade war actions. The study also provides an empirical example of how corpus-based and discourse-historical approaches can be integrated (Yang & Shi, 2021).

If we look across existing empirical studies that use domestic corpora in critical discourse analysis, a fairly stable research paradigm comes into view. Researchers typically work with public databases or self-built thematic corpora, using tools such as AntConc, Wmatrix, and KH Coder to extract quantitative patterns—high-frequency words, collocations, index entries, and semantic domains. Some studies go a step further and bring in natural language processing techniques, including LDA, STM, principal component analysis, and semantic networks, to identify latent themes. The final step is usually qualitative interpretation through Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, which allows quantitative linguistic findings and the broader socio-cultural context to validate each other.

That said, the field still has its share of gaps. One is a lingering imbalance between tools and reading. Some studies lean so heavily on output from NLP models and corpus tools that quantitative statistics and close reading of the text never really meet; the result is analysis that can feel more computational than interpretive. Another gap is coverage. The texts studied tend to cluster around mainstream Western and East Asian news media and think tanks in Europe and North America, while media texts, social media content, and grassroots discourse from the Global South remain comparatively under-examined. A third limitation is temporal. Most studies offer static, cross-sectional snapshots of discourse at a particular moment. Much less work follows how concepts travel across contexts, how texts echo one another, or how meanings shift over time. Finally, some studies stay at the level of phenomenological description, leaving the institutional, economic, and cultural mechanisms behind discourse formation relatively unexplored. Going forward, research would benefit from a better balance between quantitative tools and humanistic close reading, a wider range of regions and genres, a stronger diachronic and dynamic perspective, and continued theoretical and practical development of corpus-supported critical discourse analysis.

2.3 Previous Studies on the Cooperation between China and South Pacific Islands

As the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road continues to extend, Chinese scholars have taken a multidimensional approach to studying cooperation between China and

South Pacific Island Countries (SPICs). Liu & Kong (2026) conducted bibliometric analysis and found that domestic publications have risen rapidly after fluctuating growth. Research hotspots include regional institutions, ocean-climate governance, great-power games, bilateral relations and identity construction. Most existing works are policy-oriented applied studies, lacking profound theoretical frameworks, sufficient cross-country comparison and inter-institutional collaboration. It is necessary to build China-origin academic discourse for Pacific Island Countries studies.

In empirical trade research, Chen et al. (2022) found bilateral trade keeps expanding. Restricted by SPICs' small economic size, weak industry, political risks and poor business environment, trade development faces bottlenecks. Potential can be released via assistance, industrial-chain upgrading, diplomatic adjustment and trade supervision. Relevant domestic trade studies remain fragmented and unsystematic. Taking Fujian as a case, Cai & Huang (2021) adopted the theory of industrial re-transfer and pointed out huge cooperation potential in mineral and distant-water fishery. Constrained by limited-scale investment and shallow industrial integration, Fujian should give full play to overseas-Chinese resources and industrial-park platforms as the Maritime Silk Road core zone.

Marine cooperation covers deep-sea mining and fishery. Zhao (2019) regarded deep-sea mining as a strategic choice for high-quality BRI development. Rich submarine mineral resources of SPICs can supplement China's critical raw materials and satisfy local blue-economy demands. However, challenges involve deep-sea technology, heavy capital investment, ecological liabilities and geopolitical rivalry from the United States, Japan, Australia and New Zealand. Risks can be mitigated through high-level diplomacy, multilateral partnerships, joint scientific research and legal instruments. Chu et al. (2026) divided China-SPICs fishery cooperation into four phases. Despite cooperative foundations, problems such as insufficient strategic alignment, shallow-level cooperation, limited mutual support within international organizations and external public-opinion interference still exist. It is essential to improve institutional arrangements, promote resource conservation and folk fishery cultural exchanges.

From the macro-diplomatic perspective, Zhang (2019) analyzed the developmental vulnerability of SPICs and regional great-power competition. She suggested leveraging summit and multilateral diplomacy, abandoning competitive aid, implementing targeted assistance with effect evaluation, and deepening people-to-people, ocean-climate cooperation to jointly build the Blue Economic Corridor. For people-centered capacity-building, Liu & Liu (2024) argued that the comprehensive strategic partnership, talent demand from Chinese-funded enterprises and China's "vocational-education going global" experience underpin vocational-education cooperation, which bears political, economic and social value. Measures including policy improvement, demonstration projects and multi-stakeholder synergy can advance projects such as Luban Workshops.

To sum up, existing literature has covered trade, investment, marine industry, diplomacy and people-to-people exchanges. Nevertheless, most studies focus on several key island nations, dominated by macro policy proposals, while empirical research on micro-firm activities and grassroots interactions is scarce. Future research requires more cross-country comparison and field investigation for better theoretical construction.

2.4 Research Gaps

Based on the comprehensive review of both foreign and Chinese literature, the existing research exhibits the following four limitations, which represent potential areas for innovation in this study:

First, in the field of corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis, existing empirical studies largely concentrate on Western mainstream media, East-Asian news outlets and think-tank documents. Empirical discourse research targeting Global South small-island developing states remains under-represented. Few studies take local news media texts of South Pacific Island Countries as analytical corpus. Prior comparative discourse research mostly compares media narratives between Western countries and China, while cross-national comparative discourse analysis among South Pacific island states themselves is still insufficient. In particular, there is a lack of research on how Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands' local media construct narratives concerning China-supported agricultural-cooperation projects.

Second, existing CDA-related research mostly explores themes such as international geopolitics, cultural works, climate governance and high-level diplomatic events. Specialized discourse studies focusing on bilateral pragmatic agricultural-livelihood cooperation are quite limited. Most relevant works examine general foreign-aid discourse, rather than defining "agricultural-cooperation discourse" as an independent analytical concept. Few scholars unpack the lexical choices, quotation strategies, thematic framing and intertextual characteristics of news reports on Sino-Pacific-island agricultural cooperation from the three-dimensional CDA perspective.

Third, for domestic studies on China-South Pacific Island Countries cooperation, the overwhelming majority adopt macro-policy, economic or international-relations

perspectives. Existing literature focuses on trade statistics, marine-resource development, diplomatic strategies and vocational-education cooperation. These studies mostly rely on official statistical data, policy documents and secondary materials, rarely adopting media-discourse analytical perspectives to observe local perceptions in recipient countries. Current research tends to stand on China's standpoint to assess cooperation effects, yet insufficient attention has been paid to how local societies and local media in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands perceive and interpret China-funded agricultural cooperation. Micro-level empirical evidence from recipient-country media texts is relatively absent.

Fourth, the intersection of the two research strands is underexplored. Up to now, few studies combine Fairclough's three-dimensional critical-discourse-analysis framework with self-built news corpus to conduct comparative research on agricultural-cooperation news discourses of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands. Existing relevant research either focuses on CDA methodology without targeting South-Pacific-island contexts, or discusses China-Pacific island cooperation without adopting discourse-analysis tools. This study fills this dual gap by integrating corpus-driven quantitative statistics and qualitative three-dimensional interpretation, comparing the discursive construction of China-related agricultural cooperation in two typical South-Pacific island nations.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research Questions

Based on the research gaps and the theoretical framework of Fairclough's three-dimensional model, the present study constructs two self-built corpora of agricultural cooperation news reports from mainstream media in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. Through corpus-assisted quantitative statistics and qualitative critical discourse analysis, this paper comparatively explores the discursive construction characteristics and underlying social causes of China-South Pacific agricultural cooperation news discourse in the two Melanesian countries. This study mainly addresses the following three research questions:

First, at the textual level: what lexical features and collocation patterns appear in news discourse on China-PNG and China-Solomon Islands agricultural cooperation, and where do the two corpora converge or diverge?

Second, at the level of discursive practice: how do mainstream media in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands use quotation modes and source allocation strategies to construct narratives about agricultural cooperation, and what discursive differences emerge between the two national media?

Third, at the level of social practice: what underlying social, historical, and geopolitical factors give rise to these discursive differences, and how do local media in the two island nations interpret China's agricultural cooperation projects ideologically in light of their own national development contexts?

3.2 Corpus Collection

For this study, the corpus was built from official newspapers in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands—namely *the Post Courier* and *the Solomon Star,* together with *the Solomon Times* and *the Island Sun*. Using the search terms "China agricultural cooperation" and "China agriculture cooperation," the author identified and collected 68 valid news reports on agricultural cooperation. The Papua New Guinea material runs from June 2018 to June 2026 and includes 38 reports, totaling 16,432 characters. The Solomon Islands material runs from October 2019 to June 2026 and includes 30 reports, totaling 13,761 characters. These two sets of texts are referred to as Corpus P and Corpus S, respectively.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

CDA was put forward by the well-known linguist Roger Fowler and his colleagues. Its aim is to reveal the complex, dialectical relationship between language and ideology, as well as the subtler connections that run beneath language, power, and ideology. The theoretical framework centres on Fairclough's three-dimensional model and covers an entire analytical continuum—from language to society:

(1) Text analysis: this level focuses on linguistic form itself. It offers a linguistic description of lexical choice, syntactic structure, semantic relations, discourse logic, and other such features, and it lays the foundation for the analysis as a whole.

(2) Discourse practice analysis: this level works as a bridge between text and society. It examines how social cognition shapes the production and interpretation of texts.

(3) Social practice analysis: this level places discourse within an ideological context in order to explain the dialectical relationship between discursive practice and social structure—a relationship that is constrained by social factors but can also uphold, critique, or even reconstruct ideology and social reality.

3.4 Research Procedure

This study uses the AntConc corpus tool and works through the analysis in sequential steps. It begins with the

Word and N-Gram functions to generate word-frequency statistics for the two self-built corpora. From these, it identifies high-frequency lexical items, screens core thematic vocabulary related to agricultural cooperation, extracts high-frequency multi-word collocations and industry-specific terminology, and compares how the two media outlets differ in their selection of thematic vocabulary, their terminological expression, and their use of common collocations. From there, the analysis turns to the KWIC indexing function, Collocate collocation analysis, and Cluster clustering. These are used to identify core keywords related to agricultural cooperation, retrieve the specific contexts in which they appear, count the collocational patterns surrounding them, and determine their semantic tendencies—again comparing the two outlets in how they present core vocabulary in context and in their semantic collocation patterns. Finally, drawing on the quantitative linguistic data gathered above, the study offers in-depth qualitative interpretation. It brings together the lexical selection preferences and semantic collocational characteristics of the core terms from both media outlets, and summarizes the distinct agricultural cooperation narrative patterns they construct. At the same time, by taking into account the local social development context, bilateral diplomatic relations, and the actual state of agricultural development in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, the study probes the underlying media reporting attitudes, emotional biases, and internal value orientations concealed beneath the surface of journalistic language. It also examines the deeper influencing factors and real-world drivers behind the discourse construction that underlies different forms of discursive expression.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Lexical Features and Collocation Patterns of News Discourse on China-PNG and China-Solomon Islands Agricultural Cooperation

4.1.1 Vocabulary selection and word frequency

When we compare the top 20 high-frequency words in the agricultural cooperation discourses of the China-Papua New Guinea Corpus-P and the China-Solomon Islands Corpus-S, a stable shared core comes into view, along with some clear differences. Both corpora place the bilateral actors at the centre of the narrative. In Corpus-P, “png” and “China” appear with almost equal frequency, whereas in Corpus-S, “China” and “Solomon Islands” rank as the top two words. This suggests that both sets of texts are organized around interactions between China and the Pacific Island countries.

Administrative terms such as “government,” “minister,” and “province” are also relatively frequent in both corpora, confirming that China-PNG and China-Solomon Islands agricultural cooperation are both built on a collaborative framework marked by government leadership and official-level coordination. Words tied to agriculture and cooperation, “agriculture,” “rice,” “development,” “cooperation,” and “support”—are likewise highly frequent across both corpora. Rice, as a fundamental food industry, serves as a shared focal point in the two cooperation frameworks, while the themes of support, development, and cooperation form a unified discursive value foundation.

Both corpora also incorporate place names specific to the host country’s core agricultural regions. In Corpus-P, “marape” refers to the core agricultural area of Papua New Guinea’s Highlands region; in Corpus-S, “mal” (Mala) and “malatia” (Malaita Province) denote the Solomon Islands’ primary recipient province for assistance. These local place names appear frequently in both corpora, which together shows that both sets of collaborative discourse are anchored in the precise implementation of initiatives targeting the host country’s most urgent regional needs. The difference lies mainly in the fact that, besides the single core term “marape,” Papua New Guinea also uses broader regional descriptors such as “highlands” and “eastern,” producing a more nuanced, layered geographical narrative. The Solomon Islands, by contrast, single out Malaita (malatia) as the sole prominent provincial-level focal unit.

At the level of difference, the two corpora tell quite distinct industrial stories. Corpus-P is anchored by “Juncao Mushroom Grass,” a flagship industrial symbol that appears with unusually high frequency, and it is paired with terms like coffee, mushrooms, and production capacity. Its overall discourse revolves around specific, industrializable technological projects. Corpus-S, by contrast, does not lean on any single iconic, high-frequency crop term. Instead, it relies on a cluster of agricultural vocabulary—“agricultural,” “farm,” “farmers,” “rural,” and “people”—to convey a narrative focused on inclusive, foundational agricultural support across regions.

The spatial narrative also differs in granularity. Corpus-P frequently uses specific regional terms such as “highlands” and “eastern,” which aligns with the targeted, region-specific implementation of its cooperation strategy in Papua New Guinea. Corpus-S, on the other hand, merely uses the broad term “islands” to refer to the entire territory, lacking detailed, localized geographical narratives. The focus of practical narratives differs as well: Corpus-P, with its project-based word frequency, emphasizes technological output and specialized infrastructure development, whereas Corpus-S leans more

toward a support-oriented narrative aimed at assisting farmers and improving rural livelihoods.

This surface-level disparity in lexical frequency essentially reflects differences in the actual cooperation models. China-PNG cooperation relies on mature Juncao technology to establish demonstration industrial projects and implement zoned, precision-operated management. China-Solomon agricultural cooperation, by contrast, is still in the phase of providing comprehensive foundational agricultural support for rural livelihoods. Even so, both narratives are rooted in a unified cooperative foundation characterized by government coordination, food security assurance, and mutual benefit. Together, they form a differentiated foreign agricultural cooperation discourse paradigm tailored to the specific circumstances of various island nations in the South Pacific.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of agricultural cooperation discourse between China and PNG, as well as between China and the Solomon Islands

order number	Corpus P		Corpus S	
	vocabulary	frequency	vocabulary	frequency
1	png	187	China	150
2	China	186	Solomon	107
3	juncao	140	agriculture	100
4	rice	109	islands	96
5	agriculture	98	province	90
6	technology	97	development	72
7	project	88	support	63
8	new	77	government	57
9	coffee	74	minister	56
10	minister	72	cooperation	49
11	highlands	71	mal	48
12	mushroom	71	ministry	48
13	province	70	agricultural	47
14	eastern	66	rice	44
15	Chinese	63	Malaita	43
16	government	57	farm	42
17	agricultural	55	farmers	39
18	development	53	people	38
19	marape	51	farming	37
20	production	51	rural	36

4.1.2 Vocabulary collocations

Table 2: Collocation data for the term "China" in the P-Database

	Collocate	FreqLR	FreqL	FreqR	Likelihood	Effect
1	aid	15	0	15	33.660	2.81
2	s	31	7	24	21.101	1.359
3	between	18	17	1	19.879	1.81
4	export	15	9	6	19.573	2.003
5	republic	7	7	0	19.399	3.225
6	construction	9	3	6	15.676	2.395

Table 3: Collocation data for the term "China" in the S-Database

	Collocate	FreqLR	FreqL	FreqR	Likelihood	Effect
1	s	41	19	22	50.134	1.914
2	republic	16	16	0	43.057	3.157
3	islands	32	16	16	28.038	1.572
4	solomon	30	14	16	19.509	1.322
5	people	16	15	1	19.323	1.909
6	in	51	26	25	16.854	0.898
7	between	16	13	3	15.372	1.665

In Corpus P, the China-PNG agricultural cooperation corpus, "aid" is the collocate most strongly associated with "China." It appears 15 times, always immediately after "China," and there is no reverse collocation such as "aid China." This matches the recurring fixed expression "China Aid" in the KWIC index lines. The term is then consistently paired with concrete agricultural technology projects—Juncao, upland rice, and the like—which, at the discursive level, solidifies China's role as the proactive provider of agricultural aid. Through the high-frequency reuse of the standardized phrase "China Aid," the media positions agricultural technical assistance as a core narrative symbol of bilateral cooperation. In doing so, it constructs an image of China as a responsible major power that actively exports agricultural technologies to support its partner countries' food security.

In the same corpus, "export" ranks fourth among the collocates of "China," and the KWIC index clearly shows a large number of "export to China" patterns. The texts mainly discuss the policy advantages and cooperation agreements surrounding the export of local agricultural products—coffee, fresh vegetables, aquatic products—to China. In the corresponding collocation statistics, "export" displays a bidirectional distribution: 9 occurrences to the left of "China" and 6 to the right. Unlike the unidirectional postpositioned "aid," which only reflects China's provision of assistance, "export" introduces the narrative dimension of "importing products from other countries into China." This complements the reciprocal character of bilateral agricultural and trade relations, building a fuller discursive logic that emphasizes mutual connectivity and win-win outcomes in agricultural cooperation.

A collocational analysis of Corpus S reveals that terms like "republic," "Solomon," and "islands" collocate very strongly with "China." The discourse repeatedly puts the two sovereign states on equal footing as partners in agricultural cooperation. "Between" and "people" also show up frequently, building a narrative of mutual benefit—one that emphasizes tangible gains for ordinary people. The preposition "in" is the most frequent word overall, but its collocational effect value is under 1. It acts merely as a general grammatical particle, carries no exclusive semantic meaning, and takes no part in constructing the core cooperative discourse.

A comparison of the collocation data for the node word "China" across Corpus P and Corpus S shows that the two share some basic identity- and relationship-related items, such as "republic," "between," and "s." Their core narrative orientations, however, pull in quite different directions. Corpus P is marked by strong collocations built around "aid," together with "export" and "construction," foregrounding China's unilateral assistance, infrastructure development, and agricultural exports. Corpus S, by contrast, has no core lexical items tied to aid. Instead, it anchors its narrative in "Solomon" and "islands," framing cooperation with island nations as equitable and mutually beneficial for the people.

Table 4: Collocation data for the word "agriculture" in the P-Database

	Collocate	FreqLR	FreqL	FreqR	Likelihood	Effect
1	forestry	8	1	7	31.754	4.153
2	university	7	1	6	25.927	3.96
3	sector	11	0	11	22.387	2.658
4	boost	5	3	2	18.032	3.89
5	focus	6	4	2	15.843	3.153
6	department	6	6	0	15.843	3.153
7	farming	8	7	1	15.408	2.568

Table 5: Collocation data for the word "agriculture" in the S-Database

	Collocate	FreqLR	FreqL	FreqR	Likelihood	Effect
1	livestock	21	0	21	68.598	3.61
2	ministry	22	19	3	44.028	2.616
3	sector	9	3	6	20.196	2.824
4	and	73	20	53	18.850	0.774
5	annual	6	4	2	18.792	3.519
6	fisheries	5	1	4	15.387	3.479
7	mal	13	0	13	14.922	1.857

Corpus P centers on forestry and university-based scientific research, with its discourse focusing on the development of modern agricultural technologies and the upgrading of the agricultural and forestry sectors; Corpus S focuses on livestock farming and fisheries, aligning with the marine agricultural resources of island nations, and its narrative centers on the development of basic crop cultivation and aquaculture; these two corpora construct distinct agricultural industry profiles based on the local resources of their respective partner entities; China and PNG employ terms such as "department" and "university" to highlight the diverse stakeholders involved in the collaborative relationship between research institutions and industry regulatory authorities; in China, the term "ministry" appears frequently, reflecting a discourse that emphasizes bilateral governmental coordination at the central ministry level; Corpus P includes proactive action verbs such as "boost" and "focus," underscoring China's proactive role in facilitating industrial advancement; Corpus S lacks strong development-related action verbs and instead frequently uses the term "annual" to quantify output, emphasizing an objective description of the current state of local agricultural production. Corpus P centers on forestry and university-based scientific research, with its discourse focusing on the development of modern agricultural technologies and the upgrading of the agricultural and forestry sectors; Corpus S focuses on livestock farming and fisheries, aligning with the marine agricultural resources of island nations, and its narrative centers on the development of basic crop cultivation and aquaculture; these two corpora construct distinct agricultural industry profiles based on the local resources of their respective partner entities; China and PNG employ terms such as "department" and "university" to highlight the diverse stakeholders involved in the collaborative relationship between research institutions and industry regulatory authorities; in China, the term "ministry" appears frequently, reflecting a discourse that emphasizes bilateral governmental coordination at the central ministry level; Corpus P includes proactive action verbs such as "boost" and "focus," underscoring China's proactive role in facilitating industrial advancement; Corpus S lacks strong development-related action verbs and instead frequently uses the term "annual" to quantify output, emphasizing an objective description of the current state of local agricultural production.

The term "sector", used as a general designation for the agricultural industry, represents a set of macro-industrial vocabulary common to both corpora; the function word "and," which has a probability value <1 in only Corpus S, serves solely as a coordinating conjunction and does not possess any exclusive discursive construction function.

4.2 Quotation Modes, News Source Allocation and Narrative Construction in the news reporting

Discourse practice analysis is mainly a matter of intertextuality. In general, intertextuality refers to the interactive relationship between different texts, often called "textual indeterminacy." In discourse analysis, it means that a given discourse incorporates utterances from other speakers or excerpts from other texts. It reflects the value system of the speaking subject and is regarded as one of the basic features of discourse. Common intertextual strategies include allusion, presupposition, parody, and quotation, with quotation further divided into direct and indirect quotation. This study examines all texts in Corpus P and Corpus S. Using Antconc3.2.1, it identifies the most frequent transitive verbs (e.g., said, say, says) as well as contextual cues such as "saying." Manual screening and supplementation then determine the frequency of direct and indirect quotations and the sources of those quotations. The data are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Frequency distribution of paraphrase forms and paraphrase sources in the P-Collection and S-Collection

Corpus	Rhetorical form		Cite source
	direct speech	indirect speech	
Corpus P	32	113	Prime Minister (41); Ambassadors (22); Governors (18); Ministers & Officials (24); Experts & Scholars (12); Industry representatives (8); Others (20)
Corpus S	24	87	Public officials (52); Diplomatic representatives (23); Normal people (14); Company spokespersons (7); Others (15)

Table 6 tells an interesting story about quotation practices. In the Papua New Guinea corpus, indirect quotations (113) far outnumber direct ones (32), which suggests the reporting leans on indirect quotation to weave together perspectives from different stakeholders. When it comes to who gets cited, the PNG Prime Minister tops the list, followed by the Chinese Ambassador, provincial governors, and officials from various ministries. Experts, scholars, and industry representatives also show up with some regularity, while ordinary citizens are heard from less often. On the whole, the paraphrased quotations come mostly from high-level official figures on both the Chinese and PNG sides—a pattern that points to a reporting style focused on official positions and policy narratives.

The Solomon Islands corpus shows a similar preference. Indirect quotations (87) are much more common than direct ones (24), again indicating a tendency to integrate diverse voices through paraphrase. Here, Solomon Islands public officials are cited most frequently, followed by diplomatic representatives. Ordinary citizens make up a significant share of the citations, whereas corporate spokespersons appear relatively rarely. Overall, the paraphrased quotations draw mainly on official public officials and diplomatic personnel, but they also bring in some ordinary citizen voices. This reflects a reporting approach that values official policy positions while still making room for a degree of public perspective.

4.3 Social, Historical and Geopolitical Causes of Discursive Differences and Their Ideological Interpretation

The terms “rice” appear with high frequency in both the Corpus-P and Corpus-S corpora; this discourse feature can be traced back to its social-practical roots in the agricultural realities of both countries. According to statistical data, both Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands engage in rice cultivation; however, the rice planting and processing stages are relatively labor-intensive, and local practices generally do not include fertilization or pest and disease control measures. As a result, the local rice yield is low, and rice consumption relies heavily on imports (Zou, Peng, and Kang, 2024). Given these actual constraints in grain supply, rice has become a tangible focus of bilateral agricultural cooperation and thus appears as a high-frequency term in both news texts.

The discourse differences between the two corpora primarily stem from the distinct agricultural development foundations and the varying stages of bilateral cooperation between the two countries. The Pacific Island nations generally possess limited agricultural infrastructure and low levels of agricultural investment; the development of agricultural science and technology equipment lags behind, and the degree of agricultural mechanization is relatively low. Agricultural production in these regions largely relies on simple labor and animal-based farming methods; furthermore, underdeveloped public infrastructure—such as transportation networks and scientific research and technical services—hinders the widespread adoption and application of agricultural technologies (Zou, Peng, and Kang, 2024). The shortage of local agricultural technology supply in Papua New Guinea has given rise to a tangible demand for cooperation; consequently, the word frequencies of “technology” and “project” are significantly higher in the Corpus-P, reflecting a narrative focus on the export of agricultural technologies and the implementation of projects. In contrast, although the Solomon Islands also face a weak agricultural technology base, China-Solomon Islands agricultural cooperation is largely confined to the realm of inclusive basic agricultural assistance and has not yet progressed to the stage of implementing large-scale specialized technology projects; therefore, the corpus does not exhibit high-frequency discourse related to technological projects.

In the Papua New Guinea corpus, high-frequency occurrences of specialized economic crop terms such as “coffee” and “mushrooms” are inextricably linked to the practical imperative of expanding bilateral trade chains. As China’s domestic consumption structure undergoes upgrading, there is growing market demand for diversified, high-quality imported agricultural products; the South Pacific island nations possess favorable natural conditions, making tropical crop cultivation a key area for bilateral

cooperation. These nations encourage enterprises to participate in the development of island plantations and establish supply chains for exporting island-specific products to China (Chen, Lin and Zhuang, 2022). Papua New Guinea's coffee and mushroom crops align well with this trade orientation; consequently, relevant planting and production–marketing cooperation projects have been implemented and are reflected in the news texts. In contrast, no such specialized planting and trade linkage projects have been initiated between China and Papua New Guinea, leaving a lack of practical cooperation platforms, and thus no corresponding keyword exists in the Corpus-S.

The geopolitical environment and diplomatic strategic positioning have further amplified the narrative divergence between the two types of corpora. Influenced by the legacy of colonial history, the South Pacific island nations face a relatively complex landscape of competition among both domestic and external powers, and many of these nations receive official development assistance from multiple sources. Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are both among the countries within the region that receive substantial aid; however, they face distinct external geopolitical dynamics and varying structures of assistance. Multiple external forces constrain the scope for collaborative implementation, influence the pace and form of agricultural project rollout, and thereby shape their news narrative choices. Meanwhile, Papua New Guinea is the largest land-based economy in the South Pacific, strategically positioned at the regional center, and exerts a radiating and exemplary influence over its surrounding island nations. It serves as a strategic pivot for China's regional cooperation efforts, featuring a higher level of bilateral engagement and a permanent commercial and trade office, which facilitates the implementation of numerous agricultural technology and specialty cash crop industry projects (Chen, Lin and Zhuang, 2022). In contrast, the Solomon Islands do not hold such a strategic pivot role; its bilateral agricultural cooperation primarily focuses on basic livelihood assistance, lacking large-scale specialized industrial projects as narrative material. As a result, the corpora rarely contain expressions related to technology or specialty cash crops.

V. CONCLUSION

5.1 Major Findings

Utilising Fairclough's three-dimensional critical discourse analysis framework, this study constructed two self-built corpora consisting of 68 news reports collected from mainstream English-language newspapers in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands, covering the time span from 2018 to 2026. Supported by the AntConc corpus analytical tool, the paper carried out a systematic comparative discourse analysis of news narratives regarding China-Papua New Guinea and China-Solomon Islands agricultural cooperation along three interconnected analytical layers: textual description, discursive-practice interpretation and social-practice explanation. By comparing high-frequency vocabulary, collocation patterns, quotation modes, news source allocation and underlying socio-historical driving forces, this research has unpacked the similarities and divergences in how local Melanesian media construct representations of Chinese-led agricultural cooperation, together with the root causes behind such discursive variations. Several core empirical findings have been yielded.

At the textual dimension, news discourses from both Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are anchored in state-centred official narratives. Government-coordinated bilateral cooperation, rice production and food security constitute shared thematic pillars in the two corpora, reflecting the practical reality that food insufficiency has long been a pressing developmental challenge for both South-Pacific island nations. Nevertheless, substantial textual divergences emerge in thematic emphasis, lexical preference, collocation relationships and geographical framing. In the Papua New Guinea corpus, high-frequency lexical items such as juncao, technology, project, coffee and mushroom dominate the discourse landscape. Collocation analysis demonstrates that "China" is strongly associated with aid and export, which jointly construct a narrative that stresses China's provision of agricultural technical assistance, the roll-out of large-scale demonstrative industrial projects, as well as reciprocal bilateral agricultural trade that enables PNG local commodities to access Chinese consumer markets. Correspondingly, geographical descriptions in PNG news reports are multi-layered, covering the Highlands, Eastern regions and other spatially-specific zones where cooperative projects are physically implemented. By contrast, news texts from the Solomon Islands revolve around a cluster of livelihood-oriented lexis including farm, farmers, rural, people and Malaita. Rather than highlighting technological industrial outputs, media narratives prioritise grassroots livelihood improvement and community-level gains. Collocation patterns place heavy emphasis on sovereign state-to-state partnership between the two countries. Geographically, Malaita Province stands out as the overwhelmingly dominant regional reference point, while the rest of the archipelago is only vaguely referenced by the umbrella term "islands". In short, PNG media tends to frame agricultural cooperation as technology-driven industrial development plus bilateral commodity trade, whereas

Solomon Islands media favours a livelihood-centred narrative that highlights equal bilateral partnership and public welfare for ordinary local residents.

From the discursive-practice dimension represented primarily by intertextuality and quotation strategies, indirect quotation is widely adopted as the prevailing reporting technique across both corpora. Journalists in both countries frequently integrate statements from multiple stakeholders through paraphrasing instead of relying heavily on verbatim direct speech. The most salient gap lies in the composition and hierarchical distribution of cited news sources. In Papua New Guinea's news coverage, elite and official voices occupy a dominant position: prime ministers, provincial governors, cabinet ministers, Chinese diplomatic representatives, industry specialists and enterprise representatives are repeatedly quoted. Ordinary local citizens' perspectives are rarely incorporated into news texts, resulting in an official-elite-oriented discursive landscape. For the Solomon Islands, while government officials and diplomatic spokespersons still constitute major citation sources, local ordinary residents' viewpoints gain visible space within news stories. This mixing of official statements and grassroots feedback indicates that Solomon Islands mainstream media attempt to balance state-level diplomatic rhetoric with community-centred public perceptions of agricultural cooperation projects. Such differences in source allocation shape whose experiences and interpretations become publicly visible within national media discourse.

At the social-practice dimension, the observed discursive similarities and discrepancies cannot be reduced to mere media stylistic choices; they are conditioned by a complex assemblage of material agricultural conditions, bilateral cooperative maturity, national strategic positioning and regional geopolitical contexts. The shared focus on rice-related themes in both corpora originates from common domestic developmental predicaments: limited local rice productivity and heavy dependence on imported rice supplies in both island states, which render rice-related agricultural collaboration a pragmatic priority. The divergent narrative orientations, however, stem from uneven cooperative progress. China-Papua New Guinea diplomatic ties date back to 1976, and agricultural cooperation has evolved over a long period from preliminary technical exchanges toward systematic industrial demonstration projects and cross-border agricultural commodity trade linkages. By comparison, China-Solomon Islands diplomatic relations were established in 2019, and agricultural cooperation remains largely confined to basic livelihood-support-oriented interventions without mature large-scale industrialised flagship projects.Beyond bilateral practical conditions, regional geopolitics and national strategic status also shape how media frame these stories. Papua New Guinea, as the largest economy in Melanesia, sits at a geostrategic pivot in the South Pacific. It attracts development assistance from multiple parties, which in turn makes China-PNG agricultural cooperation more diversified—and gives local journalists plenty to report on. The Solomon Islands, by contrast, has yet to produce comparable large-scale industrial cooperation outcomes, so its local media narratives tend to focus on community-level livelihood results. This empirical evidence backs up the study's core argument: South Pacific Island nations should not be treated as a single, homogeneous group. Local mainstream media generate heterogeneous, context-specific readings of China-related cooperative initiatives rather than falling into one unified discursive stance. On top of that, this study shows the practical value of corpus-assisted Fairclough's three-dimensional critical discourse analysis for examining development-oriented international cooperation discourse in Global South small-island settings.

5.2 Implications

This study delivers multi-layered theoretical, methodological and practical implications for critical discourse studies, China-South Pacific academic research and international communication practice.

On the theoretical side, this paper pushes at the empirical boundaries of corpus-supported critical discourse analysis. So far, corpus-driven CDA scholarship has clustered heavily around news outputs and think-tank documents from Western and East Asian media institutions, while discourse evidence from small-island developing countries in the Global South remains comparatively thin. By taking mainstream English-language news from Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands as its analytical objects, this study adds non-Western empirical cases to CDA research on international cooperation. It also conceptualises and operationalises agricultural cooperation discourse as a specialised sub-category within international news discourse. Unlike conflict-centred diplomatic or crisis news discourse, agricultural cooperation discourse centres on pragmatic, livelihood-focused bilateral development interactions. This conceptual refinement offers a usable analytical lens for future discourse research on aid-relevant, development-driven bilateral exchanges between China and other Global South partners.

Methodologically, this study demonstrates a feasible and replicable analytical workflow for small-scale self-built thematic corpus research in less-studied regional contexts. The workflow includes corpus construction from

local mainstream newspaper sources, quantitative processing via AntConc for word frequency, collocation and KWIC concordance analysis, manual coding of intertextual quotation patterns and news source typologies, and multi-layered qualitative interpretation anchored in Fairclough's three-dimensional model. This mixed quantitative-qualitative analytical path can be adapted for follow-up research on fishery cooperation, climate governance or infrastructure-related media discourse in Pacific Island countries and other comparable developing regions. It also reinforces the strengths of corpus-assisted CDA: quantitative linguistic statistics help mitigate pure qualitative researchers' subjective bias, while three-dimensional social-practice interpretation prevents corpus-derived numerical findings from being isolated from real-world socio-historical contexts.

In practical terms, the heterogeneous media representations identified in this research carry tangible implications for China's international communication and public diplomacy targeting South Pacific Island nations. First, differentiated, country-tailored communication strategies should be designed according to local media characteristics and the developmental stage of bilateral agricultural cooperation. When engaging with Papua New Guinea's public sphere, communication outputs can appropriately highlight the technological demonstration value of flagship projects such as juncao cultivation, industrial upgrading effects and the mutual benefits of agricultural trade. For the Solomon Islands, external communication ought to place greater weight on authentic grassroots stories, presenting tangible community-level livelihood improvements experienced by local farmers and rural residents, rather than only emphasising technological outputs. Second, external communicators should proactively amplify ordinary local citizens' voices. The empirical findings show that grassroots perspectives already occupy partial discursive space in Solomon Islands' mainstream media but remain marginalised in PNG's newspaper coverage. Incorporating more local farmers' testimonials and community feedback into communication products helps Pacific audiences perceive cooperative achievements from lived-experience standpoints instead of merely receiving elite-dominated official narratives. Third, policy-makers and communication practitioners need to maintain continuous awareness of complicated regional geopolitical dynamics. External geopolitical forces continue to shape local media agendas in Melanesian countries. It is necessary to conduct sustained monitoring of local news framing, foresee potential geopolitically induced public-opinion risks, and maintain constructive dialogue and information sharing with local mainstream newspaper outlets, so as to facilitate more balanced, context-rooted media reporting of China-supported agricultural-development initiatives.

5.3 Limitations

Despite its empirical discoveries and contributions, this study comes with several noticeable limitations, which open avenues for subsequent scholarly inquiry.

First, the composition and scale of the self-built corpora impose certain constraints. The dataset draws exclusively upon four major printed English-language newspapers: Post Courier, Solomon Star, Solomon Times and The Island Sun. Digital news portals, social-media posts, radio transcripts and media materials published in indigenous local languages are excluded from corpus construction. Accordingly, the discursive patterns summarised in this paper mainly reflect perspectives from English-language elite mainstream print media, and cannot fully represent the broad public opinions held by non-English-speaking grassroots communities across the two island nations. In addition, the overall token volume of both corpora is relatively small. Although the 68 news reports cover multiple cooperative events spanning nearly eight years, limited corpus size may reduce the robustness of some lexical and collocation observations, and findings should not be over-generalised to all media and public discourse within Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands.

Second, this research adopts cross-sectional comparative analysis, lacking fine-grained diachronic tracking. While the corpus collection window extends from 2018 to 2026, the core analytical focus rests on comparing aggregated discursive features between the two national corpora. The study does not systematically trace how lexical choices, collocation tendencies, quotation strategies and thematic framing shift over time alongside the advancement of concrete agricultural projects, important bilateral diplomatic events, or external geopolitical shocks. Therefore, dynamic evolutions of agricultural-cooperation news discourse remain insufficiently captured in the current analysis.

Third, the integration level between corpus-generated quantitative outputs and qualitative textual close-reading can be further enhanced. This study relies on frequency, collocation and concordance results exported from AntConc, complemented by manual annotation for direct-indirect quotation classification and news-source coding. More advanced natural-language-processing techniques such as LDA topic modelling, structural topic modelling or fine-grained sentiment classification are not incorporated to cross-validate interpretative conclusions. Subjective researcher judgement inevitably exists during manual text coding and qualitative interpretation processes.

Fourth, explanations for social-practice-level driving factors are built on secondary academic literature and publicly available background documents, without primary field-work evidence. This paper infers media discourse-shaping mechanisms from discourse texts and existing secondary materials, yet it has not conducted original interviews with local journalists, newspaper editors, agricultural project practitioners or community stakeholders in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. As a result, interpretations of media production logics and local actors' real-world perceptions remain indirect rather than grounded in first-hand field data.

Against such limitations, future research can expand data sources by including digital news platforms, social-media content and indigenous-language materials to construct larger-scale multi-modal corpora. Longitudinal diachronic research designs can be adopted to observe how news discourse evolves alongside project implementation cycles. Moreover, combining corpus computational analysis with qualitative field-work methods including interviews and field observations will help scholars further unpack the institutional, economic and cultural mechanisms that shape local media representations of China-supported development projects across the broader South-Pacific Island region.

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Tracing the Subaltern in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*— A PoCo-Feminist Critique

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Abstract— *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti is a novel authored by Mohammed Hanif that discusses the underdog status of minorities, especially Christians in Pakistan. It examines how untouchables (Choohras, the janitors) in Christian community are subject to oppression from those within their group but also those outside their group, i.e., Muslims. What makes it worse is the oppression of the women from this class who are considered untouchables when it comes to equal opportunities in life and socialization but fit for interaction when taken as objects to satisfy the libido of those from out-group. This research is an attempt to study how they are exploited by those outside their community and deprived of their identity, in an attempt to silence their voices. Gayatri Spivak's essay Can the Subaltern Speak is used as the theoretical framework to analyze this novel. This research is a qualitative research based on textual arguments.*

Keywords— ***Christian, Identity, Marginalization, Oppression, Subaltern, Women.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Our Lady of Alice Bhatti is a novel by Mohammed Hanif. The genre of this work is cultural fiction, and it was first published in 2011 by Jonathan Cape. This novel lays bare the fabric of contemporary Pakistani society which has got freedom from white colonial masters but has set foundations of its new colonial rule. The modern colonizers are not from some far-flung lands but belong to the same land. The tools that they use to exploit the natives are religion, ethnicity, social status, financial status, etc. Thus, social background can land a person either in riches or a hell-like situation where there is no escape, as seen in the case of the protagonist of the novel.

The story of this novel revolves around the leading character, Alice Bhatti, who is born in a working-class Christian household. Her father, Joseph Bhatti, works as a janitor for the regional municipal corporation and provides part time social services as a spiritual healer, treating stomach ulcers for free. She loses her mother in a sexual assault at her employer's residence. This assault is guised as her accidental slipping from stairs and the murder is covered to save the influential culprits. This shows the first incident in the novel of how working-class women become an easy prey to sexual predators roaming free in the Pakistani society. This dystopia is a realistic depiction of the dilemma that Pakistani society faces today due to rampant misogyny and religious fundamentalism.

Alice's life in French colony, the slum where untouchables live in Karachi, is not that good either. Their living conditions are pitiable, and they hardly manage to live from hand to mouth. Despite miserable life and status of untouchables, the women from Christian working class, Choohras, are sexually fantasized and abused by men from different classes. Being physically assaulted, groped, verbally abused are matters of routine life. This shows the bigotry and hypocrisy of those living in the contemporary Pakistani society. Like the rest of Hanif's novels, *A Case of Exploding Mangoes,* and *Red Birds,* this novel gives a perfect overview of the society under consideration.

This novel bluntly shows how women, especially those from minority communities, are subject to violence and persecution. This sad state of minority communities, especially Christian women is well depicted in the life of Alice Bhatti, who ultimately loses her life to this social injustice. This study is an attempt to look into this matter and identify the reasons behind persecution of women. It also takes into consideration what are social causes of this injustice and what incites men to do this injustice to women.

Though there are different theories that can help with the analysis of this novel, Gayatri Spivak's essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?,* is the most appropriate work that can help analyze the situation depicted in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti.* This theory fits best in the analysis of the novel because of the identification of the characters in specific theoretical domain, i.e., subaltern. Fluid terms like women, Christian, minority, working class, etc. can be best classed under this category and be easily analyzed for specific purposes. This theory can be best used to trace the itinerary of a subaltern and the reasons that make a character/person a subaltern. This work conforms well to the situations described in the aforementioned essay and can shed light on this novel from a cultural perspective.

Purpose and Scope of the Research

The population of religious minority persons living in Pakistan (called *non-Muslims*) is in millions who form about 3.72% of the total population according to the census done in 1998 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics and Minority Rights Group Intl.). This percentage is questioned by different groups, and many claim that the stats 'have been' forged for different reasons. Christians comprise the leading community in this group who make 1.59% of the total percentage of religious minorities in Pakistan.

Despite the fact that 1.59% makes millions in a population whose total strength is 134.8 million (1998 census), Christians are not given their due rights and sidelined when it comes to equal opportunities in life. What makes it more shocking is the results of census held in 2017 which showed fall in the Christian population to 1.27% (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics) while Pakistan's total population rose to 207.8 million.

There is need for a study to know the reasons of why there is a fall seen in the population of minorities. Though being a fictional narrative, Mohammed Hanif's *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* makes an attempt to dig deeper into this problem, looking into how minorities are persecuted and denied equal rights. The focus of this novel is not only the Christian population in general, but also the situation of Christian women in particular, who are subject to oppression on daily basis. The protagonist of the novel Alice Bhatti loses her mother in a sexual assault at her employer's house. This leaves Alice in a situation where there is none to protect her from the ills that are rampant in the Pakistani society.

Being able to graduate from a nursing school, Alice is able to find a job in a Catholic missionary hospital, Sacred Heart Hospital for All Ailments. But before that she has been to borstal for an 'offence' to protect herself from religious persecution. This continues throughout her life and the mortal point comes when she resists sexual advances from an influential family brat in the Sacred Heart Hospital. Her ending is tragic because of her resistance to give in to the oppressive forces. The previous studies done in this regard show how she was subjected to oppression, i.e., sexual, social, and political, and how she tried to resist it.

This study will make an attempt to show how she is being subjected to oppression by the new masters, making her a subaltern. Her subalternity will be discussed from two perspectives, viz. being a Christian, and being a woman. In either case, she encounters oppression and ill treatment.

Theoretical Framework

Gayatri C. Spivak's essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak,* provides the theoretical framework for the analysis of this novel. This theory provides an apt rubric for the oppressed classes in post-colonial societies where reorientations of those in corridors of power have led to new master (oppressor) and oppressed classes. The oppressed classes are either based on their ethnicity, gender, or religious background. There are theories that can help identify these oppressed classes based on socio-economic status, gender, or some other factor, but what makes it easy for a researcher to identify these fluid categories is Gayatri Spivak's theory of Subaltern, which is a modified form of the concept coined by Antonio Gramsci.

Identity being a fluid term makes it difficult for a researcher to fit their work under a specific rubric. This theory is about how the oppressed are deprived of identity in the post-colonial societies. What makes it broad and all-embracing for oppressed from different classes is the acceptance of women, minorities, socially marginalized, etc. Spivak is of the view that the subaltern are silenced, and their voices are not given due importance which they deserve. She cites examples from different western authors who have investigated other cultures but from a distance and a feeling of superiority. The very first instance that she quotes in her essay is that of the legal prohibition of the rite of 'sati' which was seen from a 'universal' perspective, that she believes is not the right framework used.

Spivak is of the view that knowledge is a commodity and thus can never be innocent. So, acceptance of the concept of subaltern from the western perspective is not the

right step, instead the colonial project needs to be sabotaged by following ways that doesn't benefit the empire. She is of the view that studies shouldn't be white men speaking to white men about brown people. If this happens, it is the silencing of the subaltern. This cultural conquest includes the 'institutionalization' of the subaltern narrative which is straitjacketed for various purposes.

It is not only in the social life but in the political discourse that women have been marginalized and silenced. The only way to listen to these voices is through consideration of them as 'native informants' whose silence and fade speaks of the horrible treatment they encounter in their lives.

There is not a clear definition given for the subaltern, but it is described in bits and pieces of how a subaltern can be. Determining the subaltern in South Asian society is a daunting task but it can be done through some basic features that identify them. Spivak's theory of subaltern in *Can the Subaltern Speak* is much helpful in this regard.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to show the marginalization of the subaltern, viz women, Christians, in the mentioned novel. This research will highlight how these subalterns encounter inhuman treatment and why their voices are not heard. It will also look into detail the method, manner, and ultimate goal of this marginalization. The main focus will be the protagonist and her miserable journey of life and the abuses that she comes across as a subaltern while those in second and third tier will also be touched to show the relevance of their status as subaltern and their ultimate end.

Literature Review

Our Lady of Alice Bhatti is considered a work of immense consequence. It has touched the very roots of causes for discrimination of the marginalized people. There are various aspects of viewing this work of fiction which in fact describes the sorry state of affairs in Pakistan. It lays bare the frail fabric of Pakistani society which is based on the misogyny, oppression, promotion of elitism, and other vices that rust a society. Despite the fact that these problems are rooted in the society, few are daring enough to recognize them while others blame it on the reasons that are either non-existent or logically invalid.

Parul Sehgal, a literary critic, has called this novel an "Interpreter of Maladies' because of the novel's exposition of the main ailments from which Pakistani society suffers. Sehgal calls this novel "a blistering broadside on the socially sanctioned butchery of women and girls in Pakistan." She writes further in her review written for *The New York Times* about this novel calling it a work of "comic genius." It is because of not only the violence that women are subjected to but also the author's skill to guise as a moralist, who in real is a torturer of women. The only thing that Hanif takes as a serious task is torturing female characters while the rest continues as a "fair game." Here she compares Mohammed Hanif to Flannery O'Connor and Muriel Spark. She calls it a "deadly serious work" which fits the definition of anarchy. In short, she even muses about Sacred Heart Hospital's possibility as a "parable for Pakistan.

Our Lady of Alice Bhatti is a novel rich in meanings. It is for this reason that it can be interpreted from different perspectives. These include analysis from Marxist perspective, Magic Realist perspective, Feminist perspective, Subaltern perspective etc. Yasir Ahmed in his study considers this novel from the Marxist perspective. He has taken the socio-economic problems as the roots cause of the ills that make the marginalized characters' life miserable. This study makes an attempt to know how lack of resources places Alice Bhatti and other marginalized characters in a miserable situation. He studies class conflict and bourgeois manipulation and exploitation of the proletariat. This study shows that there are two clearly identifiable classes based on the economic status in the mentioned novel. The oppressive class uses all possible measures to deprive the oppressed class of the fundamental human rights and needs. It is a detailed study of the marginalization of the oppressed class which attempts to know about the tools of oppression used by the hegemonic structure.

Another trend in the critical study of *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* is that from the Magic Realism perspective. Saadia Qamar and Aamer Shaheen in their study "Magic Realism as a Tool for Empowerment of Women in Mohammed Hanif's Our Lady of Alice Bhatti" discuss this technique's use of this novel to show the empowerment of women in the novel. According to the two researchers the writer has employed the tool of magic realism to promote the agenda of feminism. Hanif has borrowed this technique from the Latin American writers to show Alice as an ambitious and strong character. According to the researchers magic realism has been employed to show the spiritual journey of Alice. She has the ability to know about the death of a person from their face and this shows her supernatural ability. Also, the death of the newborn baby and finally Alice's death are the instants that shows the Magic Realist touches in this work. According to the researchers these techniques used in this novel are for the strengthening the female characters. The world of fantasy not only shows the oppressive treatment to which women are subjected but also the perseverance of the main character, i.e., Alice Bhatti.

Abroo Nazar has critiqued this novel from the subaltern and marginalization perspective. She in her paper, "Silencing of Subaltern in Our Lady of Alice Bhatti," talks about how subaltern are silenced in Pakistani society. Abroo Nazar shows how women are subjected to violence in form of social, religious, and cultural oppression. These people are stereotyped by the people from the elite class which shows how they are considered mere numbers or bodies instead of human beings. Nazar is of the view that these people are helpless and have to live a meek life because of inability to resist the oppression. This research has attempted to show the subaltern are silenced due to their weakness and lacking the fundamental rights in the society where they live. They are disempowered and thus ultimately silenced. This work has attempted to show that the subaltern lack the ability to express themselves. Alice, the main character of the novel, is a prime example of subaltern in this work.

Mubashar Altaf and Qaiser Shahzad in their work "A Subaltern's Quest for Identity and Respect: A Gramscian Study of *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti*" show that how Alice tries her best to get respect in a society where she is a considered subaltern. She is subject to institutionalized oppression where she finds no respite. She is dealt like a subaltern by people from all categories of the elite class. Some of them consider her a tool for the satisfaction of their libido while others consider her a slave. Living in this society is devoid of respect and the fundamental human right of respect. According to Altaf and Shahzad she is in quest for identity and respect in many manners. She is a woman in a misogynistic society and a Christian in a Muslim majority country. This worsens her situation and she is unable to get the respect that she deserves as a human. This quest leads to her ultimate death.

II. ALICE: A SUBALTERN AND THE VERACITY OF THIS FACT

Subaltern is a term used for the marginalized people who are deemed outcast of their society. It is because of their outcast status that they are not given equal rights and discriminated based on who and what they are. There can be different reasons for being deemed a subaltern, either it might be because of a person's (or group's) social class, gender, or some other reason that they are considered inferior. Though the concept of subaltern is often presented a simple subject, it cannot be put plainly. The complexity of the concept of subaltern is seen in Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's groundbreaking essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak*. For the reason of slipperiness and fluidity of the concept of subaltern, the arguments of a person/character's being subaltern are justified using bits and pieces instead of a clearly put definition from Spivak. Spivak writes in her essay: "But one must nevertheless insist that the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogenous." (Spivak, 38) This means that limiting the subaltern to a specific domain, class, or gender would be a mistake. It is for this reason that Alice should be considered for being subaltern and this essay explores this fact.

Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory defines 'Subaltern' as:

> "A term conceived by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who because he was in prison and his writings subject to censorship, used it as a code word for any class of people (but especially peasants and workers) subject to the "hegemony" of another more powerful class." (Buchanan, 423)

Spivak's essay, as the mainstay for the researcher's study provides an idea of what a subaltern can be. She has done this by citing different examples from India under British Raj and the academic works of western writers like Deleuze, Derrida, Foucault, etc. This chapter substantiates the argument of Alice's (the main character in the novel) being a subaltern using textual evidence from works of different Subaltern theorists and the novel. The term subaltern in the mentioned novel is an exhibition of Alice's subaltern status in particular as well as the portrayal of her fellow subaltern characters in general in the Pakistani society.

The concept of subaltern can be traced back to Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci who gave an idea of the concept of subaltern in his work *Notes on Italian History* which was later published collectively in *Prison Notebooks*. Gramsci took this concept from the works of Karl Marx, and later this concept was developed by theorists like Spivak, Ranjit Guha, Edward Said, and the group of Indian scholars interested in subaltern studies named "The Subaltern Collective."

Antonio Gramsci's description of subaltern is a primitive form of this concept which has later been developed by other scholars. El Habib Louai in his comparative paper on different subaltern scholars has put Gramsci's definition of subaltern as follows.

> "The subaltern classes refer fundamentally in Gramsci's words to any "low rank" person or group of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as

active individuals of the same nation." (Louai, 5)

Gramsci comes up with a simple description of subaltern in his work *Prison Notebooks*, which is given as follows.

> "The subaltern classes by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a "State": their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States and groups of States" (Gramsci, 1971).

Other features that define a subaltern in Gramscian work are belonging to peasant or lower class, low financial and social status, and oppression by the dominant class. His concept of subaltern is mainly related to the oppression of working or peasant class by the members of Benito Mussolini's National Fascist Party. The subaltern in Gramsci's works refers to a "low rank" person or a group that suffers under the yoke of a hegemonic power or a group of people.

If Alice's character is analyzed using the same definition, then we come to know that she conforms to the concept of subaltern. Whether this comparison is done using her social background, religious affiliation, or her financial status. All these contribute to her underdog status, where she faces resentment from those in the higher classes of society. She belongs to Christian community in a Muslim majority country of Pakistan. Despite high claims of equality and social privileges, non-Muslims face backlash in different walks of life. From separation of residential areas to being shunned in workplaces, and considered untouchables in public spaces, Christians in this novel face complete social discrimination. She is not only Christian but also a woman in a misogynistic society and has poor financial background. This adds to her miseries, and she faces all the problems that a subaltern can face.

Alice belongs to the same class, and being a member of the Christian community, she resides in French Colony. This colony is a slum for Christians in Karachi with bare minimum fundamental requirements of life are fulfilled. This colony if compared to the state of the oppressed class in Gramsci's work shows evident oppression and its inmates are subject to oppressive behavior of the dominant class. As mentioned at several instances in the novel, Christians from French Colony have no opportunity to serve at any place other than Municipal Corporation. Also, the municipal corporation doesn't allocate them positions other than janitors. Most people outside French Colony think that it is a place inhabited by janitors. As "Alice Bhatti knows that people think that everyone in French Colony is a janitor and works for the corporation. But she refuses to be drawn into this discussion. It never goes anywhere" (Hanif, 106).

The same holds true about the females of their class. They have no other opportunity save working as maids or nurses in hospitals. In both places they work in unfavorable situations, where they are subject to sexual and domestic violence. As seen in the case of Alice, it is clearly evident that she is a subaltern. This can be justified from various perspectives using Gramscian concept of the subaltern. Fitting Alice into the rubric of Gramscian subaltern seems a bit tricky but this becomes easy if characteristics for both are compared. So, if the members of Christian community 'unite,' as said in Gramscian description, they can overcome their subaltern status. The same can be held true about the Christians of French Colony who if get united can change their subaltern status but unfortunately it doesn't happen. Gramscian subalternity is defined by resistance as well, as "No matter how heterogeneous the subaltern groups may be, there is a constantly unchanging character which defines them: that is, the notion of resistance to the imposed domination of the elite class" (Louai, 6). So, Alice resists her status of subaltern time and again. Though this strife doesn't prove fruitful, it shows her perseverance to break the chains of being a subaltern and her resultant marginalized status.

El Habib Louai puts the characteristics of Gramscian subaltern in their analysis very aptly, as:

> "This distinct difference between the elite and the subaltern is evident when we conceived it through the notion of political mobilization. The elite political mobilization is fulfilled through appropriation of or adjustment to the British parliamentary institutions and laws whereas the subaltern political mobilization is founded on classical forms of social organization such as: blood relationships and kinship, territoriality, traditional and tribal affiliations where popular mobilization take the form of peasant insurgencies and regional demon-strations. No matter how heterogeneous the subaltern groups may be, there is a constantly unchanging character which defines them: that is, the notion of resistance to the imposed domination of the elite class." (Louai, 6)(Ilhaam)

Based on the above-mentioned characteristics, we can see that Alice as a subaltern is part of resistance and political mobilization. This happens when she is student at the

nursing school and comes in direct conflict with Muslim students. She tries to mobilize fellow Christian students, but this attempt fails, and she faces disciplinary action. It is because of her low social status that she is punished for the mistake committed by a senior surgeon. She is sentenced to fourteen months in jail for death of a patient who died to the carelessness of the surgeon. In short, she does her best to change her status by political efforts, resistance to the elite and dominant classes, and trying different affiliations but none of these work to change her status. In contrast, if Alice and her underling group is compared to the group of Muslim girls, they have a strong backing. They are supported by their political/religious brethren in boy's colleges. As, "It seemed the poster girls had poster brothers in other colleges who had guns" (Hanif, 233). Gayatri Spivak is mainly interested in two things about a subaltern whether they can "speak," or be "heard." There are some characteristic features that define a subaltern in Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak*. These characteristics include being the "indigenous dispossessed in colonial societies," "ability to make their decisions," "achieving agency," etc. Spivak talks in detail about the Western scholars who talk about these subaltern, but this is of no use because they "reproduce" the hegemonic structures." She concludes her essay by stating that the subaltern are finally disposed and thus can't "speak." Subaltern is also defined by "marginalization" and "oppression" in Spivak's work. She puts forward the idea that the poor don't have any voice in the society, and they are not often faithfully represented by those having the power to say. These include religious leaders, educators, officials, and Western scholars.

If Alice is compared to the characteristics of a subaltern put forward by Spivak, we find a lot of similarities between the two. The main example of the subaltern cited in Spivak's work is that of Rani Gulari. She is a woman from Bengal who commits suicide after being foiled in a failed attempt to attack British officials in colonial India. Her aim is to free her motherland from the colonizers who have come to this land usurping the rights of its inmates. If we compare Alice to Gulari, we don't find an explicit political struggle, but we come to know that her struggle resembles that of Gulari. She is an apt example of "double marginalization" mentioned in Spivak's work. Gulari commits suicide and this way she wants to be "retrieved" through her body. She dies and this signifies her struggle. In comparison, Alice doesn't embrace death intentionally, but her struggle is an evident example of resistance against oppression.

If Alice's marginalization is studied, we come to know that she doesn't have opportunity to have a dignified living. When it comes to the opportunities for job and equal status in society, she is denied that but when it comes to her gender, everyone is ready to exploit her. This can be seen in the instances from novel when her commuting experience is described. "But the same people who wouldn't drink from a tap that she has touched have no problem casually poking their elbows into her breast or contorting their own bodies to rub against her heathen bottom" (Hanif, 130). Spivak considers subaltern to be the "slave" in the "master-slave relationship." She has taken this concept from Ranajit Guha's *Subaltern Studies.* She agrees to Guha that the subaltern cannot write their history, as "Guha sees his definition of "the people" within the master-slave dialectic—their text articulates the difficult task of rewriting its own conditions of impossibility as the conditions of its possibility" (Spivak, 39). At another point she writes about the subaltern as "…the people or subaltern—which is itself defined as the difference from elite" (Spivak, 39). So, if Alice is considered from the perspective of difference from elite, she can be without any doubt put under the rubric of subaltern. If we look at her personal history, she has all the traits of belonging to the class that is different from elite. She comes from a class that is there to serve the elite in every possible manner. It not only works physically for the elite and serves as a commodity but is also used for the satisfaction of the libidinal desires of the elite. This is evident from how she is dealt in this hospital, in buses and also when she is commuting back and forth from her workplace. She can't write her history or has the power to be represented legally or in historical documents. All that is there to represent her is the versions of stories that are hearsay and fabricated anecdotes. There is no story that considers her own version of an event.

Gender plays main role in the determination of subaltern role. As Spivak writes in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* "The pattern of domination is here determined mainly by gender rather than class"(Spivak, 39). This further substantiates the fact that Alice is a subaltern based on her gender, her class, her financial status, the community she belongs to. If this had not been the case, and she belonged to a different group (the elite class), then she might not have been a subaltern. "Lewd gestures, whispered suggestions, uninvited hands on her bottom are all part of Alice Bhatti's daily existence" (Hanif, 17), Her subaltern status is strengthened by her class. If we compare this to another character in the novel, that is mentioned for a single instance, i.e. Hannah Massey, who is a bishop's daughter, we come to know that she is truly a subaltern. Hannah Massey belongs to a wealthy and influential family and for this reason she is enjoying her life abroad. She has a thriving business and happy life while Alice faces every possible problem in Karachi. If Alice had the same financial privileges, then she would also have no exposure to this discriminatory treatment.

A subaltern is not merely considered a subaltern based on what traits they have of a subaltern. Rather this is more determined by what situations they face due to their roots. The marginalization runs deep in the whole society. It is for this reason that the Christians of French Colony pretend to be Muslims to ensure that they don't face discrimination because of their identity. "They remind her of those people in French Colony who give their children these names in the hope that they'll pass as Muslas" (Hanif, 241). This way they don't only face threatened but are also forced to adopt the identity of the dominant class and shed their own. This deprivation of identity and still being dealt like untouchable is a dilemma that they face everywhere in the society that has declared them outcast.

As Spivak considers a subaltern marginalized, unable to speak, and have no history of their own, we come to know that Alice faces the same problems. She doesn't even have the freedom to take her personal decisions, and if she takes any, she is ridiculed for it. Some of these include her decision to marry Teddy Butt, taking refuge at sister Hina Alvi's residence, resistance against being used to satisfy the libido of Qaz's male attendants in VIP room of Sacred Hospital, etc. Her history is distorted and there are myriads of rumors spread about her. This doesn't even stop after her death. Thus her story remains ambiguous, and she dies the death of a subaltern. Rosalind C. Morris writes in *Reflections on the History of an Idea – Can the Subaltern Speak?* "Subalternity is less an identity than what we might call a predicament, but this is true in very odd sense. For, in Spivak's definition, it is the structured place from which the capacity to access power is radically obstructed." (Morris, 8). So, we can conclude that Alice is a subaltern who not only lives the life of a subaltern, but her death is also a perfect example of a subaltern.

III. TREATMENT OF WOMEN IN PAKISTANI SOCIETY: A STUDY OF NOVEL'S FIRST TIER CHARACTER

Misogyny runs deep in the roots of Pakistani society. It is not the result of some short-term incidents and their after-effects, rather it is resultant from the patriarchal setup of this society. Misogyny has been depicted in detail in Hanif's novel where many instances show how women are treated by men and how morally corrupt this society is. There is a clear depiction of the power relationship between men and women. Men have power and they abuse it, and the treatment of women like second-class citizens is a common practice amongst men. Women are considered a commodity for procreation, and not given status higher than personal property. Rosalind C. Morris writes in the introduction about subaltern in *Reflection on the History of an Idea – Can the Subaltern Speak?* "The "woman" as Spivak tells us, inevitably is doubly in shadow" (Morris, 2).

The first-tier character in this novel is Alice Joseph Bhatti, a nurse who is resident of French Colony. She is born to an outcast (choohra) father, Joseph Bhatti, who is a janitor at Karachi Municipal Corporation. She has been through unspeakable horrors due to her parents' social status. They are not only financially weak but also have no considerable position in their own colony. It is due to their low income that she is malnourished, and their family isn't able to eat well. She is a subaltern not for a single reason but there are different reasons for it. One of these reasons is her gender. It is because of her gender that she receives discriminatory treatment. As Spivak writes about gender's role in her essay "The pattern of domination is here determined mainly by gender rather than class. The subordinated gender following the dominant within the challenge of nationalism while remaining caught within gender oppression is not an unknown story." Alice's life from birth till death is the prime example of miseries due to her gender. It is her gender that makes her life troublesome from the very beginning. It is because of her feminine body that she is ridiculed by those in her school, church, and other public places. Later this body adds to her trouble because men try to harass her. Men stare at her, grope her, and try to satisfy their libido. This bothers her in interviews, as happens in her interview at Sacred Hospital for All Ailments where one of the interview panel members stares at her body parts and makes obscene comments. "*"*Postnatal care?*"* His eyes are level with Alice Bhatti's breasts. "Inverted nipples. How do you deal with them? Should you deal with them Have you any personal experiences to share? Ortho sir roles his tongue around his gums as if there might be nipples stuck between his teeth." (Hanif, 17). This is the first instance of the lewd gestures and talk in Sacred Hospital for All Ailments and this continues till the end. She is even harassed at the 'Charya Ward' which is ward for those suffering from mental illness. The inmates of this ward react in an odd manner when she enters there. One of the inmates drops his trousers, some of them begin to shout. "Surprise them," he whispers. "Reveal yourself." (Hanif, 48) This is the reaction of one of the men in the mental illnesses ward. They hold her and then lift her up in the air. Charya Ward seems like a miniature representation of the society she lives in. The difference between the two is that in one the inmates are called mentally ill, while in the other they are considered fit and healthy.

"The agency was always male, the woman was always the victim" (Spivak, 57). In this society Alice always suffers at hands of men. There are few exceptions to it, but the majority is there to torment her. She doesn't even feel safe when she is waiting for bus, there she pretends that someone

is coming to pick her. She takes careful steps to ensure that no one misconstrues her gait. In short, she is in miserable condition due to men. Men see her as a tool for pleasure instead of a living human being and this makes it difficult for her. Her body speaks of the different events that she underwent. There are scars of cigarettes on her body that her communist boyfriend doctor left. She believed him to be someone sincere to her, but he only craved her body. This makes her believe that her body (gender) has been the reason of miseries for her.

The final misery, which ultimately leads to her death, comes when she is assigned VIP ward for night-shift duty. This is where the attendants of the patient, Qaz, try to abuse Alice and she takes pragmatic skill to prevent the man from abusing her. She tries to slash his phallus, also symbolic of trying to challenge men's power, and this leads to events that end in form of her miserable death. She is murdered by her own husband, Teddy Butt, for money. These men are from an influential family and hire Teddy to murder her. He does this by throwing a dangerous poison on her body and this proves fatal.

"The subaltern as a female cannot be heard or read" (Spivak, 63). Thus, Alice, despite taking steps to make others hear what happened to her is silenced. She is silenced so that the society doesn't come to know about what happened in the VIP ward. She loses her life to the fulfillment of the desire of revenge of the influential family. What worsens Alice's fate is the stories that are narrated after her death. Some call her saint and others equate her to an angel who has been taken to heavens by some divine creatures. This helps hide the story that what happened to her and who was the culprit. The crime is covered in an organized manner.

IV. CONCLUSION

Our Lady of Alice Bhatti lays bare the fabric of Pakistani society and the inherent set of injustices done to the marginalized people in the Pakistani society. The special consideration in this study is the first-tier character like Alice—who is the main character. Despite the fact that there is no specific definition available for subaltern which straitjackets them—which is rather fortunate because there might have been possibility of skipping a subaltern due to non-conformity to a specific part of it— she has been studied using Gayatri Spivak's essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?*. Following the features of a subaltern mentioned in Spivak's work, we come to know that this character conforms to the features that defines a subaltern.

Keeping in view the life and death of this character it can be confirmed that her miseries are mainly due to her gender, religion, financial conditions, etc. She faces abnormal situations throughout her life and this has been depicted well in the novel. Her life since her early childhood has been a perfect example of a subaltern and the same is the case with her family.

Alice's miseries as a subaltern don't come to halt after death of her mother. They continue during her educational and professional career. Her subaltern status is manifested throughout the novel. It is like a festering wound that reminds her of the pain time and again. She tries to get rid of it by battling those who have inflicted it by dividing the society into elite and subaltern. Unfortunately, all her attempts go in vain and there is no change in her subaltern status except the bad memories of the struggle to gain an equal status. She is targeted for her religious affiliation and expression of it during her nursing school days and there is no end to it.

Her body is an example of a battlefield where the politics of subaltern and marginalization operated. This struggle doesn't end in assaults like the typical of subalterns, rather it continues. She is jailed for an offence for which she was not solely responsible, still she is held as the main accused and sentenced to fourteen months in jail. It is her subaltern status that doesn't let her lead a normal life. She faces problems in her professional life due to her gender and faith. The misogyny rampant in Pakistani society and her faith lead to her ultimate death. A patient's relatives try to abuse her and this led to her death at hands of her husband Teddy Butt. He is paid for this job and he carries out it using some poison.

Miseries of a subaltern are not only harassment at the hands of the oppressor class but also the recurrent reminders of the fact that they are not normal and equal citizens. It is a mental torture that continues and is expressed in different forms. The reason behind it is the belief of women being a commodity or a property that must be owned by men. It is for this reason that women face physical and verbal abuse not only at hands of their family members, relatives, but also from those who are not related to them by any means. It is his foul language like using term 'slutsville' for the Sacred Heart Hospital, and undue intervention that shows that men regardless of their education or social background consider it a right to abuse women. Alice resists to this other abuses in an undaunted manner but it is of no use. Ultimately, there is no place for a subaltern in the mentioned society.

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Victor Frankenstein's Creature as a Literary Metaphor for Artificial Intelligence: Autonomy, Responsibility, and Technological Control in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus*

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Abstract— *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus (1818) remains a significant literary meditation on scientific ambition, artificial creation, responsibility, and the consequences of innovation. This article examines Victor Frankenstein's creature as a literary metaphor through which contemporary controversies surrounding artificial intelligence can be integrated. Rather than equating the creature with contemporary AI, the study identifies a limited but productive analogy between Shelley's representation of artificial creation and contemporary concerns about learning, autonomy, control and responsibility. Using a technoethical lens, this study compares and contrasts the creature created by Mary Shelley and Artificial Intelligence. The creature's eloquence, intellectual capacities and strength have become a causal factor in destabilising its creator and society. This article argues that the novel's continuing relevance lies not in a literal prediction of AI, but in its exploration of what happens when a creator develops a powerful artificial entity without adequately anticipating its needs, social environment or consequences. This article provides a valuable cultural and ethical lens for examining responsible innovation, human oversight, technological control and accountability in the development and deployment of increasingly capable AI systems.*

Keywords— ***Autonomy, Technoethics, Artificial Intelligence, the creature, Society.***

Résumé— *Frankenstein ou le Prométhée moderne de Mary Shelley (1818) demeure une œuvre majeure pour réfléchir à l'ambition scientifique, à la création artificielle, à la responsabilité et aux conséquences de l'innovation. Cet article examine la Créature de Victor Frankenstein comme une métaphore littéraire permettant d'interroger les controverses contemporaines relatives à l'intelligence artificielle (IA). Plutôt que d'assimiler la Créature à l'IA contemporaine, l'étude établit une analogie limitée mais féconde entre la représentation de la création artificielle chez Shelley et les débats actuels sur l'apprentissage, l'autonomie, le contrôle et la responsabilité. À travers un prisme techno-éthique, cette étude compare et oppose la créature créée par Mary Shelley à l'intelligence artificielle. L'éloquence, les capacités intellectuelles et la force de la créature sont devenues des facteurs causaux de la déstabilisation de son créateur et de la société. L'article soutient que l'intérêt durable du roman ne réside pas dans une prédiction littérale de l'IA, mais dans son exploration de ce qui se produit lorsqu'un créateur développe une entité artificielle puissante sans anticiper suffisamment ses besoins, son environnement social ou ses conséquences. Le roman constitue ainsi une ressource culturelle et éthique pertinente pour réfléchir à l'innovation responsable, au contrôle humain, à la gouvernance technologique et à la responsabilité dans le développement et le déploiement de systèmes d'IA de plus en plus capables.*

Mots-clés— ***autonomie ; techno-éthique, intelligence artificielle, la créature, société.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* published in 1818, remains one of the earliest and most captivating meditations about all that is linked to the ethics of creation and the moral implications of scientific drive. It can also serve as a productive literary resource for contemporary discussions of artificial intelligence, provided that the comparison is made critically and without treating literary analogy as technological equivalence. The creature is not an AI system in the contemporary technical sense. It is a fictional, embodied being endowed with sensation, language, emotion, desire and moral reflection. Nevertheless, Shelley's narrative raises questions that remain central to contemporary AI ethics. The nature of capabilities acquirement, the autonomy permitted by creators; the level of human control and the responsibility regarding technological systems. Shelley's portrayal of Victor Frankenstein's creation, an intelligent, strong and unstoppable being, gives insight into the dangers and fears coming with innovation when moral conduct is not observed.

The central argument of this article is therefore not that the creature is artificial intelligence, but that Frankenstein's creature functions as a literary metaphor through which selected AI controversies can be examined. This distinction is essential. AI systems are heterogeneous computational technologies, and current systems should not automatically be described as conscious, emotional or morally intentional. The comparison is strongest at the level of ethical and structural questions. Artificial creation, learning from information, the relationship between design intentions and subsequent behaviour, the distribution of control, and responsibility for consequences.

Contemporary scholars discuss the risks of maintaining an increasing rate of self-learning machines. They have emphasised the ethical risks of developing independent systems that could get out of human control. They are concerned about how autonomous machines could cause damage, making this concern relevant to humans. Shelley's work not only offers a reflection on modern science's fear but also builds a framework that helps us understand the boundaries of technological power (Bostrom, 2014; Floridi, 2015; Tegmark, 2017; Russell, 2019; Nyholm, 2023). This section explores *Frankenstein* in two dimensions: The creature's autonomy, learning and the question of artificial agency; and from creator responsibility to the AI responsibility gap. These dimensions provide insight into how Shelley's vision continues to haunt contemporary society.

II. THE CREATURE'S AUTONOMY, LEARNING AND THE QUESTION OF ARTIFICIAL AGENCY

Frankenstein, written by Mary Shelley, does not present intelligence as a fixed attribute that the creature possesses fully formed at the moment of animation. Instead, Shelley represents cognition as developing through sensation, observation, imitation, language acquisition and interaction with the environment. is discussed as forming the basis of artificial intelligence through the Monster. The behaviour patterns of the creature are viewed as typical artificial intelligence due to the fact that all that surrounds it is done by itself. Th developmental structure provides a productive point of comparison with contemporary machine learning, although the comparison remains conceptual rather than literal. Given the definition of artificial intelligence, it is the capacity of a robot to perform human tasks, mimic human actions and go even far beyond what is expected. Artificial Intelligence is a technology that enables computers and machines to simulate human learning, comprehension, problem-solving, decision-making, creativity and autonomy. (Alexandre, 2017 ; Andler, 2023 ; Ganascia, 2017 ; Éthique et intelligence artificielle, 2020 ; Mani and Chouk, 2023).

The distinction between artificial and human intelligence is essential. Andler (2023) emphasises the conceptual difficulty of comparing human intelligence with artificial systems, while Ganascia (2017) situates AI within a broader history of attempts to reproduce or augment forms of human intelligence. For Alexandre (2017), the individual capacity to draw information and find its links constitutes the foundation of intelligence. Intelligence enables one to apprehend things and judge them according to the information being put in mind. Alexandre believes that one should consider intelligence synonymous with rationality, since it processes information before use. Contemporary AI systems can perform tasks involving pattern recognition, prediction, language processing, classification and decision support. These capabilities, however, do not by themselves establish human-like consciousness or subjective experience. The creature is different in the sense that Shelley endowed it with a sentient and morally reflective being. This analogy should therefore concern the conditions and consequences of artificial capability, not an identity between the creature and AI.

The creature explains its earliest experiences, that is, learning performed through accumulated observation. The incoming data it analyses every day allows it to cross-check its effects and how to address them: "…I learned to

distinguish between the operations of my various senses" (F, p.83). The passage is important because it explains how it was difficult for the creature to understand all that happened around it. Although it is unable to interpret those events, it knows that there exists a mechanism that enables the happening of those events. It gradually constructs distinctions through repeated encounters with its environment. The parallel with machine learning lies in the capabilities that can emerge from their exposure to information and patterns. Alexandre (2017) reinforces this narrative by mentioning that machine learning is valid through loaded information. However, this ends when the creature exposes its affective pattern, making it disconnected from machine learning, which has no affective pattern. A machine learning model can identify statistical regularities in data. These regularities do not imply that it experiences the world as the creature does. They have various patterns, making them different. It is therefore important to recognise those differences, which will be a key concern in studying them.

The creature's learning is gradual and cumulative, given that it witnesses different phenomena. It distinguishes day from night, light from darkness, and different sounds and natural phenomena. It argues: "Several changes of day and night passed, and the orb of the night had greatly lessened when I began to distinguish my sensations from each other" (F, p.84). Shelley presents in this passage cognition as a process of adaptation rather than as an instantaneous transfer of knowledge. This narrative structure resonates with contemporary discussion of machine learning, in which system performance depends partly on training procedures and data characteristics it receives. The comparison is useful because it refuses to consider intelligence as an abstract property but as capabilities that can be developed over time.

The creature's development also demonstrates the importance of context. It is created without parental guidance. It must interpret the social world largely through observation. Its knowledge therefore depends on what it can access and on the circumstances in which that information is encountered. It observes what is going on around it. Examining the results and increasing accuracy in its action is greatly due in part to the full range of incoming environmental phenomena it witnesses. Eileen (2018) clarifies: "The creature's process of artificial formation begins with his animation without a mother." Because for him, "Although the creature lacks a mother, he has the same contextual and interactive process of development as other children. As with Frankenstein's creature, AI is not born, but it is still made by circumstances. This has direct technoethical significance. Technological systems do not operate independently of their design, training, evaluation procedures and deployment environment. The analogy should not suggest that AI systems develop like children, rather, it highlights the ethical importance of the conditions under which artificial capabilities are produced. This calls for an emphasis on the refusal in allowing autonomy to AI machines as found with the creature whose autonomy has led to uncontrollable situations.

Contemporary AI systems likewise depend on data, model structure, objective and evaluation. Research in areas such as medical AI demonstrates that the quality and characteristics of data can affect the reliability of automated outputs (Anichini and Geffroy, 2021; Gruson, 2020). From these data, the algorithms capture the incoming data through processing and examine the results fed to the algorithms so that a repetitive action takes place. The relevant parallel with Shelley's fictional narrative is therefore not that the creature works like AI but that both narratives direct attention to the relationship between the conditions of learning and subsequent behaviours. This leads to an ethical question regarding the conditions under which an artificial system acquires and exercises its capabilities.

Information also functions as a source of technological power, but this point requires conceptual precision. Contemporary AI systems may be trained or informed by very large quantities of digital data, whereas the creature acquires knowledge through direct observation of its environment. Alexandre believes that AI is fed through the information individuals upload on the web. The raw material of AI is information. It would be misleading to believe that AI systems are strong on their own. However, the point is that uploaded data are collected, filtered, transformed, stored and used within particular technical and institutional systems. The relevant technoethical issue is therefore data governance, including questions of provenance, consent, privacy, security and purpose. The information provided can be utilised against the individuals posing a serious threat to humankind. Individuals should stop uploading information and images on the web, an aspect deemed difficult for individuals.

The creature's observation of the De Lacey family provides a particularly revealing example of contextual learning. It observes their poverty and gradually learns words such as "fire, milk, bread, and wood. (F. pp.90-91). This passage shows that the creature does not merely collect isolated facts; it connects language with objects, actions and social circumstances. Though created in a form different from that of the cottagers, it has been able to explore what it witnesses every day. It knows the motives of their suffering and sympathises with them. Its ability to replicate what the cottagers do is comparable to artificial systems, whose analysis of data is accurate, provided that the required data is inserted into the algorithms. Botting (2018) reinforces this

position by taking into account the development of the creature to illuminate broader questions about intelligence and learning. For the present study, the episode demonstrates both the significance and the limits of the AI analogy. The creature's learning is situated, embodied and affective, whereas contemporary AI systems derive capabilities through computational processes that do not require subjective understanding.

The question of autonomy is closely connected to the question of control. People should refrain from believing that AI would help humankind. Caseau (2018) and Oppenheimer (2018) have mitigated views about AI autonomy. Metz (2023) argues that AI poses serious risks. He puts: "As companies improve their AI systems, they become increasingly dangerous. "Look at how it was five years ago and how it is now. Take the difference and propagate it forward. That's scary."" (Hinton as quoted by Cades, 2023, p.9). Bostrom (2014) and Russell (2019) examine scenarios in which increasingly capable systems might pursue objectives in ways that diverge from human intentions. Nyholm (2022), however, cautions against treating control as an unqualified good. The ethical issue is not simply whether humans retain maximum control, but what forms of control are appropriate, legitimate, and compatible with human values. Victor's failure is not merely a loss of physical control over his creature but a failure in establishing a responsible relationship with what he has created.

Victor's creature's demand for a companion marks an important reversal of the creator-creation relationship. Victor realises that his creature is capable of many things. He discovers that the being he created can formulate demands, negotiate conditions and even anticipate his decisions. His belief is that of a docile creature, as artificial intelligence is thought of. The conversation between creator and creation enables them to acknowledge the power of what is apparently unknown. Within the fictional world of the novel, these capacities constitute agency. Nyholm's work on autonomous agency demonstrates that attributing agency to technological systems is itself a philosophical and ethical question. The novel's analogy is therefore most useful when it asks what happens when a technological artefact acquires a degree of operational independence that complicates human intentions and oversight. Othman (2025) remarks that artificial intelligence: "may soon eclipse human control, evolve consciousness, and trigger societal collapse".

The issue becomes more pressing when technological development is shaped by competitive incentives. Contemporary AI development takes place within a commercial, scientific, and geopolitical environment, making it difficult to grasp the trajectory of AI systems and their use. The speed and capability of production must be checked with a careful evaluation. Metz reiterates his worries: "they (AI) often learn unexpected behavior from the vast amounts of data they analyze. This becomes an issue as individuals and companies allow AI systems not only to generate their own computer code but actually to run that code on their own. And he fears a day when truly autonomous weapons — those killer robots — become reality." (Jeff Dean as quoted by Cades, 2023, p. 9). The lesson drawn from the novel should not be that technological progress always produces catastrophe. Rather, it draws attention to the possibility that the pursuit of capability without adequate anticipation, testing and accountability can lead to unintended consequences.

Victor's creature represents AI. It functions as a metaphor for the problem of unexpected technological behaviour, not as a literal representation of present-day AI. The knowledge of artificial intelligence is limited because it performs tasks as instructed. Sometimes, it extends far beyond the work assigned to it. Contemporary AI systems may produce outputs that their developers did not anticipate, especially in complex or poorly specified environments. Alexandre (2017) assumes AI has little control over itself. Yet, the additional information to the preexisting data can be miscalculated, bringing little knowledge of the invention one admires. Russell highlights the potential influence of AI on individuals: "To get just an inkling of the fire we're playing with, consider how content-selection algorithms function on social media. They aren't particularly intelligent, but they are in a position to affect the entire world because they directly influence billions of people." (Russell, 2019, p.8). Shelley's fiction becomes analytically valuable when it directs attention to the responsibilities involved in defining objectives, selecting data, evaluating systems, monitoring deployment and responding to failure.

III. THE COLLAPSE OF RESPONSIBILITY FROM CREATOR TO CREATION

Responsibility is central to Shelley's narrative. Responsibility, according to Johnston, is "a duty to take care of something or someone or the state of being the cause of an outcome" (Johnston, 2017, p. 203). Johnston identifies Victor's responsibility for bringing the creature into existence and for the obligations associated with that act of creation. Victor's irresponsible behaviour forces his creature to beg for parental love. The creature consoles itself with the De Lacey family. This episode makes the consequences of this abandonment visible. Victor left the creature alone without nurturing it. This situation prevents the creature from knowing societal norms in order to

navigate through them. The creature is obliged to construct an understanding of social norms without meaningful guidance from its creator. Victor's failure begins before the creature becomes violent. He creates it without adequately considering the obligations that it entails and then abandons the creature he has created.

The creature's acquisition of language further demonstrates the importance of social context. It communicates, feels, and expresses emotions. The creature masters reading by imitating the sound of the young cottagers. Despite the distance, it struggles to understand the sound it hears and gradually connects words with objects, actions and relationships. Its development is therefore not simply a process of accumulating information; it is a process of interpretation within a social environment. The creature's position: "I ardently longed to comprehend these also" (F, p.92). The ethical relevance to AI lies in the fact that technological performance is also shaped by its development conditions. A system becomes powerful through loaded information. However, trained datasets can still produce unreliable or harmful outputs when their data, objectives or evaluation criteria context are inadequate.

The quality of the environment greatly impacts learning. The learning environment is crucial to both Shelley's narrative and contemporary AI governance. If the creature had received sustained guidance and social recognition, its relationship with humanity might have been different. The narrative does not provide a counterfactual to be tested, but it highlights the consequences of abandonment. In contemporary AI, the same concern involves the conditions of development and deployment. Data quality, system objectives, testing, human oversight, monitoring and mechanisms for correction should be considered. The comparison enables to recognise that unlike the creature, which can independently learn, AI systems do not possess the same psychological development. This suggests that data quality, that is, for good purpose, is due greatly to the type of person who possesses them.

The creature's reflections on human virtue and vice are also significant because they show how it interprets social behaviour: "Was man indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous, and so magnificent, yet so vicious and base? He appeared at one time a mere scion of the evil principle, and at another as all that can be conceived of noble and godlike" (F, p.98). The passage demonstrates the creature's attempt to reconcile contradictory observations about human conduct. This permits it to play with human tricks, allowing it later to downthrow its creator. It provides a useful note about the contemporary concerns about AI systems trained on data uploaded by humans. Digital datasets can reproduce patterns of discrimination, misinformation, or other social biases. Automated machines trained on such data may therefore reproduce or amplify existing inequalities. Stuart Russell argues: ""The purpose put into the machine" is exactly the objective that machines are optimizing in the standard model. If we put the wrong objective into a machine that is more intelligent than us, it will achieve the objective, and we lose" (2019, p.10-11). The ethical issue in this regard is not that AI independently "learns human malice" as found in the case of Victor's creature, but that technological systems can encode, reproduce or amplify things present in their data.

These concerns extend to automated systems. In areas such as healthcare, finance, employment, etc automated outputs can affect human opportunities and welfare. It should not be claimed that algorithms experience social rejection like Shelley's analogy. Its value lies instead in showing how judgements and classifications can have consequences for vulnerable subjects (Foley, 2024; Kartal, 2022). The problem of responsibility becomes especially complex when technological outcomes result from distributed processes. Victor is considered an author through creation. He creates his being and subsequently abandons it, making AI reflection worrisome. Contemporary AI development is fundamentally different. Responsibility may be shared among model developers, data providers, organisations, deployers, users, regulators and other actors. Although responsibility is not attributed to one person or an entity, there is still a challenge in distinguishing the environment from which the problem emanates. Matthias (2004) identified this difficulty in relation to learning automata through the concept of a "responsibility gap".

The responsibility gap should not be interpreted as proof that no one is responsible for an AI system's actions. Later scholarship continues to examine how responsibility should be allocated when autonomous systems produce outcomes that cannot be straightforwardly attributed to a single human decision-maker. Responsibility may be distributed across different stages of a system's lifecycle. Developers may bear responsibility for design choices; the organisation may bear responsibility for deployment and governance; the user for foreseeable misuse. This distributed model differs from Victor's concentrated authorship but makes Shelley's narrative newly relevant. Creation therefore creates obligations that persist beyond the moment of invention.

Nyholm (2022) and Russell (2019) are concerned about the intensity of technological development, which might lack ethics. They suggest that those who invent and develop AI must consider the long-term ethical consequences. Werthner et al. advocate: "we humans have much less control than we think over the outcomes of technology development" (2022, p.3), because "The more intelligent

the machine, the worse the outcome for humans: the machine will have a greater ability to alter the world in ways that are inconsistent with our true objectives and greater skill in foreseeing and preventing any interference with its plans. (Stuart Russell, Human-Compatible Artificial Intelligence, p.1).

Mary Shelley calls readers to measure the obligations attached to creation or invention. In the creature's case, it knows right from wrong. It learns about human actions and seeks help. Its deeds, after many attempts to get accepted by humans, are transferred to Victor since he brought it to life. Johnston's analysis of Shelley's novel emphasises the creator's obligations toward what is brought into existence. She considers that "he (Victor) is responsible for the existence of the creature and to a certain extent is therefore responsible for the creature's deeds" (2017, p.206). This insight can be connected to the contemporary principle of responsible innovation. Developers and institutions should anticipate foreseeable risks, evaluate systems before and after deployment; communicate limitations; establish meaningful human oversight and provide mechanisms for correction and redress. Responsibility should therefore be understood as an ongoing practice of stewardship rather than as a one-time obligation discharged when a technological artifact becomes operational. Johnson clarifies this position when she says: "she [Shelley] asks us to consider our obligations to our creations before we bring them into being." (2017, p.207).

By abandoning, refusing guidance, care and accountability, Victor has denied life and dignity to the very being he was so proud of right from the start of the project. From this refusal to care and bear accountability, consequences yielded the wrong and the innocent without exception, proving how inconsistent decisions can be dreadful to society. AI developers and their advocates have to consider the effects of their actions anytime they seek new ways to improve them because bearing responsibility becomes difficult in an age of automated machines.

IV. CONCLUSION

In *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley makes use of responsibility to respond to the scientific undertaking. Her work remains relevant to contemporary AI debates because it places the ethics of creation at the centre of technological imagination. The creature's gradual acquisition of knowledge provides a productive literary analogy for questions about learning and artificial agency. At the same time, it illuminates enduring concerns about autonomy, governance and responsibility from Victor' loss of control and failure of stewardship. The comparison is persuasive in the sense that it remains explicitly metaphorical. Artificial intelligence does not substitute Victor's creature. Contemporary AI should not be treated as conscious or emotionally motivated because it can generate human-like outputs. Mary Shelley recognises that people can positively impact their society as well as contribute to its extinction through their discoveries. The discovery's effects have to be evaluated in the long run instead of the short run. This implies that a discovery's importance should not consist solely of helping humans regardless of the effects; rather, scientists and engineers must weigh the good and bad sides of the discovery before any undertaking.

The article has shown that the most important connection between *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* and AI lies in the relationship between capability and responsibility. Victor's mistake is not simply that h creates something powerful; it is his failure to anticipate the obligations attached to creation and abandons responsibility when the consequences become difficult to manage. Contemporary AI development differs from Victor's individual authorship because responsibility is shared across different dimensions. Nevertheless, the principle remains the same. Technological systems should be accompanied by responsible conducts through their lifecycle, from design and training to deployment, monitoring, correction and retirement.

Shelley's narrative should therefore not be presented as a literal prediction of artificial intelligence. Its enduring value lies in its capacity to frame questions that are still relevant and remain unresolved. Shelley's novel provides a rigourous literary and technological lens through which contemporary AI controversies can be examined without collapsing the distinction between fictional agency and actual computational systems.

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Culture as Power Play: Negotiating Gender, Caste and Social Exclusion in Mahasweta Devi's Bayen

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Abstract— *This paper examines Mahasweta Devi's Bayen through the lens of culture as a mechanism of power, exploring how gender, caste and social exclusion are produced and sustained through culturally sanctioned practices. Drawing on the concept that culture is neither neutral nor autonomous, but shaped by dominant power structures, the study argues that cultural norms function as instruments of social regulation, determining identities, roles and hierarchies within the community. In Bayen, the protagonist Chandidasi's transformation into a" Bayen" illustrates how patriarchal and caste-based ideologies construct and marginalize individual identity through social designation rather than inherent reality. The paper contends that power operates through cultural discourses that normalize exclusion while presenting it as tradition or collective morality. Institutions such as the family, community and the state reinforce these discourses by legitimizing particular beliefs and religious practices, thereby maintaining existing social hierarchies. At the same time, the text exposes moments of resistance that challenge these structures, revealing the tensions between imposed identity and individual agency. Informed by theories of power and discourse, the study demonstrates that identity is socially constructed through intersecting systems of caste, gender and cultural authority rather than existing as a fixed or natural category. Ultimately, Bayen critiques the cultural politics of exclusion and underscores Mahasweta Devi's broader concern with exposing the invisible mechanisms through which power governs social life and marginalizes vulnerable communities.*

Keywords— ***Culture, Power, Exclusion, Discourses, Resistance, Marginalization***

Introduction

Culture is not merely a repository of traditions and beliefs but a contested site where power is produced, negotiated and legitimized through social institutions and cultural practices. Mahasweta Devi's Bayen powerfully exposes this cultural politics by demonstrating how patriarchal and caste-based ideologies employ ritual, superstition and discourse to construct and sustain systems of exclusion. Through the tragic transformation of Chandidasi, a lower caste woman and mother, into the socially stigmatized Bayen(witch), Devi reveals that social marginality is not an inherent condition, but a culturally manufactured identity shaped by dominant power structures. The narrative interrogates how motherhood, female agency, caste, occupation and bodily identity are regulated through cultural norms that define purity, pollution and social legitimacy. The production of the witch figure illustrates the operation of cultural hegemony, where fear and superstition become ideological instruments for disciplining women and preserving patriarchal authority. Chandidasi's body emerges as a contested site upon which caste, gender and ritual intersect, reflecting broader mechanisms of social control that inscribe exclusion onto marginalized bodies. Yet Bayen also resists these oppressive cultural constructions by foregrounding the protagonist's humanity, maternal identity and moral agency, challenging the dominant discourses that work to silence and erase her. Bayen, represents culture as an arena of power, where gender, caste, ritual and identity are continuously negotiated, exposing the ideological foundations of social

exclusion while simultaneously articulating possibilities of resistance against cultural oppression.

Cultural Hegemony and the Politics of Exclusion

Culture in Bayen functions as an instrument of power through which dominant social groups regulate behaviour, maintain authority and legitimize inequality. The story demonstrates that culture is not a neutral collection of customs and beliefs, but a socially constructed system shaped by existing power structures. Michel Foucault's concept of the inseparability of power and discourse provides a significant framework of understanding Bayen. He argues that power operates through discourse by determining what can be spoken, believed and accepted as truth. In Bayen, cultural discourses surrounding ritual purity, caste, gender and superstition become mechanisms of social control. Customs and religious beliefs are treated as unquestionable truths, enabling the dominant community to exercise authority over marginalized individuals. The belief that a woman who buries dead children may transform into a witch exemplifies how irrational cultural narratives acquire legitimacy through repetition and collective acceptance. These discourses govern everyday life, defining acceptable social roles while silencing alternative perspectives and ensuring that power remains concentrated in the hands of those who control cultural meaning.

The narrative further reveals that culture becomes a means of exclusion and resistance rather than social protection. Chandidasi's condemnation arises not from any supernatural reality but from her occupation of an unconventional social role that challenges established gender and caste norms. Her transformation into the feared Bayen illustrates how dominant groups manipulate cultural beliefs to justify injustice and reinforce unequal power relations. Those who occupy positions of authority determine the language narratives, and symbolic meanings through which society understands deviance, while powerless individuals are rendered voiceless and subjugated. At the same time Bayen exposes the conflict between institutional power and those who refuse complete submission, revealing that cultural discourses are also sites of resistance. By exposing the irrationality underlying superstition and social ostracism, Mahasweta Devi critiques traditions that function not as safeguards of communal welfare but as ideological tools that preserve hierarchy and perpetuate the marginalization of vulnerable individuals.

Gendered dimensions of Cultural Oppression

In Mahasweta Devi's Bayen, patriarchy and gender politics operate through cultural practices that are shaped by changing power structures. As power relations shift across historical contexts-from colonialism to postcolonial governance and more recently the influence of globalization and capitalist paradigms-culture is continually reconfigured to sustain dominant interests. Although the post-colonial state formally upholds secularism by proclaiming equality among all religious communities, institutional practices often continue to privilege dominant cultural and religious norms, reinforcing existing hierarchies. Within this framework, women become the primary targets of cultural regulation, as patriarchal ideology defines their social value through prescribed roles of wife, mother and caregiver. Drawing on a Faucauldian understanding of power the story illustrates how cultural discourses normalize gendered expectations and discipline women who deviate from them. Chandidasi's designation as a Bayen is therefore not merely an act of superstition but a manifestation of patriarchal power that uses cultural belief to control female identity and social existence.

Chandidasi's exclusion from society demonstrates how patriarchal discourse deprives women of dignity, agency and belonging. Once branded a Bayen, she is stripped of her identity as a wife and mother, the very roles through which patriarchal society recognizes female worth. Her husband's inability and unwillingness to defend her signifies more than personal weakness; his silence represents the complicity of patriarchal institutions that prioritize communal norms over justice and humanity. As a result, Chandidasi loses her social status, maternal rights and personal identity, becoming a victim of intersecting forms of cultural and gender-based oppression. Mahasweta Devi thus exposes how patriarchal systems manipulate cultural beliefs to legitimize the exclusion of women while presenting such practices as unquestionable traditions. By revealing the human cost of these structures, Bayen critiques a social order in which women are systematically marginalized through the combined forces of patriarchy, culture and institutional power.

Caste, Stigma and Social Ostracism

Caste system operates as a powerful cultural mechanism that structures social relations and legitimize exclusion in Bayen. Culture operates within the community through customs, religious practices and inherited beliefs that have been shaped by historical power structures. Although the principle of secularism advocates equal treatment of all religious communities and the non-interference of the state in religious affairs, cultural practices are often reinforced through state institutions and public religious activities, allowing dominant ideologies to persist. Cultural norms therefore continue to reflect the influence of earlier historical periods, reproducing long-standing hierarchies based on caste, gender and ritual purity. Within the narrative, Chandidasi's identity as a member of the Dom community, traditionally associated with handling the dead, places her at

the margins of society, even before she is accused of becoming a Bayen. Her caste location determines her social value and limits her access to dignity and acceptance, demonstrating that caste is not merely a social category, but a cultural discourse through which power is exercised and maintained.

The story further reveals that caste and gender intersect to intensify Chandidasi's marginalization. Once she is labelled a Bayen, her already precarious social position is transformed into complete exclusion, as dominant caste ideology associates both her occupation and her gender with impurity and danger. The accusation functions as a mechanism of power that legitimizes discrimination while protecting the authority of dominant social groups. By constructing marginalized communities as impure and socially threatening, upper-caste interests preserve their caste privileged position and justify practices of exclusion. Chandidasi's suffering therefore reflects the intersection of caste oppression and patriarchal discrimination, illustrating how multiple systems of power operate simultaneously to silence and dehumanize vulnerable individuals. Through this portrayal Mahasweta Devi critiques a cultural order in which inherited caste hierarchies and gender norms continue to shape social identities, exposing the enduring violence embedded within structures that claim to preserve tradition and communal harmony.

Superstition as a mechanism of Cultural Violence

Set against the backdrop of rural India, Bayen portrays superstition as a dominant force, shaping both individual perceptions and collective social behaviour. The illiterate villagers firmly believe that Chandidasi possess supernatural powers capable of harming children despite the absence of any rational evidence. Ironically, she was once respected by the same community for performing the essential ritual of burying the dead. However, as fear and suspicion replace trust, she is transformed from a valued member of society into a perceived curse. Her natural maternal instincts, expressed through her concern for children's graves, and the involuntary flow of breast-milk are tragically misinterpreted as signs of witchcraft and malevolent intent. Rather than recognizing these as expressions of grief and motherhood, the villagers allow superstition to distort reality, ultimately branding her as a dangerous supernatural being.

The destructive consequences of superstition extend beyond social prejudice and culminate in collective violence and exclusion. Convinced that Chandidasi is a bayen capable of bringing misfortune, the villagers physically attack and stab her, with even her husband participating in the assault. Their unquestioning acceptance of irrational beliefs, transforms suspicion into an unquestioned social truth, leaving Chandidas isolated from her husband, separated from her son, and reduced to the status of a social outcast. In Bayen, superstition is not presented merely as ignorance, but as a cultural mechanism through which vulnerable individuals are marginalized and oppressed. The narrative demonstrates how irrational beliefs, reinforced by collective acceptance and existing power-structures enable society to justify discrimination, violence and the systematic suppression of those who are unable to defend themselves.

Power, Agency and Resistance

Through Chandidasi's life, Bayen explores the complex dynamics of power, silence and resistance within a deeply hierarchical society. Subjected to relentless humiliation, social ostracism and psychological torment, she becomes a victim of collective prejudice rooted in superstition and patriarchal authority. Yet, despite the violence inflicted upon her, Chandidasi refuses to surrender her humanity or moral integrity. Her silence should not be interpreted as submission, rather it represents a quiet form of resistance against an oppressive social order that denies her dignity and identity. She continues to embody compassion and empathy even when stripped of familiar bonds and social acceptance, demonstrating that moral courage can endure in the face of systematic dehumanization.

The ultimate act of risking her own life to prevent a train accident serves as the highest expression of Chandidasi's ethical strength and selflessness. By saving countless lives, she protects the very community that had condemned, isolated and persecuted her. Instead of responding to cruelty with vengeance, she rejects hostility and remains guided by an unwavering sense of human responsibility/Through this sacrifice, Bayen challenges the cultural labels that define individuals according to superstition, caste and social status, suggesting that true humanity transcends such artificial divisions. Chandidasi emerges as a powerful symbol of resistance against oppression, illustrating that marginalized women often embody extraordinary moral resilience. Her self-sacrifice elevates her above the narrow boundaries of superstition, religious prejudice and class hierarchy, affirming the triumph of compassion and ethical courage over social injustice.

CONCLUSION

Culture is portrayed by Mahasweta Devi, not as a fixed collection of tradition and values, but as a contested arena where power is continuously created, exercised and challenged. The narrative reveals that cultural meanings emerge through social practices shaped by deeply embedded structures of caste, patriarchy and social hierarchy, which regulate identity, language and interpersonal relationships. By depicting the politics of fear, superstition and ideological

dominance, the text demonstrates how the protagonist is constructed as the "Other", emphasizing that marginalization is a product of social and cultural processes rather than an inherent condition. Devi further exposes how dominant cultural discourses determine whose identities are recognized, whose voices are legitimized and who is pushed to the margins thereby perpetuating systems of exclusion and oppression. At the same time, Bayen disrupts hegemonic structures by foregrounding acts of resistance and revealing the ideological foundations of gendered and caste-based discrimination. Ultimately, the text underscores culture as both a mechanism of social control and a potential space for resistance, negotiation and transformation, establishing Bayen as a powerful critique of intertwined dynamics of gender, caste and social exclusion.

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An Investigation and Research on English Student Teachers' Literacy and Application of Artificial Intelligence

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Abstract— *This study aims to explore the literacy of artificial intelligence that English teacher trainees should have and the application of artificial intelligence in English teacher education. Through the analysis of questionnaires and interviews, this study finds that English student teachers have different levels of artificial intelligence literacy. Many have some knowledge and can use relevant tools, but their knowledge and experience of AI are insufficient, and their views on its role in education also vary. Therefore, English student teachers need to improve their knowledge, skills and attitudes of artificial intelligence in order to adapt to the development needs of future education. Meanwhile, it has been found that the application of artificial intelligence in English teacher education can improve teaching efficiency, personalize learning experience, and provide teachers with more teaching resources and support. In the future, the integration of artificial intelligence into English teacher education should be further explored in order to cultivate high-quality English teachers with innovative spirit and practical ability.*

Keywords— ***English student teachers; Artificial intelligence literacy; AI Application.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

In this tech-driven era, the applications of Artificial Intelligence in education are revolutionary. For instance, in English teaching, Artificial Intelligence offers intelligent voice evaluation for pronunciation correction and natural language processing for text analysis. As the main force of the future English education career, the level of artificial intelligence literacy of English teacher trainees will be directly related to the quality and development direction of future English education. English teacher trainees with good artificial intelligence literacy can better adapt to the development trend of education informatization, make full use of the advantages of artificial intelligence technology in teaching, innovate teaching methods, improve teaching effects, and provide students with a better English learning experience. However, little is known about the current status of artificial intelligence literacy and application of English teacher trainees. Hence, there is an urgent need to study in depth whether they can meet the future needs of English education and what problems and challenges still exist.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to comprehensively understand English pre-service teachers' knowledge, skills, and practices related to artificial intelligence in the context of English education. This investigation also aims to identify how proficient these future teachers are in using artificial intelligence tools such as translation software, writing correction platforms, and intelligent teaching resources, which have become increasingly relevant in modern language classrooms. By examining their perceptions of artificial intelligence's role in education, whether as a supplementary tool, a core teaching aid, or a

technology with limited impact, this study aims to gauge their readiness to integrate artificial intelligence into real-world teaching scenarios.

Another key objective is to uncover the challenges they face, such as data privacy concerns, technical complexities, and cultural adaptation issues when using artificial intelligence in teaching. Understanding these obstacles is crucial for developing targeted solutions, such as improved training programs or more user-friendly tools, to enhance their confidence and competence. Additionally, the investigation explores how schools currently cultivate artificial intelligence literacy among pre-service teachers, including the effectiveness of existing courses and the types of training they want, such as practical case studies or hands-on tool usage workshops.

Moreover, this research aims to bridge the gap between artificial intelligence knowledge and practical classroom application, ensuring that English pre-service teachers are well-equipped to leverage artificial intelligence's potential to enhance student learning experiences, promote personalized instruction, and address the diverse needs of future students. By shedding light on their artificial intelligence literacy levels and needs, the investigation seeks to inform educational policies, teacher training curricula, and technological developments that align with the evolving demands of English language education in the digital age.

Significance of the study

Investigating the artificial intelligence literacy of English pre-service teachers holds profound significance in preparing future educators for the evolving landscape of language education. As artificial intelligence increasingly influences teaching and learning, understanding how these future teachers perceive, use, and integrate artificial intelligence tools is crucial for enhancing educational quality.

Such investigations help identify gaps in their knowledge and skills, ensuring teacher training programs can address deficiencies. For example, if many pre-service teachers lack expertise in using artificial intelligence for personalized language practice or data-driven feedback, curricula can be redesigned to include targeted training on these areas. This not only equips teachers with practical tools but also enables them to create more engaging and effective learning experiences, such as using speech recognition tools to improve students' pronunciation or adaptive software to tailor vocabulary exercises.

Exploring their attitudes toward artificial intelligence in education reveals how they balance technological aids with traditional teaching methods. Some may view artificial intelligence as a core tool for automating tasks like essay grading, while others might see it as a supplementary resource for expanding learning materials. Understanding these perspectives helps in fostering a balanced approach, ensuring that artificial intelligence enhances rather than replaces human interaction, which is vital for nurturing students' emotional and cultural understanding in language learning.

Investigating the challenges they face, such as data privacy concerns or technical complexities, can inform the development of supportive policies and resources. If pre-service teachers highlight issues with unreliable translation tools or unequal access to technology, institutions can prioritize solutions like vetting high-quality software or advocating for equitable distribution of digital resources. This promotes inclusive education, ensuring all students, regardless of their background, can benefit from AI-enhanced teaching.

Insights into their expectations for school-based artificial intelligence training can guide the design of more relevant professional development programs. For instance, if most pre-service teachers express their need for practical case studies on integrating artificial intelligence into reading and writing classes, universities will offer hands-on workshops and real classroom simulations. This alignment between training and real-world needs boosts their confidence in using artificial intelligence effectively, preparing them to adapt to dynamic educational environments.

In essence, investigating artificial intelligence literacy among English pre-service teachers is a proactive step toward bridging the gap between technological innovation and pedagogical practice. It ensures that future teachers are not only proficient in using artificial intelligence tools but also capable of leveraging them to create inclusive, efficient, and student-centered English classrooms, thereby shaping the future of language education in an increasingly digital world.

As Pei Xiaojuan (2023) noted, trainees' Artificial Intelligence literacy is crucial for future educational change. Understanding and applying Artificial Intelligence helps meet students' needs and cultivate English teachers qualified for this intelligent age.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section aims to review the current research on the use of artificial intelligence in English teaching and English teacher education. By reviewing the literature, we can show why our research on English pre-service teachers' artificial intelligence literacy is important. Also it can help us

establish a theoretical basis for our research.

2.1. Current status of research

In foreign countries, the significance of applying artificial intelligence technology in education is self-evident. Tondeur J et al. (2012) emphasized that integrating Artificial Intelligence into pre-service teacher training is crucial for future teaching quality. Artificial Intelligence has been applied in education relatively early and extensively, especially in ESL teaching, with remarkable progress in areas like vocabulary learning, listening training, and pronunciation correction. For example, intelligent tutoring systems propose automatic personalized suggestions and tasks according to learners' profiles (Kochmar et al., 2020). AI-driven learning platforms record students' behavior and interaction sequences for educators to further analyze their progress in their online learning (Tang et al., 2021), and recommend personalized learning resources for students (Whalley et al., 2021). Han (2019) attempted to utilize artificial intelligence technology to promote college students' self-directed English learning, introduced in detail the principles, characteristics and application areas of Artificial Intelligence, discussed in depth the requirements, structure, database and process of the self-directed English learning system, and chose the back-propagation neural network to design the module of the college students' self-directed English learning system. The results show that the system provides college students with intelligent and open self-evaluation tests and effective learning feedback.

The TPACK framework by Mishra and Koehler (2006) provides a foundation for understanding teachers' technological, pedagogical, and disciplinary knowledge integration. It is a model that emphasizes the integration of technological, pedagogical, and disciplinary knowledge for teachers. It helps teachers better utilize technology in teaching, understand how different knowledge components interact, and improve teaching effectiveness.

As Artificial Intelligence application widens, foreign studies also focus on Artificial Intelligence ethics and privacy protection in education, such as ensuring students' data privacy and fair access to AI-based help. Du Hua, Yuan Luxin, and Wang Luyao (2024) noted that international evaluations of teachers' intelligent literacy are different, The evaluation elements are diverse. Many foreign scholars have divided intelligence literacy into various aspects such as knowledge and application, and have focused on teachers' ability to utilize artificial intelligence. The evaluation subjects exhibit a diversified feature, with government departments and other official institutions playing key roles. Among the diversity of evaluation tools, from the perspective of evaluation orientation, they can be classified into outcome-oriented and process-oriented ones. Moreover, the form of assessment questions also includes closed-ended and open-ended types. However, there's a lack of specialized research on English teacher trainees' Artificial Intelligence literacy evaluation. Currently, a perfect evaluation system and standards for this specific group haven't been established yet.

In China, Artificial Intelligence application in English education is drawing more attention. Enhancing the digital and intelligent technology-related proficiency of university teachers is an important support for building a high-quality higher education system and cultivating high-quality talents (Mei Bing, 2024) According to the industry standard of Digital Literacy for Teachers, the connotation and framework system of digital literacy for foreign language teachers in colleges and universities should be clarified, so as to provide theoretical basis and practical guidance for foreign language teachers to realize their professional development in the wave of digitalization, and to help the innovation and transformation of foreign language education.

The cultivation of the artificial intelligence literacy of teacher trainees is of vital importance for the formation of teachers' artificial intelligence application capabilities. Cao Rujun and Xu Chenchen (2023) stated that teacher trainees lack intelligent education knowledge, and English teacher trainees face the challenge of integrating Artificial Intelligence with English teaching, with insufficient practice in using Artificial Intelligence tools in teaching. Mei Bing (2024) examined the acceptance of 11 English teacher-training students of artificial intelligence applications to assist English speech training from the aspects of behavioral manifestations, perception, attitude and intention, etc. The results showed that the research participants showed a complex pattern of acceptance of AI-enabled foreign language teaching, agreeing on the one hand with its usefulness and ease of use, and on the other hand holding some reservations in their attitudes and intentions to use it.

2.2. Issues to be addressed

In the research on cultivating English teacher trainees' artificial intelligence literacy, several key issues stand out. Tomczyk (2024) discusses the challenges in educating future teachers in a rapidly evolving information society. Although the new generation of artificial intelligence technology possesses features such as deep learning, cross-fusion, human-machine collaboration, crowd intelligence openness, and autonomous control, problems like low explainability, system bias, and potential data security risks have brought unprecedented ethical risks and challenges to the industry and society (Wang Youmiao et al., 2023).

Additionally, the rise of Artificial Intelligence

technology is redefining teachers' roles, shifting them from traditional knowledge dispensers to learning facilitators. However, not all teachers can adapt easily. A British Council for Education survey shows that 24% of teachers haven't used any Artificial Intelligence tools, and 18% haven't used them in teaching tasks.

Moreover, while Artificial Intelligence can boost teaching efficiency, measuring its real-world benefits is tricky. Automated assessment systems may not align with human evaluation, and over-reliance on technology can sideline the social and communicative aspects of language learning. Thus, developing an assessment standard that balances technological advantages and traditional values is essential.

Wang Chaoran (2024) studied students' perceptions of AI-assisted writing. This can help assess the effectiveness of AI-based teaching for English teacher trainees. Meanwhile, we must address ethical and practical problems like plagiarism and tech dependence among trainees to guide and regulate their use of Artificial Intelligence in teaching.

Many studies often fixate on particular teaching aspects like English writing, leaving other teaching segments and cross-disciplinary applications scarcely explored. The evaluation system for trainees' Artificial Intelligence literacy is far from ideal. Moreover, the assessment of Artificial Intelligence application effects in teaching is insufficient, overemphasizing traditional academic performance while overlooking students' innovative and collaborative skills.

2.3. Trends in Research

Currently, research on English teacher trainees' artificial intelligence literacy has achieved certain results. Internationally, UNESCO's 2024 Framework for Teachers' Competence in Artificial Intelligence offers a global reference for teacher Artificial Intelligence competence standards.

In China, Shaan Jinfen and Zhu Hongyuan (2024) suggest teachers should handle data privacy and algorithm bias. Shao Mengqiu et al. (2021) focus on equal distribution of Artificial Intelligence educational resources. Luo Meina et al. (2024) explore frontier ways to enhance English teachers' Artificial Intelligence literacy. Since single-discipline theories are insufficient, future research will integrate education, psychology, computer science, and linguistics. For example, psychological theories can help study students' language learning development, and computer science theories can optimize Artificial Intelligence tool applications. Wang Runlan and Li Mengxue (2023) note that the assessment system for English teacher trainees' Artificial Intelligence literacy is shifting from knowledge-based to comprehensive evaluation, using formative and summative methods. Pei Xiaojuan (2023) believes the connotation of trainees' Artificial Intelligence literacy will be more precisely defined when it is combined with teaching scenarios and subject characteristics.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, collects data through questionnaires and interviews, investigates the artificial intelligence literacy of English teacher trainees, analyzes the status quo of English teacher trainees in the application of artificial intelligence and the existing problems, and proposes an effective cultivation path. The research subjects of this study are English pre-service teachers in grades above sophomore at a university in Zhejiang Province. In this study, the questionnaire survey is used for quantitative analysis. The questionnaire data are analyzed through statistical software, and are combined with the interview results so that a comprehensive understanding of the current situation of English pre-service teachers' artificial intelligence competence can be obtained.

3.1 Research participants

Since the freshmen have no relevant English internship or apprenticeship experience, the research subjects are mainly English teacher interns from the second year and above of a certain university in Zhejiang Province. Students in the second year and above have a certain foundation of professional knowledge and are more likely to come into contact with courses related to artificial intelligence or participate in teaching practice activities. Therefore, they can more accurately reflect the artificial intelligence literacy and application situation of English teacher interns. The scope of the questionnaire covers the knowledge and understanding of artificial intelligence by English teacher interns, as well as their practical application ability, with a focus on their ability to apply artificial intelligence technology in middle school English teaching during the internship period, including teaching activities carried out in the daily practice training of professional skills. Structured interviews mainly explored their artificial intelligence literacy, teaching application, and their cognition of artificial intelligence in education.

3.2 Data collection

Data collection for this study consisted of questionnaires and interview surveys.

Questionnaire survey

To comprehensively explore English teacher trainees' Artificial Intelligence literacy and application, a questionnaire was designed, inspired by Xiao Yonghe et al. (2024). Zhong Bochang et al.'s (2024) division of Artificial Intelligence literacy into knowledge, emotion, and thinking dimensions was fundamental in constructing the questionnaire's content framework.

The questionnaire covered various aspects. It inquired about trainees' basic info, their Artificial Intelligence cognition in English education, like how they learned about Artificial Intelligence and its impact. It also examined their understanding of Artificial Intelligence, including knowledge of Artificial Intelligence technology and educational application principles. Regarding Artificial Intelligence tool use in English learning and teaching, it listed common tools such as intelligent translation and voice learning, asking about usage, frequency, and effectiveness. For those with internship experience, questions probed into AI-assisted junior high school English teaching during internships, including purposes, effects, student feedback, and challenges. Additionally, it included questions on comprehensive application and innovation, like future Artificial Intelligence application expectations in English teaching and school-related evaluations, to understand school education effectiveness in this area.

Most questions were multiple-choice for easy statistical analysis. Open-ended questions, like innovative Artificial Intelligence in English teaching ideas, were set as short answer to gather personalized views. Options followed the Likert Scale, such as five level responses for opinion-based questions and degree-related responses for extent questions. After the initial design, a pre-survey was conducted among sophomore and above English education majors. Their feedback on item clarity and information coverage led to adjustments in question formulation and order.

The questionnaire was distributed both online via platforms like Wenjuanxing (posted on the school website, class groups, etc.) and offline in classrooms and school activities. At the start, the purpose, significance, and filling requirements were explained, and anonymity was emphasized. Invalid questionnaires (e.g., short completion times, random answers) were screened during recovery.

In total, 170 questionnaires were distributed, 150 were returned, and 126 were valid. The approximately 88.24% recovery rate and 74.12% effective recovery rate suggest the sample is representative, providing a reliable data basis for subsequent analysis.In the sample, sophomore students accounted for 26.19%, junior students for 45.24%, and senior students for 28.57%. The relatively high proportion of junior students might be attributed to the fact that students at this stage delve more deeply into professional courses and pay more attention to teaching practice and related technologies. The majority of students (69.84%) have had experience in secondary school English teaching internships or trainings, and 80.16% have participated in courses or training related to artificial intelligence.

Interview survey

To comprehensively understand English teacher trainees' Artificial Intelligence literacy and application, eight students from sophomore year and above were selected as interview subjects. Considering grade-related differences in knowledge and experience, students with and without internship experience were stratified from sophomore, junior, and senior grades for diversity and representativeness. As shown in Table 1, two students are sophomores without teaching internship experience, three students are juniors with 2-week teaching observation and three students are seniors with full teaching internship. To protect the privacy of the respondents, their names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Table 1 Basic Information of the Interviewees

Name	Gender	Grade	Teaching Experience
Lisa	Female	Sophomore	No experience of junior high school English teaching internship or probation
Amy	Female	Sophomore	No experience of junior high school English teaching internship or probation
Emma	Female	Junior	Two-week experience of junior high school English teaching probation
Lois	Female	Junior	Junior high school English teaching probation experience
William	Male	Junior	Junior high school English teaching probation experience
Jessica	Female	Senior	Junior high school English teaching internship experience
Ava	Female	Senior	Junior high school English teaching internship experience
James	Male	Senior	Junior high school English teaching internship experience

The interview outline stated the purpose of exploring trainees' Artificial Intelligence literacy and application, and

emphasized anonymity to ease interviewees' concerns.

Based on Zhong Bachang et al's (2024) Artificial Intelligence elaboration, questions probed students' first exposure to Artificial Intelligence and concept understanding, like "How did you first learn about Artificial Intelligence and your initial impression?" and "What's Artificial Intelligence's relation to English education?" Regarding Artificial Intelligence knowledge depth, questions included "Have you taken AI-related courses? Which is most helpful for English teaching?" and "How much do you know about core Artificial Intelligence technologies?"

Referencing Xiao Yonghe et al. (2024) on Artificial Intelligence tool application in education, students were asked about Artificial Intelligence tool use in English learning and teaching, such as tool types, usage frequency, and effectiveness.

For students with internship experience, in-depth questions covered Artificial Intelligence assisted junior high school English teaching, including purpose, teaching effect, student feedback, and problem-solving. Interviewees were encouraged to share innovative ideas about future Artificial Intelligence use in English teaching and their views on improving Artificial Intelligence literacy. Their self perceptions of literacy enhancement and school expectations were also collected.

The interview used face-to-face or telephone methods according to the situation. As an interviewer, I maintained neutrality, listened actively, and asked follow-up questions. Interviews were recorded through audio and written notes. After the interview, the content was transcribed, organized, and checked for accuracy.

3.3 Data analysis

For the questionnaire data of the artificial intelligence literacy survey among English teacher trainees, descriptive statistics were mainly used. Percentages were calculated to analyze various aspects. For the basic information of the sample, the percentage of students in different grades (sophomores, juniors, seniors) was calculated, as well as the proportion of students with or without middle school English teaching internships and those who had participated in artificial intelligence-related courses or training.

Regarding the current state of artificial intelligence literacy and application skills, percentages were used to show the distribution of students' knowledge levels about artificial intelligence, the frequency of using artificial intelligence English teaching tools, and their application in different teaching sessions. In terms of problems and measures, the percentage of students with different concerns about using artificial intelligence to assist teaching and their corresponding solution-seeking behaviors were counted. Also, percentages were used to analyze students' perceptions of schools' cultivation of artificial intelligence literacy and their expectations for relevant courses.

For the interview data, a content-based analysis approach was adopted. The interviews with English pre-service teachers were focused on aspects like artificial intelligence literacy, teaching applications, and perceptions of artificial intelligence in education. For each aspect, specific themes were identified. For example, in artificial intelligence literacy, themes included sources of artificial intelligence awareness; in tool usage patterns, themes were about the most commonly used tools. Then, the statements of the interviewees were grouped according to these themes, and key information such as differences among different grades in artificial intelligence-related knowledge and usage was extracted to comprehensively understand the interviewees' views and experiences.

IV. FINDINGS

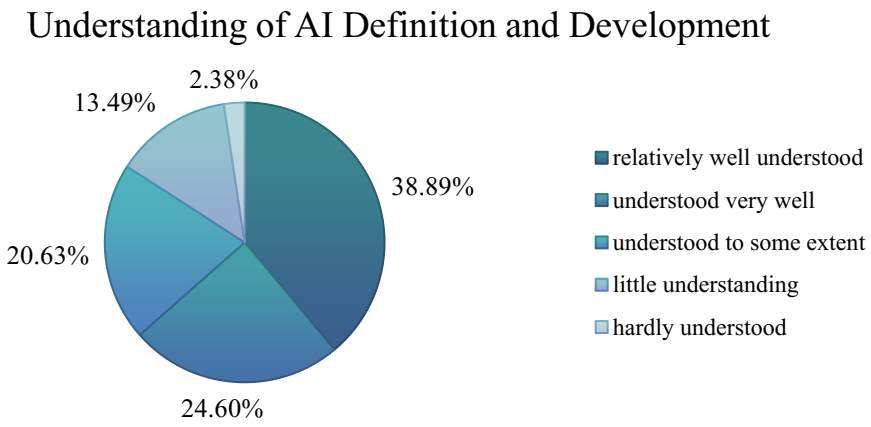
The findings section was divided into questionnaire findings and interview findings.

4.1 Questionnaire findings

Artificial intelligence literacy and application skills

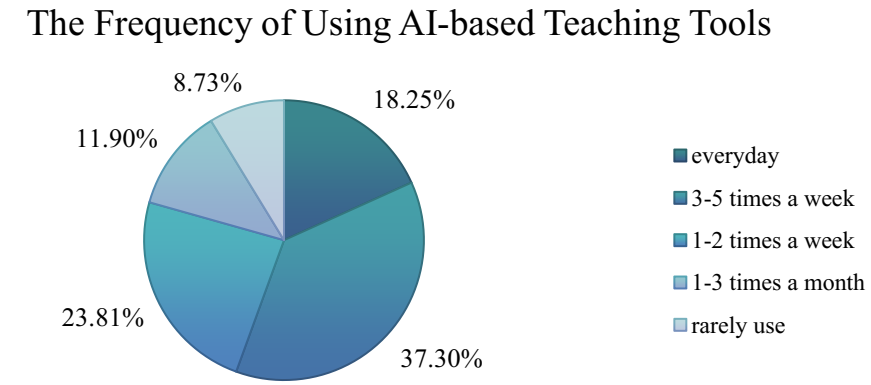
In terms of knowledge and skill mastery, as shown in the following figure, 24.6% of the students know the definition and development history of artificial intelligence very well and can elaborate on it; 38.89% of the students know more about it and are aware of the important events; 20.63% of the students know some basic concepts and the general development; 13.49% of the students know very little about it and have only heard of the related terminology; and 2.38% of the students have almost no knowledge about it.

Figure 1



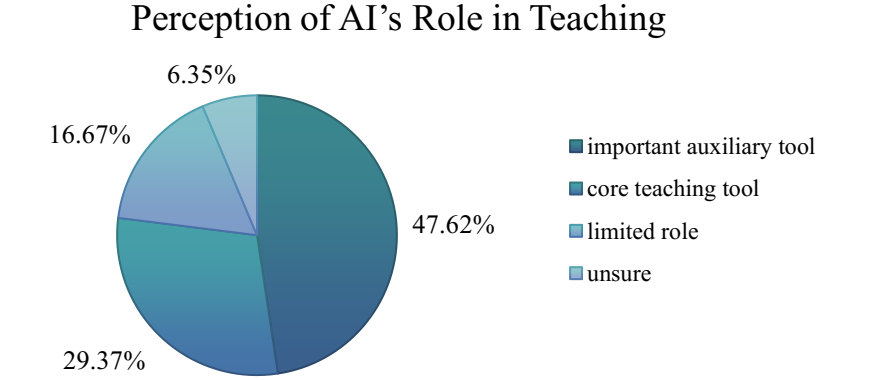
In terms of pedagogical application, as shown in Figure 2, the frequency of tool use shows that 18.25% of the students use the artificial intelligence English teaching tool every day, 37.3% use it 3-5 times a week, 23.81% use it 1-2 times a week, 11.9% use it 1-3 times a month, and 8.73% use it rarely. In English writing teaching, 43.65% of students analyze tool feedback before guiding students. In reading teaching, 39.68% of students use intelligent translation tools.

Figure 2



Among the perceptions of artificial intelligence in English education, in terms of role perception, as shown in Figure 3, 47.62% of the students considered artificial intelligence as an important aid. Regarding teaching effects, 40.48% think artificial intelligence tools significantly improve junior high school English teaching.

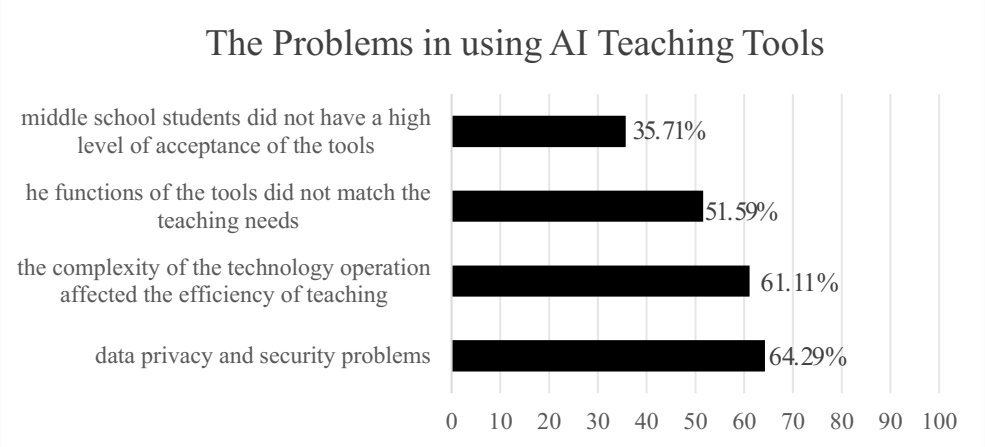
Figure 3



Problems and measures in using AI for teaching

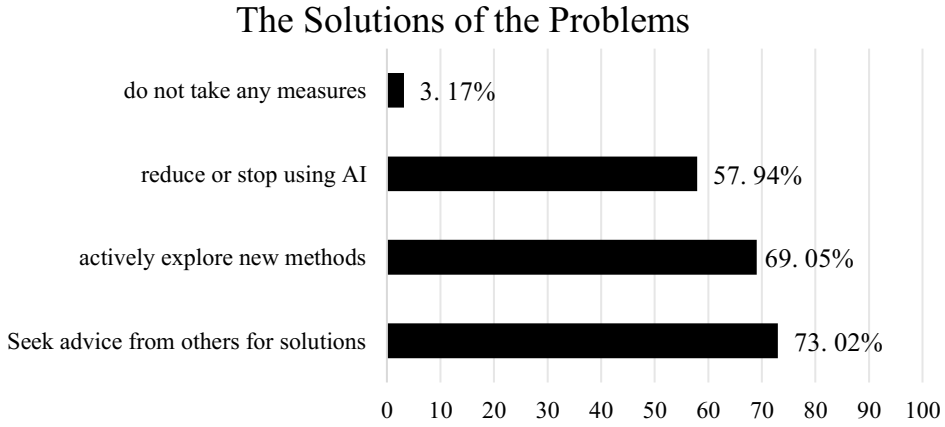
In the process of using artificial intelligence to assist junior high school English teaching, as seen in the figure below, 64.29% of the students thought that there were data privacy and security problems, 61.11% thought that the complexity of the technology operation affected the efficiency of teaching, 51.59% thought that the functions of the tools did not match the teaching needs, and 35.71% thought that the students did not have a high level of acceptance of the tools.

Figure 4



In the face of these problems, as shown in Figure 5, 73.02% of the students chose to seek advice from others for solutions, 69.05% actively explored new methods, 57.94% chose to reduce or stop using, and only 3.17% did not take any measures.

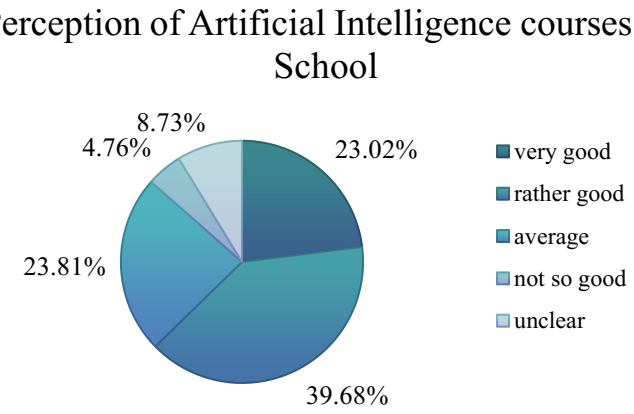
Figure 5



Perceptions of in-school artificial intelligence literacy programs

As for the aspect of schools' cultivation of artificial intelligence literacy for English teacher trainees, as shown in the following figure, 23.02% of the respondents thought that their schools had done a very good job in this aspect, with abundant courses and practice opportunities. 39.68% of the interviewees thought that the school could meet the basic requirements for developing English teacher trainees' artificial intelligence literacy, 23.81% felt that the school's performance was mediocre and there was a lot of room for improvement, and 8.73% had no idea about the school's work in developing English teacher trainees' artificial intelligence literacy. And only 4.76% of the respondents felt that their schools did not pay enough attention to this aspect.

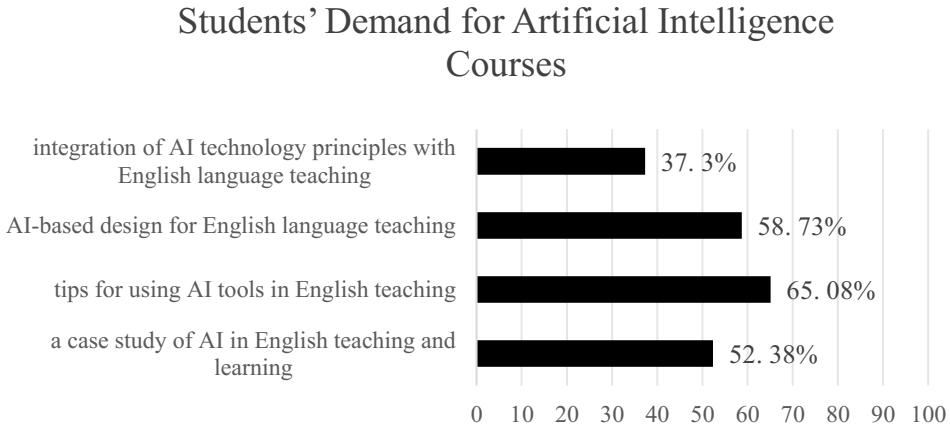
Figure 6



Overall speaking, the school has a certain foundation and achievements in cultivating the artificial intelligence literacy of English teacher trainees, but there are still areas that can be optimized and improved, especially efforts can be made to further improve the quality of cultivation and strengthen publicity and communication.

As for the aspect of schools' cultivation of artificial intelligence literacy among English teacher trainees, as shown in the figure below, more than half of the respondents expect to learn about the specific application of artificial intelligence in English teaching through practical cases, reflecting their need for practical experience and concrete operational examples. 65.08% of the respondents are eager to master the skills of using artificial intelligence tools in English teaching in order to improve the efficiency and quality of teaching. 58.73% of the respondents are aware of the importance of artificial intelligence in the instructional design process and expect to learn how to use artificial intelligence to optimize English teaching programs. 37.3% of the teacher trainees are more concerned about the direct application to teaching practice compared to the technical principles, but it also shows that there are still some people who have a demand for knowledge about the integration of technical principles and teaching.

Figure 7



Thus, the respondents' demand for courses or training on the integration of artificial intelligence and English teaching is characterized by practical application and skill operation. When planning relevant courses, schools can focus on considering strengthening the content of skills of using artificial intelligence tools, application case studies, and AI-based instructional design, so as to better meet the learning needs of English teacher trainees in the integration of artificial intelligence and English language teaching, and to enhance their teaching ability and literacy. At the same time, a more comprehensive curriculum system can also be provided by appropriately taking into account the group of students who are interested in the integration of the principles of artificial intelligence technology and teaching.

Interview findings

This study's interviews with eight English pre-service teachers from a Chinese university aimed to explore their Artificial Intelligence literacy, teaching applications, and perceptions of artificial intelligence in education. The participants, with different academic years and teaching experiences, provided diverse insights.

Artificial intelligence literacy and its root causes

The sophomores' exposure to artificial intelligence mainly came from sci-fi media and social media. Sci-fi movies often depict artificial intelligence in a futuristic and sometimes exaggerated way, like intelligent androids with superhuman capabilities. Social media, on the other hand, spreads trendy AI-related news and simplified explanations. This kind of exposure forms a rather idealized and fragmented understanding of artificial intelligence. For example, they might be fascinated by the idea of artificial intelligence but lack knowledge about its real world applications in education. As a result, their artificial intelligence literacy is more about general awareness than practical understanding, as they haven't been exposed to in-depth academic or professional content yet.

The seniors, however, learned about artificial intelligence through professional software and internship experiences. During internships, they used AI-powered teaching software that could analyze students' learning data. This hands-on experience in a teaching context made them understand how artificial intelligence can be effectively integrated into educational practices. Ava stated, "During my internship, I used AI-powered teaching software. It could analyze students' learning data and push out different levels and types of homework to achieve personalized teaching." Their literacy is more practical and profound, rooted in real-world applications, which is a significant difference compared to the sophomores.

They also differ in divergent usage patterns. Sophomores typically focus on basic functions of artificial intelligence tools, like using translation software mainly for word to word translations. Their limited academic knowledge and teaching skills mean they are not yet ready to explore more complex features. For instance, they may not know how to use advanced settings in translation tools to improve the quality of translations for different types of texts. This basic usage reflects their elementary level of artificial intelligence literacy in the context of teaching applications.

In contrast, seniors are more inclined to integrate multiple artificial intelligence tools. They might combine writing correction tools with data analytics. By doing so, they can not only correct students' writing errors but also analyze patterns in students' writing over time. This shows a more sophisticated understanding of how different artificial intelligence functions can work together to achieve better teaching outcomes, indicating a higher level of artificial intelligence literacy. But they still face issues like inaccuracies in cultural interpretations by translation tools, which shows that even with a relatively high level of literacy, there are areas that need improvement.

Challenges in AI-Integrated teaching

During their teaching applications, both juniors and seniors faced technical problems. Platform lag was a common issue. Emma said, "When using the AI-based voice teaching tool, there was a delay between students' pronunciation and the tool's feedback. It really disrupted the teaching rhythm."

Speech recognition errors also occurred frequently. Lois mentioned, "When using artificial intelligence to correct students' oral English, incorrect recognition happened frequently. It was very likely to misguide the students. " These technical glitches not only affected the teaching experience but also made it difficult to fully utilize the potential of artificial intelligence in the classroom.

Over-reliance on artificial intelligence was a significant concern. Moreover, there were equity gaps in access to AI-based teaching resources. Students from different economic backgrounds or schools with varying technological capabilities had different levels of exposure to artificial intelligence tools. This inequality could widen the educational gap between students, undermining the goal of providing equal educational opportunities.

Measures to address challenges

English pre-service teachers should actively engage in learning AI-related knowledge and master the use of various artificial intelligence tools proficiently. This proficiency enables them to integrate artificial intelligence more effectively into English teaching. As Jessica mentioned, "We should constantly learn about artificial intelligence technology, enhance our digital literacy and apply the latest technologies to our teaching practice." They should consistently keep track of artificial intelligence advancements and participate in relevant training, ensuring they stay updated with the latest trends and applications of artificial intelligence in education.

Before employing artificial intelligence tools in teaching, thorough testing is essential. This step helps to promptly identify and resolve potential issues regarding technical stability. When selecting artificial intelligence tools, factors such as technical stability, educational equity, school infrastructure, and students' individual differences must be taken into account. James said, "In the face of challenges related to technical stability, it is necessary to choose reliable technology suppliers and regularly maintain and update the tools in use." Additionally, it is crucial to have multiple backup plans in case of technical failures, guaranteeing the seamless continuation of teaching even if artificial intelligence tools malfunction.

During the teaching process, closely monitor each student's utilization of artificial intelligence tools. Provide

extra support to students with limited technical resources to ensure every student benefits from AI-assisted English instruction. Strengthen communication with students to understand their experiences and feedback when using artificial intelligence tools, and adjust teaching strategies accordingly. Lisa mentioned that we should pay attention to the usage situation of each student in teaching and offer more assistance to those students with limited technical conditions.

Moreover, actively explore diverse integration models of artificial intelligence and English teaching. Keep a close eye on industry trends and apply the latest technologies to teaching practice. Continuously enhance information technology and artificial intelligence literacy, and learn relevant programming knowledge and data analysis methods to optimize the use of artificial intelligence in teaching.

In conclusion, the artificial intelligence literacy of these English pre-service teachers varies greatly depending on their academic years and teaching experiences. While seniors generally show a higher level of understanding and application, they still need improve for all students. By implementing the above-mentioned strategies, we can enhance their artificial intelligence literacy and better prepare them for the future of AI-integrated English teaching.

V. DISCUSSION

This study delved into the artificial intelligence literacy of English pre-service teachers, presenting results that both concur with and diverge from previous research.

Previous research has repeatedly emphasized the significant role of practical experience in enhancing educators' ability to incorporate technology into teaching (Yang Daoyu, et al. 2025). Our findings strongly support this view. In our study, seniors with teaching internships exhibited advanced skills in integrating artificial intelligence tools, such as combining writing correction with data analytics. Conversely, sophomores, who had less exposure to professional teaching and AI-related practical settings, mainly utilized basic functions like translation. This aligns precisely with the experiential learning theory, which posits that hands-on experience serves as a crucial catalyst for the adoption of technology in educational environments.

The relatively large proportion of junior students (45.24%) in our sample further underscores the vital role of intermediate-stage training in cultivating artificial intelligence literacy. Students prioritize practical artificial intelligence tool skills (65.08%) and case studies (52.38%) over theoretical knowledge. Pre-service teachers are more interested in immediately applicable strategies that can be implemented in their future classrooms. This preference for practical learning has also been observed in other teacher-training programs related to educational technology adoption. They are in accordance with the research of Wang Chenglin et al. (2023), who discovered that students at the intermediate academic level show a heightened eagerness to embrace new educational technologies when provided with appropriate training opportunities.

Regarding the limitations of artificial intelligence tools, prior research has pointed out cultural and technical challenges in AI-assisted language learning (Wang Youmiao et al., 2023). Our study is in agreement, as 62.5% of the interviewees reported that current artificial intelligence tools struggle to handle cultural nuances. For example, translation software often misinterprets idiomatic expressions, and writing tools tend to over correct creative writing. This is particularly crucial in language education, where cultural context is fundamental to effective communication.

However, the issue of students' access to artificial intelligence resources in our study offers a novel perspective. Despite 80.16% of the students having received artificial intelligence training, 33% of the seniors reported problems with students' access, such as poor internet connectivity. While global studies on the digital divide (UNESCO, 2021) have highlighted disparities in technology access, our research specifically focuses on the implications for AI-integrated English teaching. This finding extends previous research by emphasizing the necessity for schools to address these barriers to ensure equitable access to AI-enhanced education.

The distribution of students' artificial intelligence knowledge levels presented shows that a significant number of students have a moderate to good understanding of artificial intelligence, yet a considerable portion still has limited knowledge. This can be attributed to the differences in their sources of exposure. As evident from the interview data, sophomores' exposure to artificial intelligence mainly through sci-fi media and social media leads to a more fragmented and idealized understanding, while seniors' experience with professional software and internships results in a more practical and in-depth comprehension.

In terms of pedagogical application, the frequency of artificial intelligence tool use and its application in different teaching sessions vary. The relatively high proportion of students using artificial intelligence tools 3-5 times a week indicates a certain level of acceptance. However, the differences in usage between writing and reading teaching can be explained by the nature of the tasks. Writing teaching

may require more in-depth analysis of student work, making the use of AI-based feedback more valuable, as demonstrated by 43.65% of teachers analyzing tool feedback before guiding students in writing.

The perception of artificial intelligence as an important aid (47.62%) in English education reflects a general recognition of its potential to enhance teaching. Nevertheless, the diverse views on its role, ranging from a core teaching tool to having a limited role, can be associated with students' varying levels of experience with artificial intelligence. Those with more hands-on experience, such as seniors, may be more inclined to view it as a core tool, while others may be more cautious due to the observed limitations.

Regarding teaching effects, the fact that 40.48% of students believe artificial intelligence tools significantly improve junior high school English teaching suggests that artificial intelligence has had an impact. However, the 15.08% who think there is no enhancement or even a negative impact can be linked to the challenges faced, such as technical glitches and over-reliance issues.

The problems identified, such as data privacy and security (64.29%), technology operation complexity (61.11%), and mismatched tool functions (51.59%), are consistent with the overall challenges in AI-integrated education. The high percentage of students choosing to seek advice (73.02%) and actively explore new methods (69.05%) indicates a proactive attitude towards solving these problems. However, the 57.94% who chose to reduce or stop using artificial intelligence shows the severity of the issues.

The mixed evaluations of schools' artificial intelligence literacy programs, with 23.02% considering the school's efforts very good and 23.81% rating it mediocre, can be related to the actual curriculum offerings and practical opportunities provided. The high demand for practical cases (52.38%) and tool using skills (65.08%) reflects the inadequacy of current programs in meeting students' practical needs.

The study has some limitations, The study's sample size (126 questionnaires, 8 interviews) limits generalizability. While seniors and juniors were well-represented (73.81%), sophomores accounted for only 26.19%, potentially skewing results toward mid to upperclass perspectives. Data were collected from one Chinese university, which may not reflect regional variations in Artificial Intelligence access, teaching resources, or student demographics. Artificial Intelligence tools' inability to handle cultural nuances such as idiomatic expressions was identified by 62.5% of interviewees, but no solutions were tested in this study.

So we need to include participants from multiple universities and regions to enhance representativeness. For example, comparing institutions in cities with those in the rural areas could reveal equity-related challenges. And it is also of great significance to track pre-service teachers' Artificial Intelligence competency development over time to identify how training programs and teaching experiences shape their Artificial Intelligence integration skills.

VI. CONCLUSION

The findings validate constructivist theories (Vygotsky, 1978) by demonstrating that hands-on teaching experiences significantly enhance Artificial Intelligence competency. This challenges traditional teacher training models that focus solely on theoretical knowledge. Institutions must adopt competency-based curricula integrating Artificial Intelligence tool training with classroom simulations. For example, micro teaching sessions could involve real-time Artificial Intelligence feedback on lesson plans. The 33% equity gap underscores the need for hybrid teaching models and government-funded initiatives to bridge the digital divide. Such as work with educational institutions to establish guidelines for equitable Artificial Intelligence resource distribution providing offline alternatives for students with limited internet access. College teachers need to update their concepts of educating students. With the goal of "developing the whole person" for talent cultivation, through technological empowerment of the educational process, the educational scenarios and behaviors are restructured (Chen Enlun et al., 2021).

For curriculum design, develop AI-pedagogy integration modules covering practical tool skills, cultural adaptation strategies to collaborate with linguists and developers, including but not limited to large language models, data mining systems, intelligent decision support platforms, etc., this also helps the faculty of universities transform theoretical knowledge into practical operational capabilities (Deng Jun et al., 2024). Implementing technology loan programs for students with limited access, providing tablets pre-loaded with offline Artificial Intelligence tools and training teachers in dual-mode teaching (online+offline) to ensure continuity during technical failures. Case studies of Artificial Intelligence in grammar and vocabulary teaching and include virtual reality simulations to train pre-service teachers in AI-supported classroom management.

For policy support, advocate for national standards, like requiring schools to allocate 10% of their budget to Artificial Intelligence resource equity initiatives. Establish Artificial Intelligence literacy assessment systems to monitor pre-service teachers' competency development.

This study quantitatively and qualitatively analyzed the current situation and challenges of Artificial Intelligence literacy among English teacher candidates, and proposed targeted curriculum reforms, technological development and policy recommendations. The study emphasized the importance of practice-oriented training and cultural sensitivity, and called for addressing the issue of technological equity. Despite the limitations of the sample and methods, this research provided an important reference framework for the integration of Artificial Intelligence and English education, and pointed out the direction for future research.

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Waiting versus Acceptance: Responses to the Absurd in *Waiting for Godot* and *The Stranger*

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Abstract— *This paper explores the philosophical Divergence in existentialist thought through a comparative analysis of Samuel Beckett's play Waiting for Godot and Albert Camus's novel The Stranger. Both text capture the 20th-century crisis of meaning, illustrating a universe devoid of inherent purpose-a condition defined by Camus as the Absurd. However, they present fundamentally opposing behavioural responses to this condition. Beckett's protagonists, Vladimir and Estragon, embody the paralyzing state of "waiting," relying on a passive, hopeful dependence on external salvation to defer the terror of existential vacancy. Conversely, Camus's protagonist, Meursault, transitions from passive alienation to active "acceptance," embracing the indifferent universe without the crutch of hope or metaphysical illusion. By examining these contrasting mechanisms-waiting as a desperate avoidance strategy versus acceptance as a liberating confrontation-this study demonstrates how Beckett dramatizes the tragicomic stagnation of unfulfilled hope, while Camus outlines a blueprint for the Absurd Hero. Ultimately, this paper argues that while waiting shackles the individual to an illusory future, acceptance liberates the self to exist authentically in the absolute present.*

Keywords— ***Absurd, existentialist, alienation, transitions metaphysical illusion, confrontation.***

Introduction

The mid-20th century witnessed a profound rupture in Western philosophical tradition, precipitated by the trauma of global warfare and the collapse of grand theological narratives. From this intellectual vacuum emerged the philosophy of the Absurd, a concept most cogently articulated by Albert Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). Camus posits that the Absurd is not inherent to the universe, nor is it exclusive to the human mind; rather, it is born out of the collision between the human desire for order, meaning, and clarity, and the "unreasonable silence of the world" (Camus, *Myth* 28). Confronted with this fundamental disharmony, humanity is forced to choose a mode of survival.

Two of the most seminal literary works of this era, Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* (1953) and Albert Camus's novel *The Stranger* (1942), serve as profound narrative laboratories for testing human responses to the Absurd. While both authors diagnose the same existential ailment-a world stripped of teleological certainty, where time is cyclical and human action appears fundamentally inconsequential-their prescriptions are radically different.

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* presents a world defined by stagnation, where the characters Vladimir and Estragon engage in a perpetual state of waiting for a mysterious entity named Godot. This waiting becomes a coping mechanism, a psychological buffer designed to evade the terrifying realization of their own radical freedom and the emptiness of their environment. In contrast, Camus's *The Stranger* traces the psychological trajectory of Meursault, a clerk who refuses to conform to societal games or adopt metaphysical consolations. Meursault's journey culminates not in anticipation, but in a radical, clear-eyed acceptance of the "benign indifference of the universe" (Camus, *Stranger* 122).

This paper will construct a comparative framework to analyze these two divergent responses to the Absurd. It will argue that Beckett's "waiting" represents a tragicomic

failure to transcend existential dread, trapping the individual in a paralyzing reliance on future salvation, whereas Camus's "acceptance" represents the ultimate triumph of the Absurd Hero, who reclaims agency by shedding hope and anchoring the self in the immediate, tangible reality of the present.

Conceptualizing the Absurd: Beckett's Void and Camus's Silence

To understand the divergence between waiting and acceptance, one must first delineate how the Absurd manifests structurally and textually within both works. In *Waiting for Godot*, the Absurd is dramatized through a total collapse of dramatic structure, language, and setting. The play famously breaks the traditional laws of Aristotelian drama; as the critic Vivian Mercier famously noted, it is a play in which "nothing happens, twice" (Mercier 6). The setting is minimalist and desolate-"A country road. A tree. Evening." (Beckett 11)-symbolizing a metaphysical vacuum stripped of historical or geographical markers.

Time in Beckett's universe is not linear but cyclical and fragmented. Vladimir and Estragon cannot reliably recall yesterday, nor can they certain of tomorrow. Memory fails them, rendering history useless and rendering the future an identical replication of the present. Language, too, loses its communicative efficacy, degenerating into repetitive games, non-sequiturs, and stichomythia. Beckett's characters inhabit a void where words do not construct meaning but merely serve to "hold the chaos at bay" (Esslin 43). The Absurd here is an overwhelming, suffocating presence that paralyzes action and renders all human striving comical yet deeply tragic.

For Camus, the Absurd is less a structural void and more an ontological disconnect. In *The Stranger*, the universe is physically vibrant, filled with the sensory heat of the Algerian sun and the cool relief of the Mediterranean Sea. The Absurd arises because this beautiful, tactile world is entirely indifferent to human morality, grief, or desire for justice. Meursault experiences this silence intuitively long before he understands it intellectually. He does not weep at his mother's funeral, nor does he offer artificial declarations of love to Marie, because he recognizes that the social rituals designed to manufacture meaning are arbitrary fabrications.

Unlike Beckett's characters, who are hyper-conscious of their existential misery and talk incessantly to mask it, Meursault is initially characterized by a quiet, unreflective immersion in the physical present. The Absurd becomes explicit when Meursault's sensory-driven actions-specifically, shooting an Arab on a scorching beach-clash with the judicial system's demand for a rational, moral narrative. The court cannot tolerate a universe where actions happen without a grand, logical trajectory; they condemn him not just for the murder, but for his refusal to lie about his lack of emotional conformity. Thus, while Beckett's Absurd is a vacuum of external emptiness, Camus's Absurd is an unyielding wall of societal delusion confronting an indifferent material world.

The Anatomy of Waiting: Stagnation and the Illusion of Godot

In *Waiting for Godot*, the act of waiting is not merely a plot device; it is the ontological state of the characters. Vladimir and Estragon are bound to a specific location by an unverified covenant with Godot, an enigmatic figure who promises to arrive but sends a boy each evening to defer his appearance until "tomorrow." By examining this cycle, it becomes evident that waiting functions as a psychological defence mechanism against the terrifying vacuum of the present moment.

The Preservation of False Hope

Waiting allows Vladimir and Estragon to cultivate hope, but within the framework of the Absurd, hope is a toxic illusion. It shifts the responsibility of creating meaning from the individual to an external saviour. Vladimir states:

"We're no longer alone, waiting for the night, waiting for Godot, waiting for... waiting. All evening we have struggled, unassisted, with now what are the resources at our disposal... But that is now over. It's already tomorrow" (Beckett 71).

The tragedy lies in their reliance on "tomorrow." By convincing themselves that their presence on the country road has a specific, future-oriented purpose-to meet Godot-they successfully evade the burden of their own radical freedom. If Godot comes, they will be "saved" (Beckett 13), meaning they will no longer have to choose, act, or define their own existences. Hope acts as an existential narcotic, numbing the pain of their current aimlessness while simultaneously ensuring their permanent imprisonment.

Stagnation, Passivity, and the Degradation of the Self

Because their entire identity is anchored to an external entity, Vladimir and Estragon are incapable of meaningful autonomous action. Whenever one suggests leaving, the other invariably responds with the refrain that echoes throughout the play:

Estragon: *Let's go.*
Vladimir: *We can't.*
Estragon: *Why not?*
Vladimir: *We're waiting for Godot. (Beckett 14)*

This brief exchange functions as a linguistic handcuff. The characters are trapped in a feedback loop where the act of waiting justifies their stagnation, and their stagnation

necessitates further waiting. To pass the time, they engage in trivial habits: taking off boots, searching hats, and playing word games. Beckett explicitly highlights the numbing quality of these routines through Vladimir's realization: "Habit is a great deadener" (Beckett 84). Routine replaces authentic existence. When Pozzo and Lucky enter, structural deviations occur, yet Vladimir and Estragon treat this master-slave dynamic primarily as an entertainment to pass the time rather than a warning about the degradation of human relationships under the weight of existential drift. By choosing to wait, the characters abdicate their agency. They become passive spectators of their own erosion, watch their bodies decay and their memories dissolve, unable to break the metaphysical chains of an appointments they cannot even verify they made.

The Path to Acceptance: Meursault as the Absurd Hero

If *Waiting for Godot* demonstrates the paralyzing consequences of waiting for external meaning, Camus's *The Stranger* provides the counter-narrative of an individual who systematically sheds the illusion of hope, culminating in the liberating power of acceptance. Meursault's trajectory represents the evolution of an unconscious actor into an enlightened Absurd Hero.

The Rejection of Societal and Metaphysical Illusions

Throughout the novel, Meursault is a "stranger" to society because he refuses to play the games of emotional and moral hypocrisy required of him. He lives almost exclusively in the sensory present, responding to physical stimuli-the heat of the sun, the taste of food, the comfort of a woman's body-rather than abstract social codes. When his employer offers him a promotion in Paris, Meursault declines, stating that "one life was as good as another and that I wasn't at all dissatisfied with mine here" (Camus, *Stranger* 41). When Marie asks if he wants to marry her, he replies that it "didn't mean anything" but they could if she wanted to (Camus, *Stranger* 41).

Meursault's refusal to manufacture false sentiment or participate in teleological career paths terrifies those around him. This terror peaks during his trial, where the prosecutor transforms Meursault's natural honesty into evidence of a monstrous, soulless character. The judicial system tries desperately to impose a linear narrative of sin, repentance, and divine justice onto an arbitrary, chaotic event. They offer Meursault multiple opportunities to save his life by conforming to their scripts-by weeping for his mother or expressing remorse for the murder. Meursault resolutely refuses, choosing physical death over spiritual inauthenticity.

The Prison Cell Confrontation and the Leap into Acceptance

The climax of Meursault's existential awakening occurs in his prison cell during his explosive confrontation with the chaplain. The chaplain represents the ultimate institutional manifestation of "waiting"-he urges Meursault to look toward a divine afterlife, repent for his sins, and place his hope in God. This is the structural equivalent of urging Meursault to wait for Godot. Meursault rejects this absolute metaphysical framework with violent fury. He grabs the chaplain by the collar and unleashes a torrent of existential truth:

"He seemed so certain about everything, didn't he? And yet none of his certainty was worth one strand of a woman's hair... Living the way he did, he was like a corpse, and he couldn't even be sure he was alive... I might seem to have my hands empty. But I was sure of myself, sure of everything, surer than he was, sure of my life and sure of the death that was coming to me." (Camus, *Stranger* 120)

By violently purging the chaplain from his cell, Meursault eradicates the final, most seductive illusion: the illusion of hope and cosmic justice. He realizes that the certainty of death strips all human hierarchies and moral judgments of their absolute authority. Following the chaplain's departure, a profound calmness washes over Meursault. He looks up at the stars and makes his ultimate existential breakthrough:

"For the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe. To feel it so like myself, indeed, so brotherly, I realized that I'd been happy, and that I was still happy." (Camus, *Stranger* 122)

This statement marks the transition from passive alienation to radical acceptance. Meursault does not despair at the universe's indifference; he embraces it. The universe is "brotherly" precisely because it imposes no cosmic demands, no inherent guilt, and no grand destiny. By accepting that his life has no ultimate meaning other than what he experiences in the flesh, Meursault is liberated. He ceases to be a victim of fate or a prisoner waiting for an execution; he becomes the master of his own brief, luminous existence.

Comparative Synthesis: Hope as Captivity vs. Acceptance as Liberation

The thematic juxtaposition of *Waiting for Godot* and *The Stranger* reveals a crucial philosophical paradigm: **hope is an agent of human captivity, whereas acceptance is the catalyst for absolute liberation.**

Feature	*Waiting for Godot* (Samuel Beckett)	*The Stranger* (Albert Camus)
Primary Response	**Waiting** (Passive anticipation of external meaning)	**Acceptance** (Active confrontation with cosmic indifference)
Temporal Focus	The unfulfilled future ("Tomorrow")	The immediate, tactile present ("Now")
Psychological State	Anxiety, fragmentation, and stagnation	Clarity, sensory immersion, and peace
Nature of "Salvation"	Deferred to an external entity (Godot)	Claimed internally through self-sovereignty
Philosophical Outcome	Tragicomic despair and cyclical imprisonment	Tragic joy and authentic freedom

Beckett's protagonists are permanently trapped precisely because they hope. Their waiting for Godot is an ongoing deferral of life. They cannot enjoy the present moment, nor can they alter their condition, because their eyes are fixed on an imaginary horizon where salvation will arrive from the outside. Beckett brilliantly dramatizes how this psychological framework transforms time into a prison. The characters are frozen in place, terrified of the void, yet unwilling to fill it themselves. Their existence is a prolonged sigh, a monument to the paralyzing power of unfulfilled expectations.

Camus's protagonist, by contrast, demonstrates that true freedom requires the total annihilation of hope. By divesting himself of the expectation that the universe owes him meaning, justice, or immortality, Meursault eliminates the capacity for the world to disappoint or enslave him. His acceptance of death does not plunge him into nihilistic despair; instead, it supercharges the value of his lived experiences. Because there is no afterlife, this life-the smell of the sea, the warmth of the sun, the memory of freedom-becomes infinitely precious. Meursault's acceptance allows him to die with his dignity intact, entirely authentic to his own perceptions, answering only to the physical reality of his existence.

Furthermore, these texts illustrate different dimensions of human solidarity within the Absurd. In *Waiting for Godot*, companionship is born out of shared terror and co-dependency. Vladimir and Estragon insult each other, threaten to separate, yet remain together because the isolation of the void is too terrible to bear alone. Their bond is a defensive shield against the quiet of the universe.

Meursault, conversely, stands completely alone in his final hours. Yet, in his moment of total acceptance, he feels an ontological connection to the universe itself. His solidarity is not with a social group or a companion, but with the raw, uncaring existence of the cosmos. He steps onto the scaffold not as a defeated criminal, but as an existential conqueror who has looked into the abyss of the Absurd and smiled.

CONCLUSION

Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Albert Camus's *The Stranger* present two of the most enduring responses to the mid-20th-century crisis of meaning. Beckett's work functions as a cautionary tale of existential inertia. Through Vladimir and Estragon, he warns that waiting for external systems, modern deities, or historical inevitabilities to grant meaning to human life results in a tragicomic decay of human potentiality and a lifetime of cyclical stagnation.

Camus, through the radical transformation of Meursault, provides a liberating alternative. By showing the courage required to abandon metaphysical illusions and social pretences, *The Stranger* positions acceptance as the supreme act of human rebellion. To accept the Absurd is to reclaim ownership of one's life, transforming the cold indifference of the cosmos into a blank canvas for individual freedom.

Ultimately, both text confirm that the universe will remain silent to human pleas for inherent purpose. However, while Beckett's characters choose to spend their lives anxiously filling that silence with the noise of waiting, Camus invites humanity to step fully into the quiet, accept the absolute finality of the present, and discover within that acceptance an unyielding, defiant joy.

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Choosing Herself: An Existentialist Reading of Paulo Coelho's Eleven Minutes

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Abstract— *This paper reads Paulo Coelho's novel Eleven Minutes, through the philosophical lens of existentialism, arguing that the protagonist Maria's journey from a small Brazilian town to sex work in Geneva is best understood not as a story of victimhood or of mystical awakening, but as a dramatization of how a person builds a self through choice. Using the ideas of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, and Soren Kierkegaard, the paper traces four stages in Maria's development: her starting point in circumstances she did not choose, her exercise of freedom in leaving home and entering sex work, her repeated retreat into fixed, self-protective identities, and her final, uncertain choice to risk love with the painter Ralf Hart. The paper shows that each stage matches a specific existentialist concept: facticity, radical freedom, bad faith, the absurd, and authenticity. Reading the novel this way reveals a coherent philosophical structure beneath its simple, popular style, one that most existing criticism, focused on spirituality or feminism, has not fully addressed. Overall, it could be concluded that the paper proves that Maria's tale is more concerned with learning to accept her fate than trying to evade it, which only an existentialist might have the ability to comprehend.*

Keywords— ***Authenticity, Bad Faith, Existentialism, Eleven Minutes, Freedom, Paulo Coelho, Self-Formation, The Absurd***

I. INTRODUCTION

Paulo Coelho's *Eleven Minutes* tells the story of Maria, a young woman from the interior of Brazil who travels to Geneva in search of a better life and ends up working as a prostitute. By the end of the novel, she has moved from confusion about love and sex toward a settled, self-chosen sense of who she is. Most critics who write about this novel focus on two things: Coelho's interest in spirituality and mysticism, and the question of whether the book is feminist or not. Both readings are useful, but they do not fully explain what actually happens to Maria on a psychological and philosophical level. This paper offers a different reading. It argues that Maria's story follows, quite closely, the pattern that existentialist philosophy describes when it explains how a person becomes herself. Existentialism is a philosophical tradition built around a simple but demanding idea: human beings do not come into the world with a fixed nature or a built-in purpose. Instead, a person becomes who she is through the choices she makes over time.

This idea can be generally summarized in Jean-Paul Sartre's phrase "existence precedes essence," meaning that we exist in this world before anything else, and only in our actions, we define what we want to be (Sartre, 1956). While this phrasing might sound very liberating, the existentialists' view emphasizes the importance of the challenges that a human might face. In other words, if nothing is given, every choice is entirely up

to the individual, and there is no God or any other higher power that one might rely on. Sartre calls this unbearable position anguish. What is more, the philosopher also mentions the concept of bad faith that can help one deal with the horrors of free choice. According to Sartre, people often trick themselves thinking that they are a certain way, and they have always been like that, meaning that their existence or being is not subject to change.

Apart from Sartre, the author also refers to Albert Camus and Soren Kierkegaard. Camus shared existentialism's interest in freedom but gave preference to meaning over freedom. According to him, humans' expectations of meaning in life conflict with the fact that the universe does not guarantee us any meaning. The conflict is termed absurd because a person is like Sisyphus, a Greek mythological figure who was doomed to roll a boulder up a hill without any rest (Camus, 1955). Kierkegaard, writing earlier than both Sartre and Camus but claimed by later existentialists as an important source, described how a person moves from anxious uncertainty into a genuine, self-defining commitment through what he called a leap: a decision that cannot be fully justified in advance and has to be made anyway (Kierkegaard, 1980). These three ideas, freedom and bad faith, the absurd, and the leap into authenticity, map onto Maria's story with striking precision. Her early life supplies the unchosen conditions she must work with. Her decision to leave home and to enter sex work is an exercise of freedom that the novel treats seriously rather than dismissing as mere desperation. Her shifting self-descriptions throughout the novel, at times cold and professional, at times numb, at times hopeful, show her moving in and out of bad faith. The repetitive, diary-recorded nature of her work echoes Camus's absurd hero. And her final decision to risk emotional closeness with Ralf reads as a leap into authenticity. The rest of this paper develops each of these connections in turn, first through a short review of existing scholarship, then through a closer explanation of the theory, and finally through detailed analysis of the novel itself.

1.1. Literature Review

Scholarship on Paulo Coelho has tended to fall into a small number of recurring categories. A large portion of existing criticism treats his novels, including *Eleven Minutes*, as expressions of popular spirituality, connecting his work to Jungian ideas about archetypes and the unconscious, as well as to broader New Age interest in the sacred. This reading is well supported by the novel itself, since Maria's story is explicitly framed, at several points, as a search for the connection between physical desire and something larger and more meaningful.

A second body of criticism approaches the novel through feminist theory, and here opinion is more divided. Some readers see the novel as a positive portrayal of female sexual agency, since Maria makes her own decisions about her body and her work, and the narrative avoids simply punishing her for those decisions. Other readers are more skeptical, arguing that the novel, written by a male author, may be projecting a fantasy of female desire that is more comforting to a general readership than it is honest about the real difficulties of sex work. Both sides of this debate raise fair points, and this paper does not attempt to settle the disagreement.

What is largely missing from this critical conversation is sustained attention to the philosophical structure of Maria's development, considered on its own terms. Existentialist literary criticism has a long history, stretching back to readings of Sartre's and Camus's own novels and extending into broader studies of coming-of-age fiction, but it has rarely been applied to popular, spiritually themed fiction like Coelho's, likely because such fiction is often assumed to be philosophically simple. This paper argues that this assumption deserves to be tested rather than taken for granted, and that *Eleven Minutes*, read carefully, shows a clear and consistent existentialist pattern that has not yet been fully described in the scholarship.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To keep the analysis grounded, this paper organizes existentialist theory into four working concepts, explained here in plain terms before they are applied to the novel.

Most of all the term "Facticity" refers to the parts of a person's situation that she did not choose: where she was born, her family, her early experiences, the opportunities available to her. Existentialists do not deny that facticity matters. What they insist on is that facticity is not the same as destiny. A person's freedom operates inside her facticity, responding to it and working with it, rather than being cancelled out by it. Next the term "Freedom", in the existentialist sense, is the ability to give meaning to one's situation through the choices one makes, even when the situation itself was not chosen. This freedom comes with a psychological cost, which Sartre calls anguish: the uncomfortable awareness that no one else can make our choices for us, and that we cannot blame anyone else for the direction our life takes. Bad faith is the common escape route from this discomfort. It involves treating oneself as a fixed thing, a role, or a type, in order to avoid facing an open, undecided future.

Moreover the term "The absurd" describes the tension between the human wish for life to mean

something and a world that does not supply that meaning automatically. Camus argues that the honest response to this tension is neither despair nor false comfort, but a kind of clear-eyed persistence, continuing to live and act fully while accepting that no final answer is coming. Finally the term **"**Authenticity" names a way of living that accepts freedom and responsibility instead of hiding from them. Kierkegaard's idea of the leap adds an important detail: authentic commitment is not something a person can reason her way into with total certainty. At some point, she has to decide and act, without a guarantee that she is right.

2.1. Maria's Starting Point: Facticity and the Limits of Her World

Maria's childhood and adolescence in a small Brazilian town establish her facticity: the conditions she begins with but did not choose. Her early disappointments in love, and the narrow range of options open to a young woman in her situation, form the backdrop against which her later choices take place. It would be easy to read Maria's later path as something forced on her entirely by these early conditions, but the novel resists that reading. Coelho gives real attention to Maria's inner thoughts as she considers her situation, which suggests that her circumstances set the stage without writing the whole script. This matters for an existentialist reading, because it keeps open the possibility that what happens next is a genuine exercise of freedom rather than simple cause and effect.

2.2. The Choice to Leave and the Choice to Work

When Maria leaves Brazil and later has agreed to work in the sex trade, the novel suggests that both decisions are choices that she exercises free will in making. This does not mean the decisions are free of pressure; money is clearly part of her motivation. But Sartre's point about freedom is precisely that it operates within pressure, not instead of it. A person is still choosing, and still responsible for how she chooses, even when her options are limited. The novel supports this reading by giving Maria extended passages of reflection before and during her decisions, showing her actively interpreting her circumstances rather than simply reacting to them without thought.

2.3. Retreating Into Fixed Roles: Bad Faith in Practice

At several points in the novel, Maria settles into a fixed description of herself in order to make her situation easier to live with. Sometimes she describes herself as someone no longer capable of real love. Sometimes she treats her body and her emotional life as two separate things that never need to interact. Sometimes she simply waits, telling herself that fate will eventually sort out her contradictions for her. Each of these self-descriptions offers a kind of relief, because it turns an open, ongoing question, who am I becoming, into a closed, settled answer. But the novel keeps disturbing these settled answers. Maria's discomfort keeps resurfacing, which is exactly what Sartre would predict, since bad faith is never a permanent solution; it is a temporary shelter from a freedom that does not actually go away.

This pattern is not unique to Maria. Other characters in the novel, including some of her clients and Ralf himself, show similar tendencies to define themselves in fixed, protective ways, whether as respectable, as damaged, or as simply not the kind of person who falls in love. The existential interpretation of the novel implies that this defensive strategy is not limited to sex workers or even Maria: an overarching tendency toward self-definition as a means of protecting one's mind against the anxiety of undecidability is likely to be characteristic of human beings in general.

2.4. Repetition and the Absurd: Maria's Diary

One of the book's structural devices is the periodic interruptions of the main narrative to depict Maria's private diary. The diary is filled with descriptions that feature the protagonist's daily work in an almost identical manner, portraying the lack of any specific significance of Maria's life. Her entries could be associated with the absurdity of Sisyphus's activities as described by Camus: a task that does not have any purpose but cannot be abandoned. Her approach to her profession could be viewed as an example of the absurd hero's temperament: detachment from the meaningless repetition of actions that still need to be regularly performed.

2.5. The Leap Toward Ralf: An Uncertain Authenticity

By the end of the novel, Maria allows herself to risk emotional closeness with Ralf Hart, despite everything she has learned about the dangers of vulnerability. This shift can be read as a Kierkegaardian leap: a decision made without certainty, because certainty was never going to be available. It matters, for an existentialist reading, that the novel frames this choice as something Maria actively decides and continues to question, rather than as a rescue that simply happens to her. At the same time, a fair existentialist reading has to stay alert to an important tension. It is possible to read the ending as authentic self-choice, and it is also possible to read it as a more conventional romantic resolution that quietly closes down the freedom Maria spent the whole novel building. This paper leans toward the first reading, but does not think the second reading should be dismissed. Existentialism itself would suggest that no choice, including the choice a novel makes about how to end its heroine's story, comes with a built-in guarantee of being the right one.

III. CONCLUSION

Reading *Eleven Minutes* through existentialist theory brings out a philosophical structure in the novel that spiritual or feminist readings, on their own, do not fully capture. Maria begins in circumstances she did not choose, exercises real freedom in leaving home and entering sex work, repeatedly takes shelter in fixed self-descriptions that existentialists would call bad faith, lives through a long stretch of repetitive, meaning-resistant experience that resembles Camus's absurd, and finally makes an uncertain, self-defined leap toward Ralf. Each stage of her story lines up closely with a specific existentialist idea, and together these ideas form a coherent account of how a person builds a self through choice rather than discovering one that was there all along.

This reading does not replace existing spiritual or feminist interpretations of the novel; it adds another, more precise vocabulary alongside them. It also suggests that popular fiction like Coelho's, often assumed to be philosophically simple because of its plain, accessible style, can reward the same careful attention usually reserved for more difficult literary or philosophical texts. Future work could test this same existentialist framework against other novels by Coelho, or against other popular fiction that follows women rebuilding their sense of self after difficult or socially judged experiences. Such work would help show whether the pattern found here in *Eleven Minutes*, unchosen circumstance met with real freedom, bad faith as a temporary shelter, repetition as an absurd but honest condition, and authenticity reached through an uncertain leap, is specific to this one novel or points to something more general about how popular stories imagine a woman becoming herself.

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Indian English Literature in the Age of Globalisation: Identity, Migration and Cultural Change

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Abstract— *The advent of globalisation has significantly transformed the thematic, cultural, and aesthetic dimensions of Indian English Literature. As India became increasingly connected to global economic, technological, cultural, and migratory networks, Indian writers in English began to engage with questions of identity, displacement, belonging, hybridity, cultural memory, and social transformation in increasingly complex ways. This paper, Indian English Literature in the Age of Globalisation: Identity, Migration and Cultural Change, examines how contemporary Indian English writers negotiate the tensions between local cultural affiliations and global modernity. It explores the ways in which globalisation has reshaped individual and collective identities while creating new spaces of cultural interaction, negotiation, and resistance. The study focuses on representations of migration, diaspora, transnational mobility, urbanisation, changing family structures, and encounters between traditional and modern value systems. Indian English literature frequently presents characters who inhabit multiple cultural worlds and experience a sense of belonging that is neither completely local nor entirely global. Such narratives reveal the complexities of cultural hybridity, particularly among migrants, diasporic communities, second-generation Indians, and individuals negotiating rapidly changing social environments. At the same time, contemporary writers examine how global capitalism, consumer culture, digital communication, and Western cultural influences affect Indian social practices, relationships, aspirations, and perceptions of self. The paper adopts a qualitative and textual approach to selected works of prominent Indian English writers, including Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Arundhati Roy, and Rohinton Mistry. Through a comparative reading of their narratives, the study investigates the relationship between migration and identity and considers literature as a significant space for negotiating cultural change. It argues that Indian English Literature does not simply reproduce the effects of globalisation; rather, it critically examines, questions, and reimagines the relationship between the local and the global. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that contemporary Indian English literature functions as a dynamic cultural space in which identities are continuously reconstructed through migration, memory, language, intercultural encounters, and changing social realities.*

Keywords— ***Indian English Literature, Globalisation, Identity, Migration, Diaspora, Cultural Change, Cultural Hybridity, Transnationalism, Displacement, Belonging, Postcolonialism, Global Modernity, Cultural Memory, Multiculturalism, Indian Diaspora, Urbanisation, Consumer Culture, Transnational Identity, Intercultural Encounters, Contemporary Indian Writing.***

Indian English Literature reverberates the literature of imitation and colonisation, which has been influenced by the hegemonic and gatekeeping aspects of British Literature for a long time, even after the end of colonialism. The Indian English literature established its own literary canonicity and unified configuration by

implementing its own literary intelligentsia in order to carve a niche in the world of literature from the 'word literatures.' The modern perspective entered Indian English literature with the advent of the post-World War I era, as the ripples of this significant change primarily affected the West.

According to Richard Shappard, modernity includes: Uncompromising intellectual nihilism, discontinuity, formalism, attitude of detachment, use of myth, subjectivity, alienation, chaos, search-panic, terror, irony, a contrast with romanticism, against aestheticism, inversion of Realism, contract with Expressionism, Futurism, Surrealism and matrix approach.[1]

This advent of 'modernity' in the global scenario provides wings to the Indian English literature also by transgressing the cocooned traditional conservative parameters of literature and flourishing its cognisance in world literature by providing the standard and renowned place for Indian literature; the plurality here stands for multidimensional and different dynamic perspectives like regional, cultural, social, political, religious, etc. Modernity in literature is imbibed with certain characteristics, intrinsic qualities, attitudes and affinities.

This concept of multidimensionality fabricated the social milieu for the implementation of literary avant-garde, sentimental restraints, repression, skepticism, self-consciousness, precious craftsmanship, outright rejection of the past, self-absorption, etc. This was the canon-formation period as Indian English literature germinates from the post-colonial angst to flourish the journey of transnational realities through grappling with transculturalism, sowing the seeds for the fertile ground for globalised macro-level Indian English literature.

The metaphorical journey of (IEL) was purposefully evidenced by globalisation, economic liberalisation, cross-culturalism, cosmopolitanism, explorism, the intersection of Eastern and Western sensibilities, hybridisation, cultural collision to redefine the Indian identity as flowing like a fluid, dismantling the utopian narratives, professional migrations to the West, brain drain, commodification of culture, and expansion of Indian culture in literature into a polyphonic global discourse.

Damrosch's definition succinctly defines the new arena of world literature that Indian English literature is fueling itself. The concept of world literature includes canon formation and literary works of quality that signify existence in the minds of scholars and writers. The academic departments used to nationalize the literature being the invention of the nineteenth-century university.

The present research article entitled *Indian English Literature in the Age of Globalisation: Identity, Migration, and Cultural Change* is self-referential and is going to elaborate on itself in the process of gradual development, understanding the terms exclusively one by one, and Homi, K. Bhabha, explains the effects of the *English Book* on the colonised India.

The effects of mimeticism and colonialism block the creative essence of a writer who faces the problems as discussed by Canadian writer Dennis Lee in his article, *Writing in Colonial Space*:

> The colonial writer does not have words of his own. Is it not possible that he projects his own condition of voicelessness into whatever he creates that he articulates his own powerlessness, in the face of alien words, by seeking out fresh tales of victims?...Perhaps the colonial imagination is driven to recreate, again and again, the experience of writing in colonial space.[3]

Ranjit Guha expresses his insightful views about the historiography of colonial India, and he demonstrates the suppression of the 'subaltern subject' by the heterogeneity of the colonisers in specific reference to literature. Guha's definition has been derivative of the perspectives of Antonio Gramsci's writings and he conceptulised the idea of Subaltern.

The concept of globalisation has popularised a new terminology, including the frequent use of words like inter-culturalism, cultural competency, consumerism, and commodification. It transformed almost all spheres like literature, culture, education, lifestyle, fashion, language and tourism, etc.

Globalisation was associated with the benefits and challenges in economy, trade, business and everybody was applauding it for bringing harmony among heterogeneous groups and nations. On the other hand, the darker side included increasing criminal activities such as human trafficking, cyber-crimes, and illegal trade practices.

The present research paper is intended to enunciate the metaphorical transformation in Indian English literature due to globalisation and its impact upon the writers of Diasporic identity grappling with the questions of identity, migration and cultural changes at different levels.

The first writer in the terrain, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni weaves a story of immigrants from South Asian Countries in America and represents their

experiences in the convention of magic realism. The novel *The Mistress of Spices* is imbricated with the attempt to conform the idea of magic realism in transporting the protagonist (heroine) Tilo, whose perspective is manifested in the embracing of identity. The novel begins with Tilo's inability to express her true self-perception, as she views herself through the perspectives of others, which leads to the marginalisation of her authentic identity.

Stuart Hall provides the definition of identity; he states, "Identity is a process, and identity is split... Identity is also the relationship of the other to oneself." In the shadow of this definition, Tilo confronts multiple but contradictory perceptions of herself through her diasporic experiences.

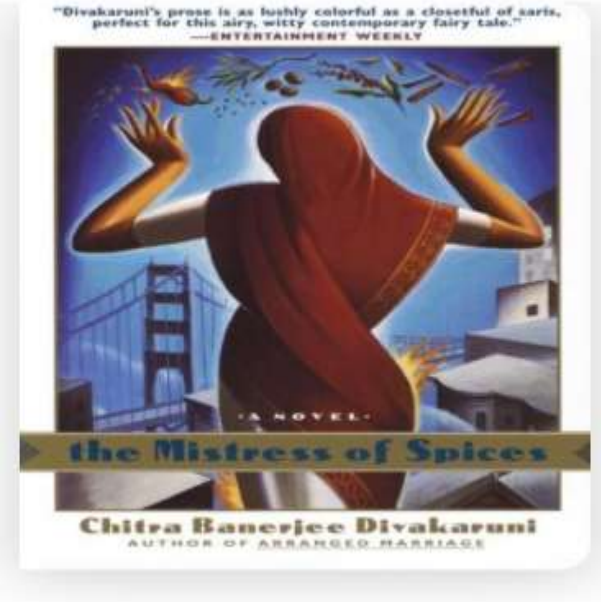


Fig.1
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The protagonist-narrator recapitulates that she was named as Nayantara, 'Star of the Eye', then named her 'Bhagyavati', 'Bringer of luck'. Interestingly, with the passage of time, she selects her own name, 'Tilo', the shortened version of Tilottama, which indicates her role as the life-giver, restorer of health and hope (42) Divakaruni. The burning of the old body and rebirth from the ashes indicate her phoenix-like existence. Tilo's journey to America can be called a transformation and translocation of herself.

The mythological interpretation of the word 'Tilo' is the derivative of the sesame seed, but in Hindu mythology, it is the name of the most elegant dancer at Lord Indra's court who had to suffer damnation. Her mother gifts her a gift at the moment of parting, and Tilo interprets it "... to cut my moorings from the past, the future. To keep me always rocking at sea." (51).



Fig.2
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Tilo violates all the rules that the mistresses are obliged to adhere to. She establishes fostering friendship with the Indians and with Raven, a Native American. She transgresses all the forbidden territory located outside her confined store. Referring to such transgressions, Olivia Espin defines that "immigrants have struggles including feelings of rejection from the new society, which affect self-esteem and may lead to alienation; confusion in terms of role expectations, values, and identity." (p. 19)[7].

Tilo exits from the confines of her store and longs for the "place called home," and this homesickness is described in the following words: "I run my hand over the door, which looks so alien in the outdoor light, and I am struck by the sudden vertigo of homelessness." (p. 128).

Spatially dislocated Tilo finds a temporary space in her geographical migrations. Minh-ha suggests this pain appropriately in the following words: "The search for an identity is ... usually a search for that lost, pure, true, real, genuine, original, authentic self, often situated both in the process of elimination of all that is considered other, superfluous, fake, corrupted, or Westernised" (Minh-ha 415).

Tilo reterritorialises "the other foreign lands," completely dismantling the loss of home, and constructing the 'diaspora'. She recognises the need to adopt a new

name for herself as "Tilo life is over" (316), she accepts the cross-cultural identity, and she describes Raven about her expansion as "spans my land and yours, India and America, for I belong to both now." (p. 317)

Summing up, Divakaruni portrays Tilo as a chameleon who keeps changing throughout the narrative space for her diversified experiences and transnational existence. She completed her picaresque aspect of life by ultimately adopting a new name 'Maya', which symbolises illusion, spell, enchantment, the power that keeps this imperfect world going day after day. (p. 317).

Thus, this novel debunks the concept of unified identity and accommodates her different—South Asian, American, and possibly others—present in her consciousness. This novel, *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), was released as a film with the same name in 2005, starring Aishwarya Rai and Dylan McDermott.

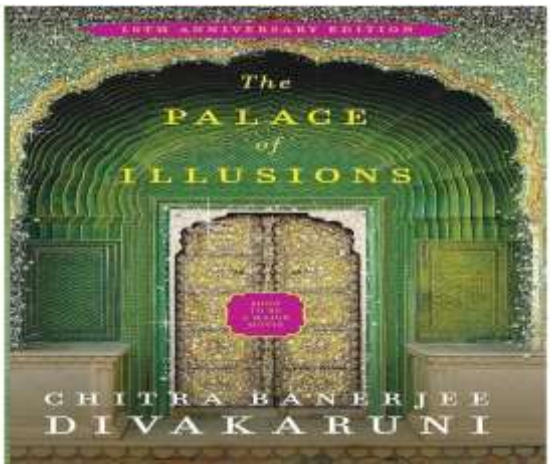


Fig.3
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The mental agony of the diasporic womens' writings can be better captured in the following lines:

> Remember, it's an in-between space.
> Neither here nor there.
> It is dangerous."
> By definition: immigrant.
> (Mortis 2001, *Mantra for Migrants*)

The same plight of an insisting trauma in the female psyche is better interpreted and appreciated by American journalist Susan Faludi, who dissented from the powerful counter-assault on women's rights, as she explains that handful of small and hard-won victories that are somehow managed by feminist movements are really the tormented and tortured soul's defined succinctly as:

> Professional women are suffering 'burn-out' and succumbing to an 'infertility epidemic'. Single women are grieving from a 'man shortage'…High powered career women are stricken with unprecedented outbreaks of stress-induced disorders... Independent women's loneliness represents a major mental health problem today.[10] (pp. 1-2)

The second text in the sequence of the critical assessment, under the point of view of the objective of the research paper is *Jasmine*, by Bharati Mukherjee. Jasmine is the prominent culmination of Mukherjee's characters experiencing the exuberance of immigration through the cross-cultural assimilation and shifting to American culture.

The protagonist comes through the evolutionary unfolding of herself as she successfully completes her journey from a victim to a voyager who admits this gracefully: "We murder who we were so that we can rebirth ourselves in the image of dreams" (25). Jasmine re-invents and redefines her own self by transcending her origin, coming from a village called Hasanpur in Punjab; she grows in the semi-feudal, rural and patriarchal society.



Fig.4
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Jyoti acquired her education by resisting all of her father's traditional beliefs and eventually married a modern Indian husband, Prakash, who aspired to emigrate to the

United States of America for education and to establish an electronics business that included Jyoti. Prakash, who had renamed Jyoti as Jasmine, saw all his dreams shattered when a terrorist attack by Sikhs claimed his life.

Jasmine's conscience decides to complete Prakash's dream and goes to Florida to attend the intended school. The captain of the ship victimised her by rape and successfully smuggled her to America through illegal immigrant. She managed to murder him and abandoned her plans to immolate herself. She got an American woman, Lillian, as a friend who helped her to travel to Flushing, New York, in order to find the home with Prakash's mentor, Prof. Devinder Vadhera, and his friends. Jasmine acquired a new name during her journey of self-discovery.

Jasmine's transformed self was appearing as the incarnation of goddess kali who had stood upon the man who had violated her chastity, and she slained him to preserve her self respect and blood was oozing out from her tongue magnifying the magic realism of violent self-assertions.

Jasmine experiences different mythological stances in her journey of exile. Jasmine prepares herself, strongly determined to accept the life in America. The Hindu God made up of sandalwood with an elephant trunk to uproot anything" (p. 102). The sequence of her metamorphosis in names—from Jasmine to Jazzy to Jase to Jane—finally succeeds as a transformed, liberated, and self-driven woman.

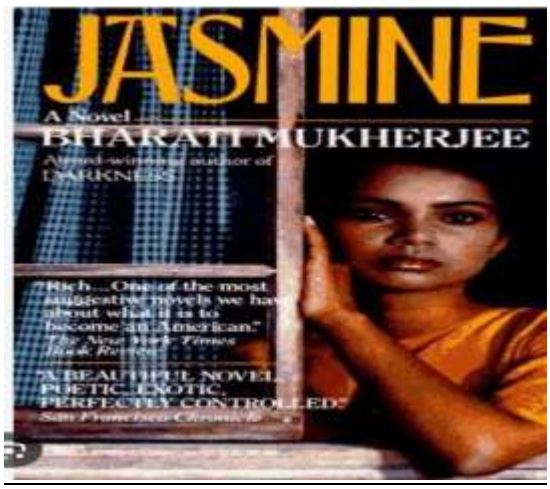


Fig.5

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Even Darell, who falls in love, gives her a new name, calling her Juhane. Jasmine's personality reflects a pattern of growth towards identity formation, through which she dislocated herself, left the crippled bud, and adapted to new worlds of discovery and adventure.

Bharti Mukherjee portrays the canvas of Jyoti—Jasmine—Kali—Jase—Juhane—Jane—to become an integrated personality and to ultimately blend herself with the other of the American milieu. The present contextual modes of contextuality, the study of literature, have expanded themselves in the fields of discourse, culture, ideology, race, and gender that are drastically different from traditional models of literary study in respect of the canons, authors, nations, periods, and genres, etc.

Globalisation has transformed the literary perspective in the modern era from 'communal documents' to 'the scheme of relationships' that emerged in 1980s into a complex web of social relations and cultural practices which are becoming the foundational stones of literary text.

The present research article, titled *Indian English Literature in the Age of Globalisation, Identity, Migration and Cultural Change*, primarily focuses on the acts of rumination and reflection, as these are standard parameters for the resurgence of something new.

The new Indian English literature is also grappling with the genology, intertextuality, dialogism, thematology, historiography, and theories of reception in the emerging span of diasporic writers who played an eminent role in the 'bridge formation' between the obsoleting culture of writing and emerging new multidimensional cultures of the world.

The traces of the fading literary style, both connotatively and denotatively, provide the impetus for shaping the 21st-century globalised and boundless stream of comparative literature. There have been significant debates and discussions in the scholarship of literature and culture.

The optimistic spirit of uniting the 'world literatures' into one 'World Literature' was the objective recalling the ideal of Goethe's Weltliteratur and Tagore's Viswasahitya about the feasibility of promoting a new literary ambience by embracing all varied literature to unite in one.

The radical transformations in literature have emerged through the intervention of computers, the internet, multimedia, and digitisation. According to Fuentes:

> Literature, indeed became de-centred and literary could meaning that reading, writing, teaching, and learning are all activities that that reading, writing, teaching, and learning are all activities to introduce civilisations to each other. (p. 12)

The concept of 'ex-centricity' means moving away from traditional, conventional and canonical texts and breaching the boundaries of power, privilege or the 'hierarchies of hegemony' as defined by Antonio Gramsci. The term 'cultural studies' explores significant terms like 'otherness', 'alterity', 'hybridity', 'displacement', 'alienation', 'marginality', ethnicity, etc.

The third literary work in the sequence of the critical assessment under the title of research paper is Kiran Desai's novel *The Inheritance of Loss*, projecting specifically the losses which are social, personal, cultural, historical that passes down through generations through the struggles of people and effects of colonisation and globalisation.

The incidents of novel are stringed into like Sai, an orphaned teenage girl who lives in a decaying mansion at the foot of the Mount Kanchenjunga. Her grandfather who is retired judge is anglicised and embittered by his nature named Jemubhai Patel, and their cook. Sai's Nepali tutor Gyan with whom she has fallen in love, but their romance collapses by the joining of Gyan in the Gorkhaland nationalist insurgent movement.

The parallel portraiture of Biju, cook's son who lives in America with the undocumented immigrant in U.S. Biju was merely surviving thereafter, the characters experience disillusionment and the breaking of the American dream while grappling with economic hardships, working low-paying restaurant jobs, suffering humiliation and poverty, and experiencing a disintegration of their personal selves.

The Inheritance of Loss is a critically acclaimed literary work, awarded with the Man Booker Prize in 2006 as well as the National Book Critics Circle Fiction Award. The writer has fabricated all the possible transparent dimensions of the contemporary setting of the background of the novel by depicting the minutest details of the characters to reveal their stream of consciousness and intricacies.

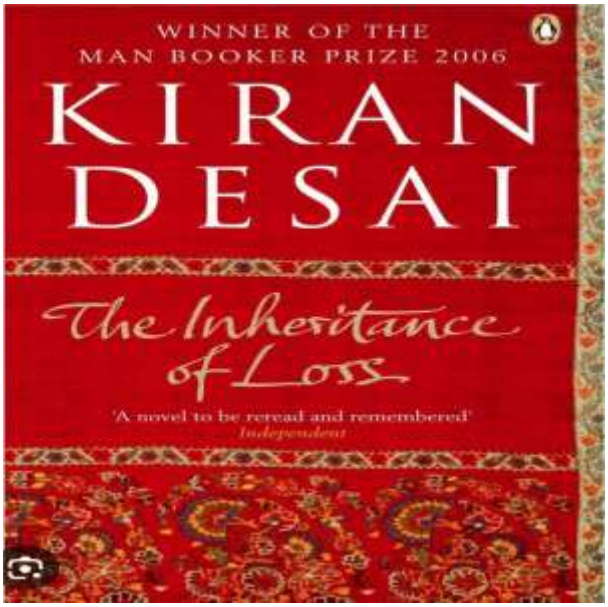


Fig.6

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This work explores a poignant struggle of characters divided into two parts primarily growing in the simultaneous scenario; one side is Sai, a girl and Gyan, her family member and friend of Sai like her and Roni, who were nostalgic in the entrapment of the colonial period, even living in the post-colonial era. Their fascination for British culture, language, and other modes of life has left them swinging in the two contradicting and coexisting worlds.

On the other parameter is the character of Bijju, Sai's, Sai's mother Mini. They were victims of the new global perspective that emphasised cross-cultural characteristics of status quo, which made them feel suffocated and claustrophobic. To bend their self-esteem and self-respect while grappling with the psychosomatic disorders in their personalities, as a transformational phase of life imbibed with insecurities.

C. Vijay Shree, an eminent and renowned Indian scholar and critic, has conceptualised emigration and expatriation in a postcolonial and literary tourism perspective by postulating it as not merely the geographical relocation of human beings but also a deeper psychological and emotional rendering state of displacement, particularly for women.

She reflects on physical emigration and migration as metaphorical journeys that pave the way for the

metamorphosis of both literary characters and real-life individuals. The physical sojourning of characters across borders foregrounds the backdrop for the extension of self while feeling the perpetual alien environment in that scenario.

The characters experience a perpetual pendular movement between the geographical and cultural spaces of their native land and their host land. The phenomenon of emigration and expatriation has played a significant and dramatic role in the postcolonial societies of the second half of the twentieth century, ultimately giving rise to invited tensions that are polarised into patterns such as dislocation vs. relocation, heritage vs. hybridity, exile vs. involvement, and dispossession vs. integration.

Cultural expansionism from centers to the external peripheries becomes the prominent reason for the large-scale loss of meaning of human beings' lives due to the cultural disparities, homogenisation, and sometimes ghettoisation also. *Inheritance of Loss* is a mélange of some interconnected stories about a group of uprooted and isolated characters.

Jemubhai Patel, the son of a well-established family from Gujarat and a living epitome of colonialism, lived a life marked by a split personality, characterised by timidity, shyness, hesitation, and a preoccupation with his brown skin, Indian accent, pronunciation, and, above all, a disdain for and discrimination against the racial features of white people.



Fig.7

https://www.google.com/search?q=Jasmine+book&sca_esv=42c786bd57fb3a9a&hl=en&biw=1600&bih=765&udm=2&sxsrf=APpeQntQ6G_kxt4uwBMBV0VdySiFsq16jA%3A1790790589032&ei=vUu9arLCAYDC4-EPg8yD0AI&ved

Kiran Desai has succinctly described the tortured psyche of a young Indian among the white Britishers:

> For the entire day nobody spoke to him at all, his throat jammed with words unuttered, his heart and mind turned into blunt-aching things, and elderly ladies, even the hapless—blue-haired, spotted, faces like collapsing pumpkins—moved over when he sat next in the bus! … (p. 39)

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has expressed a similar agony of 'speechlessness' or 'silence beyond interpretation' in her work *The Palace of Illusions*, where she critically addresses the traditional silent culture of women in India, who are often assumed to be living in 'speaking silence.' Women's roles, duties, concepts of living are always analysed under the ancient religious texts perspectives like 'Vedas', the 'Puranas', and social texts like 'Manusmriti' and 'Grihasutras' etc. In one of her insightful talk at Google office, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni asserts:

> There is an action. There are plotting and planning, there is fortunes made and fortunes lost... most epics are a very action-oriented tales, but we do not really get the story of the women. Our epics are generally male-centred. But there are some amasing women like Drapadi and Kunti who really amased me. But I never knew what they were feeling, thinking or motives of their actions.

The Palace of Illusions, is a supportive work for women education as the protagonist is indulged in the feminine interests out of her wish, she kept silent and used to talk to herself in the communication of 'speaking silences.' Hilary Clinton has appropriately portrayed the agony of women in the following words:

> ...My grandmother was always silent.
>
> Always aggrieved, …
>
> We speak only to give words
>
> To those who cannot speak
>
> (too many women in too many countries)
>
> I speak only to forget the sorrow.
>
> of my grandmother. (Clinton p. 278)

The above lines are interpreting the patriarchy as the provenance of civilisation, which provides women the status and suppresses or exploits the individual desires and identity, eventually making them silent, which forms like an irreversible wound of 'speechlessness' inside their

mind, heart, and soul, suffocating and choking their throats with unexpressible and unutterable words.

The protagonist narrator of *The Palace of Illusions* speaks about her choked throat in the following words:

> I was given lessons in singing, dancing and playing music. (The lessons were painful, both for my teacher and me, for I wasn't musically inclined or deft on my feet). I was taught to draw, paint, sew and decorate the ground with age-old auspicious designs, each…meant for a special festival. (My paintings were blotchy and my designs full of improvisations that my teachers frowned at) I was better at compromising and solving riddles, responding to witty remarks, and writing poetry, but my heart was not in such frivolities… (Chitra p. 29)

The most prolific and discerning philosopher and theoretician, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, established the definition of subaltern in the postcolonial perspective in the following words in the one of her interview with the 'New Nation Writers Conference' in South Africa in 1992:

> …Subaltern is not just a classy word for oppressed, for the other, for somebody who's not getting a piece of the pie…Now, who would say that just the oppressed? The working class is oppressed. It's not subaltern. Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous...wanting a piece of the pie, and not being allowed to let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse. They should not call themselves subaltern.

Essentialism denies the persistent dangers to multiple cultural identities, while strategic essentialism plays a pivotal role in the functioning of diverse cultural and ethnic identities. Spivak advocates the practical role of intellect, as she recommends the distinction between two words: one is 'representation,' and the other is 're-presenting.' The first is the Marxist concept of the *Vertreten,* wherein that represents something in itself but speaks of something else; a second is *darstellen*, representing the significant aspect of what is already present.

The concept of identity has always been a 'persistent' struggle in literature at both the international and national levels. The characters of the literary works portray themselves as the narratives, possibilities, traits and themes of literature. It has emerged through the external manifestation of characters' views about themselves specifically and how they act or are perceived within the civilisation.

The cultural and group identities are the pertinent parameters of tracing race, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, and class, respectively. Writers of cultural studies, cross-culturalism, and diaspora are frequently combating the challenge of character identity throughout the growth and migration within the text. The naming of characters, their symbolic significance, the ethnicity of the character, and social, political, and religious other aspects are equally important.

The next work of literature for critical assisment is *The Namesake,* written by diaspora writer Jhumpa Lahiri who being diasporic sensibility created the literature while living outside their native lands, exploring the themes rooted in dislocation, displacement, migration, and dual consciousness, respectively.

Diaspora authors frequently grapple with the struggle to define themselves amidst shifting cultural landscapes and plural identities. The agony of uprootedness and striving for re-rooting of self-identity into an entirely new literary scenario and attempting to germinate the seeds of Indian cultural and cross-cultural perspectives in the unfamiliar host culture.

The persistent syndrome of occupying the 'third space' continuously affects them with an 'insider/outsider' sensibility. Nostalgic panic attacks in the far distant world of imagination prick the profound yearning for roots in the homeland, and the writers used to soothe themselves with the idealised panorama of nostalgic reconstructed emotional landscapes. The fluctuating dynamic image of the homeland perpetually taps into the inner psyche of the writers as well as their characters' protagonists through the stream of native ancestral lands. The displaced and alienated psychological state of diasporic creative writers is transparently visible in the parching mentality of the emotional toll of exile, racial discrimination, and cultural clashes.

The diaspora authors consciously apply the linguistic diversification of multilingualism, code-switching, and textual translating to mirror the fluidity of shifting between different languages and cultural boundaries. The diasporic writers are being designated with titles like 'immigrant writers,' 'charismatic charm magic realism authors,' 'migratory writers,' etc.

Jhumpa Lahiri's debut novel, *The Namesake*, explores the effects of migration from India to America, navigating the contrast between the original home and the new one. The retrieving of the cross-cultural nuances is more specifically reflecting the struggle to lose and gain

the cultural principles and how the characters exhibit all these experiences in the journey of achieving the world-acclaimed award in literature like the Pulitzer Prize for Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*.

The novel under study is *The Namesake* (2003), which was published as a novella in *The New Yorker*, and it was later on expanded into the full-fledged novel. The writer's cultural journey ultimately connects Calcutta (now Kolkata), Boston, and New York City. The novel depicts the hardships faced by a Bengali couple, Ashok and Ashima, who have immigrated to the United States (referred to as America hereafter) in hopes of improving their future prospects through a traditional arranged marriage, while sharing a common cultural background from India. Settled in Central Square, in Cambridge, Massachusetts. carrying their burdensome transformations into Americans.

The birth of their first child, a baby boy, and the task of naming him led to feelings of annoyance; Lahiri perfectly expresses Ashima's emotional vacuum in the following words, capturing the momental stance:

> Now she is alone, cut off by curtains from the three other women in the room. One woman's name, she gathers from bits of conversation, is Beverly. Another is Lois Carol lies to her left. Goddamnit, goddamn you, this is hell.

she hears one of them say. And then a man's voice:

> I love you, sweetheart…It is the first time in her life she has slept alone, surrounded by strangers; all her life she has slept either in a room with her parents, or with Ashoke at her side.
>
> (p. 3)

The couple felt astonished by the acknowledgement of their incapability to leave the hospital before naming their son a legal name. Gogol Ganguli, the name of a Russian novelist, positioned the burden of heritage as well as his old artist's 'name' as a 'borrowed identity." Gogol was uncomfortable with his name because it was neither Bengali nor American. The question, 'Why not Indian or American?' highlights the cultural clashes behind the process. Why only Russian? Gogol was absolutely embrashed with this persistent sensibility as summed up by Amy Reiter in following appropriate words:

> Turning her sights on the next generation, on Gogol's life after he begins to make his way in the world as a first-generation American, Lahiri proves herself nearly as adept as when she focuses on the particular struggles of the parents. Gogol goes to Yale, changes his name to Nikhil ('I hate the name Gogol. I've always hated it,' he tells the judge in charge of his name-change application) and re-creates himself as the person he'd like to be—hanging with friends, going to parties, meeting girls—but never fully shakes his old identity. (Amy, 2003)

Gogol's internal struggle with his name is the backbone of the novel, representing the universal and objective disintegration of all the diasporic writers. After the death of his father, Gogol realizes his absence is more hurting than he had imagined. Returning to his cultural heritage roots of family, he eventually falls in love with Moushumi, the Bengalese woman.

They were married to sustain the romantic togetherness in their happily-ever-after tale. Moushumi, who was a quiet and shy young teen, has already tasted the freedom from her parents, but she feels claustrophobic confinement in her marriage; she crossed the threshold of marriage only to be revealed as having a love affair.

The novel clearly depicts the clashes of cultural identities and cross-cultural identities. The simultaneous existence of rejection and acceptance represents two intertwined experiences found in both the characters and Suhila Rathor observed the stance in the following manner:

> Her novel *The Namesake* brings to tone many of the issues that Indians, settled in promising land of opportunities, face in America, the narrative revolves around the difficulties faced by Bengali couple in different country – the clash of cultures, the relationship between parents and children, the generation gap, identity problems. (Rathor 149)

During the colonial discourse, the emergence of the statement comes like knowledge is not non-functional; rather, it is the systematic strategy to project the profound hegemony in society. Edward Said's concept of 'Orientalism' is the acknowledgement of the ideology accompaniment of colonial power which was produced and circulated in Western cultures.

CONCLUSION

The present research article imbricates the spatial dislocation of prolific and discerning writers of Indian English literature who are playing the roles of diasporic writers. The thematic concerns of these authors resonate with their aspirations to live, settle, and establish themselves in the western context by carving a niche in mainstream world literature through their multicultural, multilingual, and cross-cultural creative expressions known as world literatures. The postcolonial shadows and their effectivity are clearly perceptible through the vicious circle of rumination, reflexivity, and resurgence in literary creation. The shaping of Indian Diasporic writers does not originate from their false aspirations of a dreamy world; rather, they are evolutionised consequences of alienation, nostalgic sensibilities, globalised identity crises, hybrid fluency of life, the hyper-consumerism concept of modern society, etc.

The objective of this research article is to acknowledge the influential presence of postcolonial writers, or Diasporic authors, by examining their literary creativity and the challenges they face as Indian writers within the broader context of world literature, where they establish literary canonicity and radical perspectives by articulating the fundamental aspects of literature.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The present research paper has been critically analysed with existing primordial polarities of Indian English literature in the contextual aspect of identity, migration and cultural changes.

The selected diasporic writers have successfully acknowledged themselves in the graphic presentation of world literature by acclaiming esteemed and prestigious awards. The attempt has been made during this research to provide a platform for the transformational and transitional writers to flourish even after all types of hardships of their journey of literary achievements.

The research conducted in this paper draws upon the following primary resources:

- *The Mistress of Spices* — Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni
- *Jasmine* — Bharti Mukerjee
- *The Inheritance of Loss* — Kiran Desai
- *The Namesake* — Jhumpa Lahiri
- *Beginning Theory* — Peter Berry
- *The White Tiger* — Aravind Adiga
- *The Location of Culture* — Homi K. Bhabha
- *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* — Stuart Hall

The present paper studies Indian literature through the contextual interpretation of identity, migration, and culture, positing that despite the literary works of Indian diasporic writers living in countries like the US, the UK, or any other part of the world, they all write about Indian cultures, life, values, and other features unique to India with a unified literary sensibility.

The physical migration of the writers is interpreted as the result of globalisation, liberalisation, commodification of culture, modernism, transnationalism, etc., but the underlying spirit and soul of the writers is only the nostalgic panic attacks, rootlessness, identity crisis, and struggling and baffling perspectives of their establishment of themselves as the authors of world literature negotiating and carving a niche in the canvas of the International Platform.

The writers, like Arvind Adiga, Kiran Desai, and Jhumpa Lahiri, dismantled the idea of globalised ‘shining India’ and established the idea that neoliberal trading, capitalism, and transnational migrations are not creating cosmopolitan, cross-border common humanitarian culture but rather forging the new paradigms of servitude that eventually result in the trapped marginalised systematic violence.

The false promises of globalisation are like fairy tales bound to be vanishing with the dawn, as both internal and international migration ultimately reinforce the colonial-era hierarchies, dehumanising the modern migrant into the commodified labour and fragmented Indian identity along with indispensable demarcations of class and caste.

The present research article is an attempt to bridge the gaps of post-colonial themes in the contextual arena of globalisation. This attempt involves creating a connection between geographical and spatial frameworks. The legacy of the first global asymmetry is properly reported in The New York Times (Friday October 17, 2003) speaking about the huge demonstrations in La Paz which defied military barricades for protesting the export of natural gas to the United States:

> Globalisation is just another name for submission and domination', Nicanor Apaza, 46, an unemployed miner, said at a demonstration this week in which Indian women...carried banners denouncing the International Monetary Fund and demanding the president's resignation. We've had

> to live with that here for 500 years, and now we want to be our own masters. (p.210)

The characters of these writers, like Balram of *The White Tiger* (Aarvind Adigha), Gogol of *The Namesake* (Jhumpa Lahiri), Tilo of *The Mistress of Spices* (Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni), Jasmine of *Jasmine* by Bharti Mukerjee, and Biju of *Inheritance of Loss* (Kiran Desai), are the representatives of the writers' internal struggle of life.

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Research on the Efficacy and Paradigm of AI-Assisted English Translation of Forestry Ecological Security Legal Texts— A Comparative Experiment Based on Zero-Shot, Few-Shot, and Chain-of-Thought Prompting Strategies

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Abstract— *The international dissemination of China's ecological rule-of-law discourse relies heavily on high-quality English translation of legal texts. However, English translation of forestry ecological security legal texts has long faced quality bottlenecks due to inconsistent species nomenclature, complex interdisciplinary semantics of ecological terms, and difficulties in restructuring complex legal sentences. The emergence of Generative Artificial Intelligence (LLMs) offers a novel path for legal translation in domain-specific contexts. Using the Forest Law and the Wetland Protection Law of the People's Republic of China as corpora, this study constructs a Chinese-English parallel dataset and designs a comparative experiment across three prompting strategies—Zero-shot, Few-shot, and Chain-of-Thought (CoT)—based on a 5-point Fluency and Adequacy scale. The results indicate that Chain-of-Thought prompting achieves the best performance in restructuring complex sentences and converting legal jurisdiction concepts; few-shot examples significantly reduce mistranslation rates; and general-purpose large language models can efficiently adapt to forestry legal translation scenarios through prompt engineering optimization. This study constructs the 'Prompt Guide for AI-Assisted Forestry Legal Translation,' providing a reusable solution for cross-border forestry law enforcement cooperation and the international dissemination of ecological rule of law.*

Keywords— ***Generative AI, Forestry Ecological Security, Legal Translation, Prompt Engineering, Chain-of-Thought, Machine Translation Evaluation***

I. INTRODUCTION

With the deep evolution of the global ecological governance system, China has achieved remarkable progress in rule-of-law construction regarding forest resource protection and wetland restoration. The ecological legal system, represented by the Forest Law and the Wetland Protection Law, constitutes the core foundation of the national ecological security and legal shield. However, in cross-border forestry law enforcement cooperation, CITES compliance, and the construction of international ecological governance discourse, the English translation of forestry legal texts faces multiple practical dilemmas.

Forestry ecological security legal texts feature both legal normativity and ecological professionalism. The pain points in their English translation manifest in three aspects: first, inconsistent nomenclature for species names and proper nouns, with a lack of strict mapping between Latin scientific names and legal terms; second, complex interdisciplinary semantics of ecological terms (such as 'non-commercial forests for ecological protection' and 'forestland use control'), which lack direct counterparts in Western legal systems and are prone to semantic drift;

third, multiple logical tiers in complex legal sentences, which easily lead to structural breakdown or omission of key information during LLM translation.

To address these bottlenecks, this study leverages the academic strengths of Northeast Forestry University to explore guiding LLMs toward precise translation via prompt engineering. By constructing a Chinese-English parallel terminology database and designing comparative experiments among zero-shot, few-shot, and chain-of-thought strategies, this study quantitatively evaluates the performance differences of various paradigms in term accuracy, sentence compliance, and logical restructuring, aiming to establish a low-cost, high-efficiency, and reusable practical paradigm.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Legal Translation and International Dissemination of Ecological Rule-of-Law Discourse

Legal translation emphasizes 'functional equivalence' and 'Skopos theory,' requiring translators to reconcile concepts across legal jurisdictions. Existing research mostly focuses on general codes, with a noticeable lack of quantitative empirical studies on the English translation of forestry ecological laws.

2.2 Generative AI and Prompt Strategy Research

As the core method for controlling LLM outputs, prompt engineering encompasses three classic paradigms: 1. Zero-shot prompting: directly providing the source text and instructions; 2. Few-shot prompting: embedding a small number of high-quality parallel corpus examples to align formatting and terminology features via in-context learning; 3. Chain-of-Thought (CoT) prompting: significantly enhancing the quality of complex sentence restructuring through explicit reasoning steps (e.g., 'extract terms — analyze structure — draft translation — conduct legal proofreading').

III. RESEARCH DESIGN AND EXPERIMENTAL METHODOLOGY

3.1 Corpus Extraction and Parallel Terminology Dataset Construction

This study selects the Forest Law and the Wetland Protection Law along with their authoritative English translations, extracting 100 core terms to construct an Excel Chinese-English parallel dataset. The corpus covers species names (e.g., Korean pine), ecological terms (e.g., peatland wetland), and legal procedure terms (e.g., timber harvesting quota).

3.2 Prompt Strategy Experimental Design

The experiment calls representative LLMs such as DeepSeek/Kimi to design three instruction comparisons: Strategy A (Zero-shot direct translation); Strategy B (Few-shot example constraint); Strategy C (Four-step CoT). Each strategy is tested 3 times on the same corpus to eliminate random generation errors.

3.3 Evaluation Metrics and Scoring Standards

A standard 5-point 'Fluency and Adequacy' scale is adopted, with double-blind scoring by 3 experts and inter-rater reliability testing (ICC) to ensure data objectivity.

IV. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Data statistics show the scores of the three prompt strategies across Adequacy, Fluency, Term Accuracy, and Overall Average Score, as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Comparison of Translation Performance Among Three Prompt Strategies

Prompt Strategy	Adequacy Avg	Fluency Avg	Term Accuracy	Overall Avg
Zero-shot Prompting	3.42	3.85	71.5%	3.64
Few-shot Prompting	4.28	4.30	91.2%	4.29
Chain-of-Thought (CoT)	**4.75**	**4.68**	**96.8%**	**4.72**

4.1 Term Accuracy and Conceptual Mapping Analysis

Experimental analysis shows: First, term recognition and conceptual mapping capabilities are significantly improved. Under zero-shot, the model often literal-translates '生态公益林' as 'Ecological Public Welfare Forest', whereas few-shot and CoT strategies explicitly map it to 'Non-commercial forests for ecological protection' through term constraints, raising term accuracy from 71.5% to 96.8%.

4.2 Logical Restructuring of Complex Legal Sentences

Second, the ability to restructure complex legal sentences is greatly enhanced. Legal clauses often contain complex conditional sentences. CoT prompting guides the model through grammatical analysis to automatically convert Chinese pre-conditions into standard legal English post-clauses or participial phrases, significantly improving fluency and legal rigor.

V. PRACTICAL PARADIGM AND PROMPT GUIDE DESIGN

Based on experimental results, this study extracts a structured System Prompt Template:

[System Role] Senior expert in ecological legal translation.

[Workflow (CoT)]

1. Term Analysis: Extract species names and ecological legal terms, converting them standardly according to the [Term Bank];

2. Logical Breakdown: Deconstruct logical tiers of legal clauses (main actions, applicable conditions, exception clauses);

3. Draft Translation: Use standard legal English (prioritizing terms like "shall", "in accordance with", etc.);

4. Self-Proofreading: Verify accurate transmission of legal binding force without omission or ambiguity.

[Term Bank Example] 生态公益林 -> Non-commercial forests for ecological protection; 采伐限额 -> Timber harvesting quota.

VI. APPLICATION PROSPECTS AND SOCIAL BENEFITS

The research outcomes have clear application prospects: serving cross-border forestry law enforcement and CITES compliance; promoting high-quality translation of characteristic achievements such as 'ecological red line' and 'forest chief system' to enhance international discourse power; providing a lightweight AI application paradigm that enables general LLMs to adapt to domain-specific scenarios relying solely on prompt engineering and terminology databases without model fine-tuning.

VII. CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK

This study addresses the pain points of forestry ecological legal English translation and verifies the efficacy of different prompt strategies. Experiments confirm that CoT and few-shot strategies effectively resolve issues such as inconsistent species nomenclature, term semantic drift, and complex sentence restructuring difficulties. The resulting prompt guide possesses high reusability. Future research can further expand corpus size and explore AI Agent applications in multilingual ecological legal translation.

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Myth, Memory, and Female Agency in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions: Reclaiming Draupadi's Voice Through Feminist Myth-Making

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Abstract— *Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Palace of Illusions (2008) retells a mythical tale of Mahabharata from the perspective of Draupadi, making the traditional epic narrative a tale of women's consciousness and rebellion. In this paper, I would like to discuss how the author uses the concepts of myth as a living cultural memory and the idea of reconstruction of female agency through the revival of Draupadi's voice. Based on the theories of cultural memory, feminist myth criticism, and Indian Knowledge Systems, the study shows that Divakaruni does not deny mythology or simply update it but recovers myth as a vibrant memory space which gives women an opportunity to navigate their identity, power, and subjectivity. In order to do so, the following three interconnected aspects will be discussed: myth as cultural memory, memory as resistance to patriarchal historiography, and agency of women as self-narration. It will be shown that The Palace of Illusions turns Draupadi into a conscious subject who reinterprets the concept of dharma, desire, and fate. Therefore, this reinterpretation proves that myth is an important means of reconstruction of female history while keeping the philosophical basis of Indian civilization.*

Keywords— ***Myth, Cultural Memory, Female Agency, Feminist Retelling***

Throughout history, myths have served as the cultural archive which preserved the philosophy, ethics and social consciousness of any civilization. In the Indian tradition, *Mahabharata* is not only an epic, but the archive of collective memory wherein such ideas as dharma, karma, justice and human relationships are constantly reinterpreted from generation to generation. At the same time, the preservation of cultural memory has been carried out on the grounds of the patriarchal narration leaving women only symbolic roles and not allowing them to be autonomous subjects. Feminist mythological retellings attempt to revive the silenced voices by giving women an opportunity to tell their own stories. In that way, the retellings do not deny the authority of the traditional texts but simply offer new interpretation of the texts. The cultural memory, in this regard, is never closed and fixed, and therefore, the process of retelling is actually the act of negotiation between the tradition and consciousness of contemporaries.

The Palace of Illusions written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni can be considered one of the most influential feminist reworkings of the *Mahabharata*. Choosing Draupadi for the first-person narrator, Divakaruni creates myth through memory, feelings and experience of its heroines. The novel shifts the focus from the heroic warfare to the inner drama of a woman struggling with the duty, desire, power and her identity in the patriarchal world. Instead of discarding the epic tradition, the novel reinterprets it using female memory and proves that mythology is an evolving discourse able to accommodate the voices of marginalized people. The importance of Divakaruni's intervention, thus, consists in the change of the narrative perspective. The epic survives intact but the centre of consciousness changes – the heroine is not just a

character narrated from the outside but the heroine telling her own story.

Cultural memory is a term which means the exchange of shared beliefs, traditions and historical consciousness across generations. In *The Palace of Illusions*, mythology becomes active memory and not just history. Divakaruni retells familiar stories like the birth of Draupadi, swayamvara, the dice game, exile and the war at Kurukshetra in order to redefine the emotional meaning of these myths and not to change the historical order of events. This way mythology becomes an active repository of memories in which personal memories intermingle with collective cultural memory. Draupadi understands and remembers humiliation, longing, love and political violence differently from the heroes in the epic. This is why readers will encounter the Mahabharata not as a history of kings but as a story of feminine survival. Mythology accordingly turns into the place in which forgotten emotions become historical memory. Personal memory accordingly becomes a link between the individual and the collective because the experience of Draupadi gets its importance due to the fact that she reveals those aspects of the epic which would remain unnoticed in a heroic narrative. Her memory doesn't substitute collective memory, but complicates and enriches it through bringing to light those emotions of a woman who participated in the events and was not usually given the chance to express herself.

Memory in the novel is an instrument of struggle against patriarchal historiography. It's

typical for traditional version of the *Mahabharata* to emphasize masculine heroism and regard

Draupadi only as the one who provoked the war. Divakaruni refuses this simplification through

allowing Draupadi to remember the events through her emotional experience. Her memory of the

humiliation in the dice hall becomes the act of feminine rebellion and not just a political

catastrophe. Likewise, her memories about Karna, Krishna and the Pandavas show the complexity of feminine desire that is usually suppressed by patriarchal narrative.

It becomes the concern of the community, which demands that one ask whose version of the past is being heard. Divakaruni demonstrates that the process of recovery of women's memories leads to recovery of elements of the cultural heritage that were overlooked. It becomes even more essential in a mythological narrative, since what is remembered and forgotten affects interpretation of the past by the community. The process of remembering is central to the plot of the novel; Divakaruni situates Draupadi's memories in the context of the novel. Therefore, in this novel, memory becomes a means of gaining influence. Not only does Draupadi recount the events, but she evaluates them, questions them, and interprets them by attributing meaning to events, which were previously seen from a patriarchal perspective.

The most prominent feature of *The Palace of Illusions* is that women acquire authority in the narration. Their authority is represented through narrative voice. The deeds of Draupadi become important not as such, but as an interpretation. The character has a chance to interpret her own life and give it shape. When Draupadi narrates, she does not remain an object of interpretation made by others. Her authority is represented by many means. She challenges patriarchal interpretations of dharma. She gives expression to her feelings and aspirations that were considered inappropriate. She participates in the decisions that affect the group. She defies the expectations regarding marriage and maternity. At the same time, she retains her self-image in spite of becoming a queen and a wife of five husbands. Divakaruni creates an image of the character that thinks and participates in the discussion, rather than a suffering heroine. Feminine agency is not based on awareness and interpretation and the ability to talk, but on physical force alone. This distinction is important. Not only freedom from social constraints can grant agency. Draupadi remains within the confines of royal obligations, marital obligations, kinship relations, and patriarchy . Still, she learns how to challenge these forces. She also learns how to talk back and make choices within them. In this way, her agency shows up through pushback, bargaining, reflection, and her refusal to let a social role fully set her identity.

In *The Palace of Illusions*, Draupadi's story is tied to the *Mahabharata*. Divakaruni reshapes that larger tale so Panchali becomes the focus. This retelling tries to open space for women inside a world that often keeps women in place. It also lets the feminine self speak in ways that confront the epic's male order. In that setting, the line "I was born of fire but that did not mean I did not feel pain" (Divakaruni 5) hits hard. It undercuts the old idea that a divine or special birth means no real emotions. Fire birth may give her myth weight, yet her words insist that deep greatness does not cancel bodily pain. Divakaruni shifts the story toward the private and the psychological. She makes the well known woman easier to reach as a person, while keeping her place in cultural memory.

Divakaruni writes with mythic figures so we can feel what they go through. Their heroic side becomes easier to grasp when their emotions are clear. The author also draws from the experiences of the women in the past not as an additional feature, but as part of the same trajectory. It looks like the tradition changes, but it does not obliterate the

previous one. In The Palace of Illusions, the characters do not confine themselves within one interpretation. With the privately held views becoming the primary focus, the older stories get a new dimension. This is not only the transformation of the story for a new audience; this is rather an interpretation of the same events from a different perspective. The old version provides a basis for the culture/meaning, while the new one brings up the new issues. It asks about gender, about selfhood, and about how feelings shape experience. Myth keeps going because it can talk with the world as that world changes.

The mythic female figure is made human through psychological and feminist re-visioning. Draupadi who emerges from fire in the *Mahabharata* represents divine birth and power because She possesses both divine and human qualities which serve as her ultimate fate. The symbol of birth exists in Divakaruni's work as she presents maternal suffering which lead to the creation of mythological female figures who endure pain. The statement challenges the male dominant belief which requires that women who achieve exceptional status through divine or powerful or sacrificial labels must remain emotionally strong at all times. The line demonstrates that people use symbolic praise to create falsehoods which hide actual events because they consider trauma to be concealed by the social norms of strength and honor. Fire (agni) is viewed as a purification and transformation tool while Divakaruni interprets fire as a force which creates suffering that leads to personal transformation. The line establishes a connection between historical times and current times because it maintains ancient mythological symbols while demonstrating current psychological truths which enable Panchali to emerge as both a mythical figure and a complete human being who requires recognition of her pain in order to receive ethical treatment.

Panchali's defiance of the established gender norms would display how her actions create a divide between what society expects from her and personally claimed freedom: "Why did the word woman always have to be followed by obedient?" (Divakaruni 92)

The question operates as a feminist examination of *The Palace of Illusions* which contains two elements from epic tradition and social discourse that still maintain their patriarchal structure.

Divakaruni uses this rhetorical question to demonstrate that people expect women to submit to male authority which shows that society creates gender roles instead of using biological differences to decide them. The question requires the epic's moral framework to disintegrate because female purity depends on total obedience to male authority which includes fathers and husbands and kings while male power exists through their ability to act and make decisions. The question serves as a postcolonial feminist critique because it demonstrates how traditional norms which people mistakenly believe to be cultural authenticity actually function as instruments of female oppression within societies that appear to possess superior moral and spiritual standards. This query raised by Panchali helps her refuse the assigned role. This is done because she needs to express her views about womanhood. In her opinion, it lies in her right to disobey any order.

This makes the concept of obedience not a simple moral commandment but an interesting debate topic. Moreover, it combines the old tradition-based ideology and the new feminist ideology. Divakaruni is very good in mixing these ideologies in her work. She manages to portray the epic as a dialogue between two sides. This text is not a closed one but the one open to discussion. It is more like a dialogue rather than a monologue. The image of Panchali created by the author is such that it is not totally freed from tradition or submitted to it blindly.Her voice signifies a contemporary woman who has negotiated a place for herself, thus claiming her right to choose albeit under limitations:

"I would not disappear into someone else's story." (Divakaruni 214)

The proclamation functions as a metaphorical tool that allows the speaker to reclaim narrative control which epic patriarchs previously possessed. The battle of Panchali represents modern women who use their traditional knowledge to assert their rights against oppressive forces.

Draupadi from the Mahabharata appears as a background character whose existence creates male motivations for war and honor and revenge yet her character belongs to the Paṇḍavas and Krishna.

Panchali defies destiny by asserting her right to shape her own identity through her resistance against those who claim she belongs in their narrative. Feminists following a psychoanalytical approach would say that the utterance comes up as a denial to disappear within the patriarchal symbolic order where females are became objects instead of being able to express their minds.

The epic story reveals its hidden elements through a process that allows the character to reclaim his voice from unconsciousness. The phrase postcolonial feminist perspective because it challenges historical and cultural accounts which ignore women to create a heroic narrative of the collective and masculine. The storytelling process serves as a battleground according to Divakaruni because sharing one personal story functions as an act of defiance. The statement connects the past with the present by turning epic legacy into a place for the writer's own authority through his declaration that existence and identity depend

on both remembrance and the right to speak oneself. As if speaking through feminine consciousness, Panchali's musings on fate and free will resonate nothing but the living experience rather than the theoretical law:

"Was it destiny, or had I made these choices myself?" (Divakaruni 71)

The Mahabharata uses fate and cosmic law to show how both forceful divine powers and human behaviour operate throughout its narrative. The two forces create a situation that exonerates people from their ethical duties. In particular, the two forces let men keep their power over women. The question shows how Panchali examines moral teachings which assert that her misfortune results from destiny while ignoring the social forces that operate through patriarchy. The woman in this inquiry discovers her true self because she understands her wish and participation and the hidden option of her position which brought her to her present situation. The process of going from passive acceptance to active agency begins when people start examining their unconscious beliefs about fate. Divakaruni uses her narrative technique to connect historical events with contemporary society while her epic character transcends destiny.

This transformation allows people to treat fate as a psychological and moral study. It also enables contemporary feminists to show their ability to make choices and develop their identity.

Divakaruni uses dharma to show how the concept exists as a psychological and moral battle. The epic gets experienced through IKS because it gets told through oral tradition which preserves Indian itihasa as a framework for dialogue and interpretation. Psychoanalytic feminism supports the interpretation of these texts as attempts to reveal female desire and their experiences of repression and trauma and their processes of self-expression within patriarchal systems. Panchali's narrative voice is considered by feminist psychoanalysts to be the return of repressed feminine voices. Her emotions of anger, desire and resentment which are often silenced in the epic tradition emerge again and again:

"Anger burned in me, sharp and dangerous, but no one asked me what I wanted." (Divakaruni 156)

The Palace of Illusions presents a profound emotional and structural suppression of female desire. Divakaruni presents anger as a valid response to discriminatory systems instead of depicting it as an uncontrollable violent reaction which results from detecting threats against patriarchal authority. Panchali's anger represents her repressed needs and her existence which society has chosen to disregard because it views women as inferior to men. The absence of the inquiry "what I wanted" demonstrates how authorities strip women of their ability to make choices between their personal needs and their societal responsibilities which affect their entire existence. The burning imagery evokes agni as a force which destroys and purifies because it shows how suppressed anger can transform into acceptance. The line uses its power to link past and present by transforming female anger into a moral insight which brings about resistance because women's needs must be heard to achieve genuine justice.

Through her feminine voice which she uses in the epic, Panchali breaks the male dominant structure of phallic symbols which controls the story. Her story functions as a healing process which helps her to reclaim her lost psychological state.

Panchali demonstrates Gayatri Spivak's investigation into the possibility of subaltern women being heard. By telling her own story, she is telling the world that she will not be silenced: "I would not be the shadow in someone else's legend." (Divakaruni 214)

The assertion examines both epic patriarchal systems and the colonial restatement of Indian mythological traditions which results in Panchali becoming a postcolonial feminist who reclaims traditional cultural authority through her research of existing customs. The text establishes a boundary which prevents narrative resources from being used to diminish women's existence in the male-dominated epic. Draupadī exists in the Mahabharata as one of the female characters but her existence only serves to showcase the battle accomplishments of the male heroes whom she accompanies. The situation which Divakaruni modifies exposes the historical tendency to exclude women from cultural memory while they existed only to assist men in their predominantly masculine narratives. The term "shadow" describes the hidden space which contains women's dreams and expressions and their ability to influence everything while the "legend" represents the patriarchal system which establishes who may share their experiences. She claims her right to communicate without following the established order. Here, the notion

of challenging older concepts which celebrate the act of being heroic is made. However, she also mentions the actual societal cost associated with these tales. Divakaruni moves the concept of the epic to become a call for equality. This narration links past events with the present day. This narration provides a voice, public awareness and identity formation.

CONCLUSION

The Palace of Illusions by Divakaruni is an example of how the modern reading of the myth can function as culture

preservation, criticism, and the act of empowering women to reclaim their voice. Thus, *The Palace of* Illusions allows us to understand the emotional and mental aspects of Draupadi's story, and at the same time keep the philosophical and cultural aspects of the epic alive. The novel thus shows how cultural memory becomes richer if voices that have been silent before are added to it. Draupadi's voice brings new relevance to the ancient myth and encourages us not only to rethink who we remember but also who has the right to remember and narrate. This way, the novel presents myth as an intellectual resource which allows one to explore the issues of gender, identity, morality, power, and human agency through the lens of the constantly developing Indian literary and knowledge tradition. At the same time, The Palace of Illusions shows that women's agency is not about being completely free of tradition. Draupadi is a part of such structures as marriage, family, kingship, duty, etc., and finds her agency in questioning, negotiating, interpreting, remembering, and narrating. Thus, Draupadi's agency is not absolute as it means both being a victim of patriarchy and being a modern woman projected into the past.

Under the rubric of Indian Knowledge Systems, the novel also shows the ongoing vitality of interpretation of the itihasa. Terms like dharma, karma, fate, duty, and ethics are not seen as fixed doctrines but rather as concepts that assume various meanings from one subject to another. As such, a feminist reinterpretation of the epic should not be viewed as weakening the tradition since it is indicative of the ability of the tradition to reflect on itself and renew itself.

Ultimately, in *The Palace of Illusion* s, myth is rendered a dynamic source of intellect through which issues related to gender, identity, morality, power, memory, and human agency may continue to be explored in the changing context of Indian literary and intellectual culture. Through granting Draupadi the privilege of remembrance and speech, Divakaruni turns cultural memory from being an archive of what has been remembered in the past into a platform for asking about what has been forgotten. Ultimately, in this way, the novel implies that remembering in a different way can be a moral action in itself. By bringing back Draupadi’s voice, the retelling is not only offering a new perspective on the past but is calling on the present to reflect on the ways cultural stories have been told and what traditions may accommodate.

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Spatial Construction of *Brave New World* from the Perspective of Literary Cartography

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Abstract**—***Aldous Huxley's Brave New World constructs two contrasting yet mutually reflective social spaces through the juxtaposition of the World State and the Savage Reservation, revealing the tensions among technological rationality, institutional discipline, and human nature. Drawing upon Robert Tally's theory of literary cartography, this paper examines the awakening of topophrenia and the spatial construction of the novel from the perspective of literary space. It focuses on the metaphorical functions of literary cartography in representing civilizational conflicts, cultural divergence and ideological tensions, which together constitute a complex network of power discourse. Furthermore, this paper investigates the influence of power space on character identity formation and explores the utopian paradox and dystopian essence embedded in the novel from the perspective of heterotopian space. The study demonstrates that the World State, characterized by a highly standardized and institutionalized spatial order, eliminates individual differences through technological rationality and disciplinary mechanisms, whereas the Savage Reservation, as a heterotopian space, preserves primitive human emotions, religious beliefs, and experiences of suffering. This paper argues that literary cartography serves not only as a spatial narrative strategy but also as an intellectual practice to rethink social order, power relations and the potential of free space in the future, which provides a new theoretical perspective for studies on spatial politics in dystopian literature.*

Keywords**—Brave New World, literary cartography, opposed spaces, other spaces, power spaces**

I. INTRODUCTION

The idea of literary cartography, associated with the American scholar Robert T. Tally Jr., occupies an important place in contemporary studies of literary space. Fredric Jameson remarked that, before Tally, no one had traced as a whole the development of spatial practices and spatial thought in contemporary theory (Fang, 2021). Over recent decades, spatiality has come to rival temporality in accounts of literary narrative; Eric S. Rabkin discussed the relation between spatial form and plot (Rabkin, 1977). Spatial approaches to literature now draw on the work of Henri Lefebvre, Edward W. Soja, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, Yuri Lotman, and other scholars, whose concepts include the production of space, Thirdspace, spaces of power, binary spatial structures, and cultural semiotics. Tally's work ranges across literary cartography, topophrenia, geocriticism, and utopia. His contributions involve the formulation of concepts, theoretical analysis, and critical practice. Influenced by Jameson's cognitive mapping and utopian thought, he understands literary writing as a form of mapping and as a significant part of contemporary utopian thinking. In *Utopia in the Age of Globalization: Space, Representation, and the World System*, he treats utopia as a way of mapping the world system (Tally, 2013). On this account, literary cartography uses the imagination to think through apparent impossibilities and represent the world system in an age of globalization (Shen, 2021). A novel can thus offer a figurative image of the world, a possibility especially evident in utopian literature.

This article takes Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* as a practice of literary cartography. In the novel, material abundance, rapidly developing technology, totalitarian conditioning, and the chemical management of mental life

form the cultural setting for Huxley's anxious projection of modern society's future. Since its publication in the 1930s, the novel has attracted sustained scholarly attention. Alongside Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* and George Orwell's *1984*, it is often grouped among three major dystopian novels. Scholars in China and elsewhere have examined it through totalitarianism, personality development, technological alienation, and spatial discipline. Taking Tally's literary cartography and geocriticism as its main theoretical basis, this article interprets the novel's spatial representation and metaphorical significance through the mapping of narrative space, the formation of character identity, the metaphor of power space, and the possibilities of the future suggested by other spaces. The aim is to show how this visual way of reading shapes spatial images, deepens the novel's themes, and prompts readers to think about future social spaces.

II. THE AWAKENING OF TOPOPHRENIA IN A LOST SPACE

Tally's literary cartography brings together Jameson's cognitive mapping, Bertrand Westphal's geocriticism, and Henri Lefebvre's distinctions among forms of space. Jameson's thinking was itself influenced by Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan. He regards cognitive mapping as a way of understanding new postmodern spatiality: in a vast social space that seems impossible to represent, an individual needs a mapping project to locate relations with other people (Tally, 2021). Cognitive mapping does not produce a precise map of an actual place. Through the interaction of subject and space, it enables a changing critique of power structures, social institutions, and ideology. The resulting map is therefore a critical representation of a subject's place in a social whole, not a neutral diagram. In Tally's formulation, the subject needs to read the relations among institutions, practices, and people rather than merely identify a point on the ground. This understanding helped shape Tally's approach to spatial criticism and literary cartography. After repeated discussions with Tally, the Chinese scholar Fang Ying summarized the system as a progression from being, or topophrenia, to writing, or literary cartography; from the text, or literary geography, to criticism, or geocriticism; and finally to theorization through cartography (Huang & Wu, 2025; Fang, 2021; Zhu et al., 2020).

Topophrenia denotes the discomfort experienced in a place and a persistent anxiety about one's surroundings. It includes the fear of being spatially lost and calls for a cognitive map of the place one occupies. This gives rise to the cartographic imperative and, in turn, to mapping (Zhu et al., 2020). In reading or writing, this activity requires continued reflection on the relation of people and things to the larger world. It attends to both the whole and the relations within it, represents the subject's situation in a place, and commonly takes shape in narrative writing. Chad Walsh describes the creators of fictional societies as concentrating on an ultimate dream or nightmare and enlarging or clarifying it so that readers can study and assess it (Walsh, 1962). Such narrative mapping is metaphorical. In utopian literature, the actions and routes of individuals or groups carry the story within a dynamic overall space that stands outside ordinary history. This process can bring about a sense of disorientation and anxiety about place, through which a subject attempts to construct a sense of self.

In *Brave New World*, Huxley invents a society that dates its years from Ford and replaces childbirth with the mass production of embryos through biological engineering. The first space presented is the Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre, where human beings are divided into castes. Alphas stand at the top, followed by Betas, Gammas, Deltas, and the Epsilon workers at the bottom. Bernard Marx is an Alpha, yet his short stature and appearance make him feel inferior: in the World State, being small is a mark associated with the lower castes (Huxley, 1975). His unusual character soon damages his social standing and makes him uneasy in familiar surroundings. His acute self-consciousness weighs heavily on him (Huxley, 1975). Aware that he thinks and behaves differently from others, he becomes anxious about what he cannot predict. The cartographic anxiety generated by topophrenia leaves him unable to map himself and his environment in a meaningful way (Tally, 2016). The representational crisis associated with this anxiety creates a desire for narrative and prompts the activity of literary mapping (Fang, 2021). He therefore flies south to Propaganda House to seek out Helmholtz Watson, who also senses an independent life beneath his assigned role.

Helmholtz differs markedly from Bernard. He excels in sport, has access to material comforts, and has no shortage of social or sexual attention; yet sport, women, and communal activities have come to seem secondary to something he cannot name (Huxley, 1975). He feels unable to describe his fleeting inner perceptions with the vocabulary and accumulated knowledge available to him. The distinction matters: Bernard feels visibly marked as different, whereas Helmholtz has all the outward signs of success and nevertheless finds the language allotted to him inadequate. As Tally and Fang argue, a change of situation involves both a change in the subject's position and perspective and a change in the objective conditions in which an experience occurs (Tally & Fang, 2023). Bernard's and Helmholtz's unease arises from changes in

self-understanding as well as from their social circumstances. Their positions in space involve history, society, and psychological perception, rather than physical distance alone.

John faces a related difficulty. He is the son whom Linda, originally from the World State, gave birth to on the Reservation. Motherhood is stigmatized as something filthy in the World State, whereas the older society holds a different view of maternal identity. Linda's upbringing and beliefs make her an outsider on the Reservation. The resulting hostility extends to John. Other children isolate him, and as an adult he is barred from taking part in a ritual. Unable to discover a secure system of values around him, he turns to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* to develop his understanding of emotion and the world. In his anxious situation, a form of mapping appears to offer an appropriate aesthetic and political practice (Tally, 2021). Psychological need and lived experience together impel him to travel to the World State, to understand that society and reconsider his own position.

III. CHARACTER IDENTITY ACROSS OPPOSED SPACES

Once topophrenia emerges, space is no longer only a narrative background; it becomes a means of producing meaning, and the cartographic imperative follows. Huxley's writing performs an initial act of literary mapping. The author maps while readers redraw that map in the act of reading (Yao, 2024). By examining the represented landscape, readers and critics produce a second map in their own minds. Although the novel's society differs greatly from their own, its narrative map becomes a way to understand and consider their social space (Tally, 2021). As the story unfolds, the World State and the Savage Reservation move from separation toward contact. Bernard's, Helmholtz's, and John's identities are unsettled and repeatedly reconstituted as they move between, or imagine themselves across, these opposing spaces. This is more than geographical movement. It is a transition between systems of discourse in which individuals must redefine their positions under different spatial norms.

The two societies first meet directly when Bernard takes Lenina to the Savage Reservation in New Mexico. Their journey is a turning point in the plot and a new act of mapping. Flying across the frontier between what the World State calls civilization and savagery, they encounter two opposed social spaces. On one side are soma, which produces artificial happiness, and such technologies as liquid air, vacuum vibrators, synthetic music, and escalator squash courts. On the other are drinking, hardship, and the Reservation's rugged landscape. The fence extends in an uncompromising line over mountains, across salt flats and deserts, and through forests, ravines, peaks, and mesas, tracing a geometric design over uneven terrain (Huxley, 1975). Through the travellers' route and perspective, readers can reconstruct the Reservation's outline. The fence also runs across deep canyons, precipices, and flat-topped heights, transforming natural irregularity into what the narrative depicts as a proud geometric assertion of human will. The flight crosses a cultural and moral boundary as well as a physical one and offers an aerial view of both societies at once. After landing, the visitors walk in the shadow of a mesa, pass an outcrop, and climb a steep path through a water-cut ravine; the path twists in a zigzag among the gullies (Huxley, 1975). Their growing sense of disorientation reverses the apparent clarity of the aerial map. The World State appears brightly ordered, while the Reservation seems backward from their perspective. The contrast shows how spatial mapping and the construction of a subject's sense of self shape each other.

Bernard and Lenina meet John and his mother Linda and bring them back to the World State. The juxtaposition of the two spaces brings formerly separate social orders into direct conflict and forces the characters to confront incompatible ways of life. The people involved in this exchange act as catalysts for the further development of the map (Ma, 2018). The geographic and cultural differences between the two societies register in Bernard's and the others' contrasting responses. They also intensify John's sense of division. Raised between two sets of values yet accepted by neither, he cannot fully belong on the Reservation or accept the values taught by the World State. This double rejection leaves him at the margins of both.

The public spaces of the two societies form another contrast. Huxley depicts splendid places of entertainment in the World State. After work, Lenina and Henry go to the Westminster Abbey Cabaret. Coloured screens in its dome display a tropical sunset, while four hundred couples dance five-steps on the shining floor. At the height of the music and dance, they move together like twin embryos gently swaying in a sea of blood-surrogate (Huxley, 1975). The spectacle and the dancers' movement act as strokes in a spatial map of happiness and stability amid material abundance. Bernard's Solidarity Service presents a related scene. Every other Thursday he goes to the 320-metre-high Fordson Community Singery for a collective rite. Its recurrent Thursday schedule is as important to the scene as its architecture: participation is organized and repeated until belonging seems habitual. The recurrent ceremony draws him into a cycle of time and space. Outside, its white Carrara-surrogate façade gleams above Ludgate Hill; an immense red T stands at each corner of its helicopter

platform, and solemn synthetic music issues from twenty-four golden trumpets (Huxley, 1975). Architecture, sound, and ritual together create a quasi-religious atmosphere in which collective celebration offers an artificial sense of belonging.

Public ritual on the Reservation provides a sharp contrast. At a village ceremony intended to seek rain and crops and to honour Pookong and Jesus, the square concentrates the crowd's movements around a single centre. Masked participants, some with faces painted beyond recognition, emerge from an underground chamber and sing and dance around the square. A leader distributes snakes of various colours, including black, brown, and mottled ones. The dancers carry them as they move, then throw them into the middle. An elder sprinkles cornmeal over the snakes while a woman adds water. Images of an eagle and a crucified man rise above the square. The elder conducts the next part of the rite. A boy of about eighteen circles the snakes and is whipped by a man wearing a coyote mask until he collapses. The elder touches a feather to his blood and waves it toward the snakes. The crowd cheers and leaves, while the boy lies still until three older women carry him away (Huxley, 1975). The scene exposes the individual directly to religious custom, collective force, and physical suffering. Its portrayal can appear exaggerated and othering. Nevertheless, the represented ritual provides a map through which readers can consider their own society and imagine a future one.

John's difficulty of belonging comes to a head within this contrast. He witnesses both worlds and bears the consequences of their collision. Each society reveals its cruelty to him, and each places demands on him that he cannot reconcile. The conflict between rational order and emotional life intensifies his instability and foreshadows his eventual withdrawal to an abandoned lighthouse and his suicide. His fate is at once an individual tragedy and an indictment of the failure of both spatial orders.

IV. THE METAPHORICAL MEANING OF POWER SPACE

From the 1970s onward, the work of Lefebvre, Foucault, and others advanced the spatial turn in scholarship. This turn changed approaches in human geography and also affected literary criticism and cultural studies. As Lefebvre argues, space is not an object that ideology or politics subsequently distorts: it is already political and strategic (Lefebvre, 2008). Space is closely bound to power. Even if it does not itself produce power, it provides a medium in which power can operate and become visible. A room, boundary, or route may prescribe movement, separate groups, or make a hierarchy seem natural. In a literary narrative these arrangements can be read as part of the action of power rather than as incidental scenery. The formation, distribution, and use of spaces take place within particular structures of control and social order. Tally's account of literary mapping converges with Foucault's analysis of power, knowledge, and the spaces of modern society: cartography allows detailed scrutiny of the maps produced within and about those societies (Tally, 2021). A map does more than depict a place. It can encode and organize relations of power and make them available for interpretation. Louis Marin's work on utopia also treats space as a system of signs: imagined utopian places can rewrite and criticize the power relations of the actual world. The relation between space and ideology is thus central to their interpretation.

For Tally, literary cartography represents metaphorically the social space of a narrative and the position of individual or collective subjects within a larger spatial, social, and cultural whole (Tally, 2018). Space, in this sense, is integral to the production of narrative meaning. Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* uses a literary method akin to mapping to relate actual and imagined spaces to a wider system of power in a postnational world. Their movement and instability disclose the complexity of that system. Huxley likewise depicts the power structures of the old and new worlds through particular places, using those local spaces to suggest larger social and political wholes.

The Central London Hatchery and Conditioning Centre is the World State's most consequential institutional space. It is a future heterotopic site through which individuals are monitored and controlled and a model of the society as a whole (Foucault, 1986). This local space of experiment extends its logic outward. Jameson describes such discontinuous development in terms of a quantitative leap in the expansion of capital (Jameson, 1991). As the Hatchery's logic spreads, a local institution becomes the pattern of an entire social order. Unlike the heterotopic spaces imagined by ideal utopias, this future space projects a bad or evil place whose appearance overturns a supposedly good present (Ji, 2012).

At the Hatchery, people are assigned to castes before birth, and each embryo travels along a production line. Bottling is followed by social predestination and then the underground Embryo Store. In its hot red darkness, automatic sprayers stand at intervals of twelve metres along a route extending to the 2,040-metre mark (Huxley, 1975). Bottles are carried on racks that form three levels. The web of metal shelving disappears into the dark in every direction (Huxley, 1975). This arrangement suggests both discipline and enclosure. Each distance corresponds

to a stage of treatment: the space itself functions like a programme, while the developing human being is moved and processed within it. The precise stages give an otherwise abstract caste system a physical scale. The visitor sees not only the completed divisions between people but the measured process by which those divisions are made. Pituitary doses increase during the final ninety-six metres of the embryos' journey. At Metre 112 each bottle receives an artificial maternal circulation. Embryos destined for tropical labour begin to be inoculated at Metre 150. On another rack, heat conditioning occurs around Metre 170; at Metre 320 on Rack 11, a mechanic slows the circulation of blood-surrogate to restrict oxygen for a developing lower-caste embryo (Huxley, 1975). Oxygen restriction leaves selected embryos underdeveloped and helps produce caste differences. In the final two metres of each eight-metre interval, the bottles are shaken to simulate the experience of being born. This manufactured experience acts like a prearranged memory, preparing the embryo for subsequent psychological control. What might seem a technical process is also the production of thought: biological stages are made to secure the roles assigned in advance.

After birth, conditioning continues in the Neo-Pavlovian rooms, where a long row of bowls filled with roses stands beside picture books showing birds, animals, and fish (Huxley, 1975). The infants reach toward the flowers and books, but the institution links these objects with fear and pain until the attraction is destroyed. Its purpose is to produce an aversion to books and nature that will serve the governing order. What appears to be an individual's preference has been constructed by power. Compliance ceases to feel like an external command and becomes an internalized belief, limiting the possibility of independent thought.

In the older society, religion operates as an institution of authority. People turn to gods, Jesus, and sacred stories to give shape to hopes that they cannot realize through their own actions. In the World State, the symbolic centres of authority are Ford, the industrialist associated with the production line, the Hatchery's Social Predestination Room, and the repeated voices of sleep-teaching. Ford becomes the sign of an ideological system within which every citizen must live (Li & Liu, 2010). The apparent disappearance of traditional religion is not simply the result of contentment or a lack of fear; it also reflects the erosion of people's capacity to question their surroundings. Citizens can appear equal in a narrow physical or chemical sense, and even the work of an Epsilon may be described as indispensable. Yet this appearance of equal usefulness conceals the structural inequality built into the Hatchery. It is the upper castes that organize and supervise the system, whereas the lower castes have been engineered to accept the roles allotted to them. Lower-caste citizens have been taught to welcome their own position and not to envy those above them. Conditioning forms their beliefs before they can choose them, and the surrounding social environment reinforces those beliefs. The Controller lends the seemingly natural hierarchy an absurdly religious colouring (Ma, 2018). He is no god, yet his position invites a form of belief that assists government.

As Tally argues, mapping can be associated with empires, social oppression, and ideological projects that manipulate spatial representations for particular political interests (Tally, 2020). Huxley's spatial order reveals a further form of alienation: as people are shaped and disciplined by the spaces they inhabit, they can lose the ability to reflect on their circumstances and become willing participants in the operation of power.

V. OTHER SPACES AND THE PROSPECT OF THE FUTURE

The future-oriented force of an other space lies both in its alteration of familiar places and in its capacity to generate different ways of understanding and criticizing the world. The spatial theories of Foucault and Soja offer ways to interpret power, social structures, and spatial practices, but the spaces considered within them remain closely tied to actual experience. Even an imagined space can be understood as a secondary space produced by representing, distorting, or reorganizing the real. Fantasy and dystopian writing, however, loosen this reality-centred model by asking how a world might be constructed beyond existing spatial categories. Their alternative spaces need not merely mirror the real with a changed surface. They can propose new relations among people, institutions, and the possible future, opening a different standpoint from which the present can be judged.

In *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*, Kathryn Hume treats fantasy as a way of responding to reality through the reorganization and extension of experience (Hume, 1984). J. R. R. Tolkien's account of sub-creation and the Secondary World in “On Fairy-stories” (Tolkien, 1983) likewise grants a writer the capacity to build an internally coherent world beyond the one already given. Such a world cannot be reduced to a distorted photograph of actual geography; it has its own relations and internal consistency. Hume's account of fantasy and Tolkien's account of making a world thus provide different but complementary reasons to treat invented literary space as an active construction. Together, these ideas help explain why literary cartography can work where mimesis and fantasy overlap. A map need not

reproduce an existing place. It can serve as a constructive and critical narrative form. Tally argues that utopian other spaces offer an especially useful setting for thinking about mapping and spatiality, because even a practical map is ultimately a fictional or metaphorical representation of what is called real space (Tally, 2021).

From this perspective, literary space does more than describe geography. It can encode and reproduce ideological relations. In *Walking Virginia Woolf's London: An Investigation in Literary Geography*, Lisbeth Larsson studies the organization of streets, parks, squares, and buildings in Woolf's London (Larsson, 2017). Reading *Mrs Dalloway* and other works through literary geography and cartography, she examines how the characters' routes and spatial experiences connect particular urban sites into a cognitive map with ideological implications. London is thus both a physical city and a symbolic space reshaped by discourse and power. The movement of a character from one street to another can bring sites with different social meanings into relation without reproducing every detail of the actual city. Paths through parks, squares, and buildings contribute to the shape of an imagined urban whole. Mapping makes that symbolic organization visible.

Ideology is a powerful force in the making of such maps. Terry Eagleton argues that literary works are neither mysterious products of inspiration nor things that can be explained solely through an author's psychology. They are forms of perception shaped by the prevailing ways of seeing, or the social spirit and ideology, of their time (Zhu, 2001). Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* illustrates the problem. His ambition to depict real life remains limited by the ideological framework of late nineteenth-century Britain (Wu, 2008). The literary map therefore carries a particular historical perspective, including limits that the work itself may not be able to overcome. In the twentieth century, world wars and rapid technological development changed the historical setting and prompted intellectuals to reconsider the problems of society. Dystopian literature emerged in this context (Liu, 2015). Its extreme imagined societies magnify potential dangers in the present. Literary space becomes a way both to criticize existing arrangements and to test the possibilities of a future one.

Huxley's *Brave New World* is shaped by this ideological context. It places a recognizable older society beside a newly imagined one, constructing their values separately before bringing them into conflict. In the World State, technology promises to abolish acute suffering. For stability and efficiency, biological and psychological conditioning begins with the embryo and discourages emotional attachment and uncontrolled desire. Beneath the appearance of perfect order lies a profound emptiness; any serious upheaval is treated as a threat to civilization. The Reservation, by contrast, is uncertain but tangibly human. Its social life may be disorderly and oppressive, yet its people retain the capacity to love, desire, grow old or unattractive, suffer terminal illness, go hungry, and endure other forms of pain. The argument presents these experiences as rights denied by the World State, while recognizing the cruelty and exclusion present on the Reservation. John, who grew up there, values a life in which sacrifice, devotion and defending one's convictions remain possible. These competing ideologies require readers to ask what an ideal society would mean and whether either of these societies could be one.

Mid-twentieth-century dystopian fiction often has a strongly political dimension, and its invented societies may seem implausible. Their power lies partly in their ability to go beyond the immediately real. Imagination can make unrealized forms of freedom and happiness thinkable, even where the novel offers no complete alternative social order. Such a perspective makes it possible to imagine new spaces of freedom. Tally likewise envisages future literary maps that will represent both the world we encounter and worlds that exist only in imagination (Tally, 2021). Huxley's fictional societies look back to older forms of human life even as they reflect critically on modernity. Their opposition offers readers a way to intervene imaginatively in the present and think about the future. By tracing identity, mapping the two societies, and considering their social values together, literary cartography gives the novel's spatial construction an enduring critical force.

VI. CONCLUSION

As literary criticism becomes more attentive to space, bringing literary cartography to bear on utopian and dystopian writing offers a way to examine how imagined places speak to the present. Tally's spatial studies draw on earlier scholarship while developing a distinctive account of how literature can use imagination to make a complex world system perceptible. On this account, established representations of space cannot simply be taken for granted. In *Brave New World*, topophrenia first impels the characters toward mapping. Huxley's narrative then sets two spatial orders in opposition, depicting the confrontation between a remembered past and a projected utopian future. The construction of power spaces within that map represents political and social relations that are difficult to grasp as a whole. Readers can thus use the novel to reconsider their own position and values in a changing world. Its spaces remain open to interpretation

because the questions they raise about society, power, and possible futures remain unresolved.

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Between Human and Machine: Posthuman Narratives and Artistic Experimentation in Human Al Collaboration

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Abstract— *Posthuman narratives offer a critical framework to examine how Al tools when collaborated with traditional ways of authorship, identity, and creativity can reframe the artistic narratives. The present paper explores the emergence of posthuman narratives in when artistically cooperate between Human and Al reinvent a new ways of creativity. The integration of Al into creative processes challenges the conventional notion of the artist as the sole creator, positioning artistic production within a hybrid human –machine ecosystem. The study takes into account a series of case studies and investigates how Al as a collaborator redefines human experiences in art. Futher, it highlights how these experimental practices of human-machine engagement, refigure artistic authorship and intellectual ownership and last but not the least , the paper argues that post human narratives offer speculative future of digital creativity and Human-Al collaboration.*

Keywords— ***PostHuman Narratives, Al tools, Machine, Collaborate, Human***

With the advent of AL the domain of artistic creativity, visual art, narration all underwent a drastic change. Human-machine interaction paved wave to increasingly possibilities of new text, images, music, context, narration where boundaries of originality and authenticity blur easily. As landscape evolve new sets of aesthetic experimentation it even open up new area of post human thinking. The collaboration between human and machine redefine narrative structures, artistic possibilities and cultural role of technology in building new ways of creative expression.

With this new possibilities and interpretation of understanding nuances of literary corpus is a new way of seeing literary narratives. Post human narratives extend the idea that humans are the only important subject. It encapsulates the fusion of human and algorithm in storytelling and artistic creation. The narratives shift ‘from human and embrace machines system and environmentalists as co-creators. (Hayles, 1999: Braidott, 2013)

Theoretical Framework

There are experimental practices which provoke critical questions. What does it mean for a machine to collaborate with human? Does the presence of Al in the creative process will dilute or enhance the authenticity of work? Who owns the right to art generated text in hybrid framework? Scholars have approached these issues from multiple angles, each offering different criteria for evaluating creativity. From a posthuman persepective it will reconceptualize the nature of authorship.

The history of art is replete with movements that decenter the artist creativity. What distinguishes posthuman narratives today is the involvement of machine- not as extension of the artists hand but as a partner with its own logic, and creative impulses. As Al system become more sophisticated, and increasingly capable of aesthetic surprise. Artist co-creation with Al becomes a space for speculative experimentation. With Al intervention intelligence, creativity is no longer exclusively human attributes.

Equally using Al in narration and experimental storytelling, using platforms such as GPT based language allows artists to construct interactive literary environments where text evolves in response to user input or environmental conditions (Roose, 2021). In this way, narrative becomes an open-ended, interactive and more relational. These qualities align more closely with posthuman epistemologies, which prioritize systems, networks, and multiplicities over isolated, human-centered narratives (Badmington, 2000)

From a sociocultural standpoint, posthuman narratives open new avenues for inclusive and pluralistic expression. In Southeast Asia , for instance, where oral storytelling , traditions, animist beliefs, and localized cosmologies have long resisted Western dualism of nature and culture, Al-based co-creation provides a fertile ground for hybrid aesthetic forms (Nguyen and Trinhg , 2022). This perspective challenges the Weatern –centric framing of Al as a solely technological or computational phenomena and reestablish it as a cultural contributor in local epistemologies.

The Theoretical framework and foundations of posthuman narratives can be traced to Donna Haraway's (1985) , Cybrog Manifesto, which undermine the dichotomies between human and machine, nature and culture. In the context of contemporary Al , this fusion is not only symbolic, but operational, generative adversarial networks (GANs), natural language processing (NLP) systems, and reinforcement learning is not only tools but also collaborators capable of aesthetic direction.Al can create learning and stimulate visual language for better understanding.

The theoretical foundation for posthuman narratives in Al driven art is rooted in posthumanism, a movement that questions human exceptions and emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans, machine and non-human entities. As Hayles (1999) says, ' posthumanism rejects the mind-body dualism and opens the door for a more inclusive understanding of what constitutes human. Posthumanist philosophy challenges traditional binaries such as human/ non-human, subject/ object, and nature/ culture. This ideological shift is reflected in the artistic practices that incorporate Al, where the boundary between the human artist and machine collaborator is blurred (Braidotti, 2013)

The integration of Al into artistic processes has led to new methods of creation, where Al acts as a medium and a tool. According to McCormack et al (2019), Al can generate novel outputs that surpass human expectations, offering opportunities for unpredictability and aesthetic surprise. In Al driven tasks, the creative energy of the human artist with machine contribute to the process. This co-creation contrasts with traditional practices where artist is viewed as the sole creator of the text.

Al –driven narratives has emerged on Open Al's GPT -3 are used to generate text-based stories, creating a dynamic interaction between the audience and the narrative (Roose, 2021) These interactive narratives allow new modes of story-telling , where the machine and the user create the narrative , illustrating the potential for Al to redefine the fabric of storytelling. Al in artistic context produce posthuman narratives that decenter human agency. Posthuman narratives challenge traditional storytelling conventions by introducing alternate forms of subjectivity. As Badmington (2000) , says, posthumanism emphasizes multiplicity, and interconnectivity, where Al take on a co-authorship role in the narrative structure.

Al driven art often presents fragmented narratives, subvert the classical structure of beginning, middle and end, proposing speculative realism. It rejects human-centered worldview, and favour more expansive, fluid understanding of reality. (Byrant , 2011).The integration of Al into artistic practices raises significant ethical, and philosophical questions. As Al is trained on data sets , instruction, command it raises serious question about the authorship of text. Al is simply a product of processed data and the concept of creativity nowhere align with technical output of data. This unpredictability challenges traditional notions of artistic control and raises questions about the nature of creativity. Is Al generated art is creative or simply it is the product of what it has been trained on? McCormack (2019) argues that the concept of creativity needs to be reevaluated in the light of new technological developments.

Methodology:

Case Study : 01

Fragments of me is a speculative fiction developed by Hana Li, a media artist. In this Language model is fed with diary entries, social media post and personal poetry. With the use of Al narrative text mimic artistic voice, producing stories blend with real memories using artificial emotional constructs. It explores use with fabrication, there can be memory distortion and ambiguous authorship can be created of emotionally charged narratives. Human Al co-creation process blurs the line of artistic creation. The final product which came is an auto-fictional journal that created a post human self- that is neither human nor entirely machine.

This aspect of creation can create lack of coherent and singular self; creating a posthuman narrative, with intermingling of human and non-human modes. The piece will elicit emotional responses, but co-authorship create a

varied narrative designs. It clearly specifies how human-Al interaction can affect the understanding of conceptual, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions. It even point out serious question on relevance of identity, public recognition to access data, and lack of subjectivity. It analytically questions how authorship is negotiated or redefined through human –Al interaction; in what ways audience respond to these , how these artwork challenges artist, intention , authenticity and creativity?

Case Study 2

A software names as ' Eachloop', was developed by collective artists and programmers. Visitors are allowed to speak into microphone while seeing Al-generated visual and Text project to them on screen. The Al adapts emotional tone, language, style, narrative pattern, memory and modify the conversation. Each loop function as a generative ecosystem GPT based model, generate text and produce a story.

There is no author in the story. This align with posthuman conception as something relational, non-hierarchical, collective, intuitive, curious and entirely new narrative is being created, where there is a total collapse of human creativity. It suggest anthropomorphic projection how Al can blur emotional boundaries. The result gives new contours of posthuman aesthetics. These artistic experiments suggest how narrative can shift, how authorship, emotional assonance can conceptualize digital art. The use of Al as a tool generates a formation of new narratives, aesthetics and meaning. How identities are dissolve, memories are distorted and ambiguous authorship of emotionally charged new digital narratives are created. There is an emergence of posthuman self where there is neither anything purely human nor entirely machine based.

The emergence of new destabilized narrative, creating visual effect of new posthuman identity where collaborating of human is with non-human memory modes. Apart from it, Al generated visual , textual inputs, emotional patterns, language, style, modify the story. The human participants are performers as well as narrators and they equally shape Al's response. There is no single author in the story. Al reconstitute, recontext narratives and infact viewers perceives Al as a curious, intuitive and compassionate. It blur anthromorphic projection, and assert how with the use of Al systems reinforce the collapse of subject and machine, blur emotional responses of human and machine output, generating new creation of aesthetic innovation.

This led to emergent ways of posthuman aesthetics. It drastically shift narrative, agency, emotion, and reassure digital art-creation. The question of traditional authorship is no more alive with Human Al interaction. The subject is decentered and text passes through data, algorithms and social systems. Artistic labour is distributed across various platforms, machines and networks. Al generated narratives democratizes creative production, develop new fluid narrative, reveal things that we don't know about ourselves, about language, and there is a negotiation between user and system.

Al generated narratives and visuals often occupy an ambigious space-this ambiguity invite deeper reflection from viewers, to discuss about authorship, how to fill gaps, thereby fostering deeper emphatic engagement. The two binaries are mind and machine, emotion and computation , how it can be synthesized or negotiated effectively by artificial system for operating better socio-cultural framework.

Beyond aesthetic and emotional relation human –Al creation art carriers cultural, political, weight. We engage with complex technologies, with deep technical expertise. Large scale data raises concern about surveillance, bias and digital colonialism. As Noble (2018) and Crawford (2021) stated Al systems are not neutral- they are embedded with the values, structures, context and a space for experimentation.

Posthuman narratives are not about technology-they are about rethinking human identity, creativity, their authenticity which is increasingly shaped by non-human intelligence. It even questions the limitation of human with in a creative force. Al becomes a speculative partner and gives alternate options and possible future outcome. Henceforth, it becomes evident that human Al interaction challenges conventional understanding of authorship and creativity. Al not merely acts as a tool, but facilitates as an active co-creator, reshape narratives, cultural expression and emotional engagement.

The emergence of posthuman narratives marks significant shift in developing posthuman aesthetics, creating new spaces, interaction patterns, and encourage experimental and inclusive approaches and interpretation of storytelling. It further create unpredictable response and future generation outcome. Posthuman narratives expanded vision of creativity, embrace hybridity, multiplicity, imagine new future collaborate across world, reimage newness and co-construct aesthetic world that reflect entangled realities of our technological age.

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An Analysis of Attitude Resources in the Reading Materials of New Horizons College English (4th Edition) from the Perspective of Eco-linguistics

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Abstract—*This study examines the attitude resources in six ecologically-themed texts from New Horizons College English (4th Edition) from the ecological discourse perspective. Using the UAM Corpus Tool software for annotation and statistical analysis, combined with qualitative and quantitative methods, the study investigated the distribution of attitude resources and the ecological orientation in the texts. Two findings emerged in the results. In terms of the distribution of attitudes, a relatively balanced distribution was observed among affect, judgement, and appreciation, with each subsystem emphasizing certain constituent within itself: the highest proportion of insecurity/security in affect resources reflects editors' concerns about ecological crises; negative evaluations in judgement resources reflect critical attitude toward behaviors that harm nature; and negative evaluations in appreciation resources express editors' dissatisfaction with the current ecological situation. In terms of ecological orientation, the three types of attitudes were relatively evenly distributed, with negative resources being used most. In practical implications drawn from the study, it is proposed that textbook compilers should enhance ecological awareness, increase the proportion of texts with ecological beneficial attitudes, and enhance the topical coverage of ecological topics, so as to improve the guidance and enlightening nature of the textbooks in ecological teaching.*

Keywords— ***Ecolinguistics, Attitude resources, Ecological orientation, College English textbooks, Discourse analysis***

I. INTRODUCTION

The ecological environment is closely related to every individual. A sound ecological environment plays a vital role in human health and well-being, green economic development, and the sustainable development of society. The Guidelines for the Ideological and Political Development of Higher Education Curricula (2020), issued by the Ministry of Education of China, explicitly emphasize the importance and necessity of integrating ideological and political education into university curricula. The guidelines require discipline-specific courses to fully explore their distinctive characteristics and incorporate ideological and political elements into teaching, thereby helping students develop sound ecological values and ultimately cultivate a mature and comprehensive ecological philosophy.

Against the backdrop of an increasingly severe global ecological crisis, Ecolinguistics has emerged as a new interdisciplinary field. Research on language from an ecological perspective generally follows two major paradigms, namely the Haugen model and the Halliday model [1]. Within the Hallidayan paradigm, ecological discourse analysis (EDA) occupies a central position, referring to the ecological analysis of all forms of discourse within an ecological framework [2]. This approach aims to expose discourse practices that

contribute to ecological degradation and social injustice, uncover the ecological ideologies embedded in discourse, and further identify discourse resources that promote ecological sustainability. In doing so, it seeks to guide human beings toward interacting with nature in a harmonious manner through appropriate attitudes and responsible practices [3-4]. Guided by an ecological philosophy, discourse can be classified into three categories: ecologically beneficial, ecologically ambivalent, and ecologically destructive [5]30.

The linguistic foundations of ecological discourse analysis are primarily rooted in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Cognitive Linguistics. Studies adopting the former framework have mainly focused on the transitivity system, mood system, modality system, grammatical metaphor, and context [6]. Existing studies on the ecological analysis of teaching materials have predominantly employed the transitivity system as their theoretical framework [7-8]. By examining the selection and representation of ecological participants and ecological processes in discourse, these studies reveal textbook compilers' perceptions, understandings, and conceptualizations of the ecological world, thereby identifying the ecological orientation embedded in teaching materials. Appraisal Theory has recently become another important theoretical framework in ecological discourse analysis. It focuses on revealing speakers' emotions, attitudes, and evaluative judgments toward the ecological world, all of which are essential for uncovering the ecological values underlying discourse [9]. Although Appraisal Theory has been widely applied to fields such as news reporting and political discourse [10], its application to educational discourse remains relatively underexplored.

Drawing upon He and Ma's ecological discourse analysis model, the present study investigates six ecology-related reading texts selected from the four volumes of *New Horizons College English (Fourth Edition) Reading and Writing*. Using UAM Corpus Tool, the study annotates and quantifies attitude resources in the selected texts. By combining qualitative and quantitative approaches, it examines the distribution of attitude resources in natural ecological discourse and explores the ecological orientations they convey. The findings are expected to provide insights for both English language teaching and the compilation of college English textbooks.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the distributional characteristics of attitude resources in the reading texts of the textbook?

RQ2: What ecological orientations are conveyed through the attitude resources in these reading texts?

RQ3: What aspects should be considered when ecological issues are addressed in the compilation of college English textbooks?

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Appraisal Theory comprises three interrelated systems: Attitude, Engagement, and Graduation. Among these, the Attitude system constitutes the core component, while engagement and graduation serve as supplementary resources for analysis. The Attitude system focuses on language users' emotional responses and evaluative judgments toward behaviors, texts/processes, and phenomena, and therefore serves as the primary theoretical framework of the present study. Drawing on perspectives from psychology, ethics, and aesthetics, Martin and White classify attitude into three subsystems: affect, judgement, and appreciation. Affect concerns individuals' emotional experiences; judgement evaluates human behavior in terms of social norms and ethics; and appreciation concerns evaluations of phenomena, objects, or semiotic products [11]. As shown in Figure 1, resources within all three subsystems may carry either positive or negative evaluative meanings.

From the perspective of Ecolinguistics, He and Ma further developed the appraisal framework proposed by Martin [12] and his colleagues by incorporating both the value subject/object relationship into the analytical model. On this basis, they proposed a more operational appraisal framework for ecological discourse analysis based on the Attitude system, as shown in Figure 2.

Following He and Ma's ecological appraisal framework, the present study treats all selected texts as examples of natural ecological discourse. Accordingly, human beings and nature are adopted as the two reference points for identifying the sources of affect, the standards of judgement, and the objects of appreciation. During corpus annotation, attitude resources were identified on the basis of contextual information, the explicit or implicit meanings of evaluative expressions, and the corresponding sources of affect, standards of judgement, and objects of appreciation. Subsequently, the ecological orientation of each attitude resource was determined by examining whether the discourse conforms to the ecological philosophy of harmonious coexistence and diversity. Specifically, when a speaker expresses a positive attitude toward entities or behaviors that conform to this ecological philosophy, or a negative attitude toward those that violate it, the attitude is classified as an ecologically beneficial orientation, as it contributes to the healthy development of the ecosystem. Conversely, when a speaker evaluates ecologically responsible entities or behaviors negatively,

or expresses positive evaluations of ecologically destructive ones, the attitude is categorized as an ecologically destructive orientation. Attitudes that neither support nor contradict the ecological philosophy are classified as an ecologically ambivalent orientation [6].

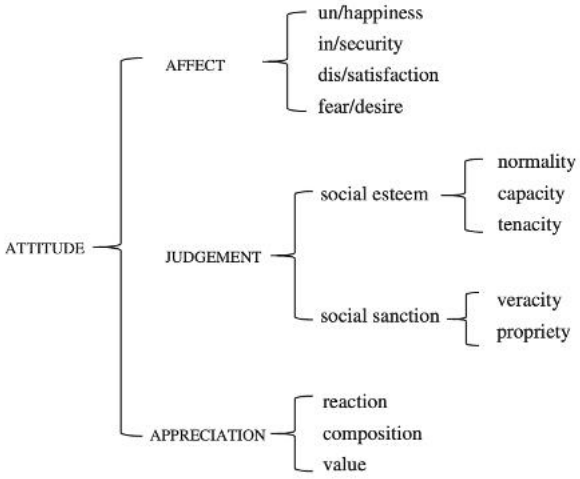


Fig.1. Classification of the Attitude System [13]

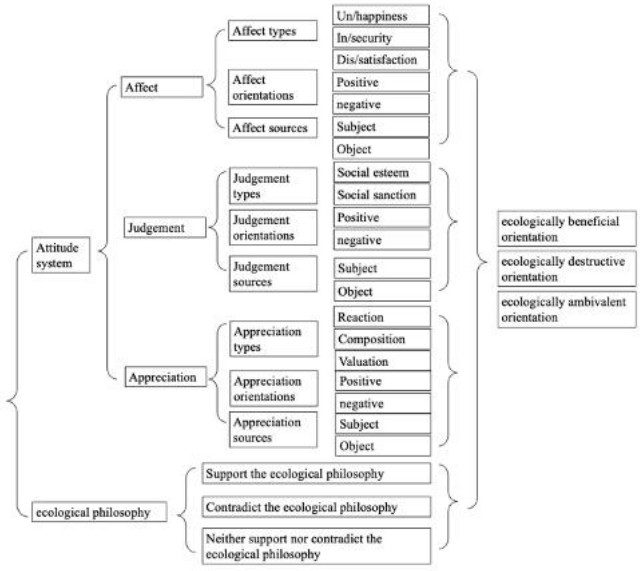


Fig.2. He and Ma's Ecological Discourse Analysis Model [6]

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study focuses on natural ecological discourse. Six ecology-related reading texts were selected from the four volumes of New Horizons College English (Fourth Edition): Reading and Writing. Specifically, the corpus consists of Texts A, B, and C from Unit 4 ("Man and Nature") and Unit 6 ("Energy and Food Crises") in Book 4.

A specialized corpus was subsequently constructed using these six texts. For corpus analysis, UAM Corpus Tool was employed as the primary analytical instrument. The corpus was imported into the software, and the Manual Annotation function was used to annotate attitude resources systematically. Multiple rounds of verification were conducted to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the annotation. After the annotation process was completed, the corpus data were processed to generate statistical results. Finally, representative discourse examples were selected for qualitative analysis and discussion in order to uncover the distributional patterns and underlying characteristics of attitude resources in the natural ecological discourse presented in the textbook.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Distribution and Analysis of Attitude Resources

The present study investigates the use and distribution of attitude resources in six ecology-related reading texts selected from the textbook. The overall distribution of attitude resources is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Overall Distribution of Attitude Resources

Attitude Resources	Frequency	Percentage
Affect	43	28.29%
Judgement	37	24.34%
Appreciation	72	47.37%
Total	152	100.00%

As shown in Table 1, the three types of attitude resources are relatively evenly distributed across the selected texts. Among them, appreciation resources account for the largest proportion (47.37%), followed by affect resources (28.29%) and judgement resources (24.34%). Since each type of attitude resource serves a distinct discourse function and conveys different ecological orientations and ecological values, the following sections examine the distribution and functions of the three subsystems of the Attitude system in greater detail.

4.1.1 Affect

Affect resources express people's emotional responses to entities, events, and situations. According to Martin and White (2005), affect can be classified into four subcategories: un/happiness, in/security, dis/satisfaction, and dis/inclination. Since no instances of dis/satisfaction were identified in the corpus, this category is excluded from the analysis. The distribution of the remaining affect resources is presented in Table 2. The three subcategories of affect resources are unevenly distributed. In/security is

the most frequent category, accounting for 17 instances (39.53%), followed by un/happiness with 15 instances (34.88%). Dis/inclination is the least frequent category, comprising 11 instances (25.58%).

Table 2. Distribution of Affect Resources

Affect Resources	Polarity	Frequency	Total	Percentage	Subtotal
Un/Happiness	Unhappiness	9	15	20.93%	34.88%
	Happiness	6		13.95%	
In/Security	Insecurity	4	17	9.30%	39.53%
	Security	13		30.23%	
Dis/Inclination	Disinclination	0	11	0.00%	25.58%
	Inclination	11		25.58%	
Total		43		100.00%	

More specifically, within the in/security category, security resources outnumber insecurity resources. This finding suggests that, while the texts portray environments characterized by safety and confidence, they also encourage readers to pay greater attention to ecological issues and environmental protection. In contrast, unhappiness resources occur more frequently than happiness resources, reflecting the authors' negative emotional responses to the current state of the natural environment. As for dis/inclination, only inclination resources are identified, indicating that the texts consistently express human willingness and determination to protect the ecological environment.

4.1.1.1 Un/Happiness

Happiness resources primarily depict desirable ecological environments. For instance, in Example (1), the expression *free from* conveys liberation from urban pollution and artificial constraints while expressing a longing for the authenticity and joy of nature. By contrast, unhappiness resources mainly describe environmental degradation and energy-related problems. In Example (2), the metaphor *prisons* vividly portrays the alienation of human living spaces brought about by industrialization. Likewise, the word *pleasure* in Example (3) evokes the harmonious coexistence that humans once enjoyed with nature, implying that such happiness has since disappeared. This expression reflects nostalgia for an original ecological state while simultaneously expressing regret and criticism of humanity's destruction of that harmonious relationship.

Example (1): *Let's sit down here, all of us, on the open prairie, where we can't see a high way or a fence, free from the debris of the city.* (Text B, Unit 4, Book 4)

Example (2): *You live in prisons which you have built for yourselves, calling them homes, offices, or factories.* (Text B, Unit 4, Book 4)

Example (3): *However, you don't have that pleasure of coexistence with nature anymore.* (Text B, Unit 4, Book 4)

4.1.1.2 In/Security

Across the corpus, security resources occur more frequently than insecurity resources, suggesting that the texts seek not only to emphasize ecological risks but also to convey confidence in addressing environmental challenges. In Example (4), the phrase *in jeopardy* highlights the severe threat posed by ecological degradation, while *human-driven* explicitly identifies human activities as the primary cause of the crisis, implicitly criticizing development models that prioritize economic growth over environmental sustainability. In Example (5), the expression *intermittent uncertainty* emphasizes the persistent and unpredictable nature of ecological crises, thereby conveying a strong sense of insecurity. By comparison, security resources are relatively limited. As illustrated in Example (6), expressions such as *sufficiently high* and *stay strong* focus mainly on short-term economic indicators. Although these expressions appear to acknowledge the effectiveness of technological or economic solutions, they also imply underlying concerns about long-term ecological sustainability.

Example (4): *However, the future of life on our planet—and thus our own—is in jeopardy due to human-driven ecological change.* (Text A, Unit 4, Book 4)

Example (5): *Intermittent uncertainty in food markets will animate people to act when they would otherwise remain calm.* (Text B, Unit 6, Book 4)

Example (6): *Stocks of wheat are at sufficiently high levels, and the turnout from some big producers is still expected to stay strong.* (Text B, Unit 6, Book 4)

4.1.1.3 Dis/Inclination

Only inclination resources are identified in the corpus,

with the majority occurring in the unit "Man and Nature," accounting for 63.6% of all inclination resources. These expressions primarily promote concrete actions for environmental protection by employing highly urgent language to encourage readers to take immediate action.

In Example (7), the phrase *no delay* conveys a strong sense of urgency, framing environmental protection as a moral obligation that requires immediate action. Similarly, Example (8) contrasts *small steps* with *giant leaps*, while the phrase *dire need* further reinforces the urgency of environmental action. Together, these expressions suggest the author's dissatisfaction with the current scale of environmental efforts and advocate a shift from incremental actions to more systematic and transformative measures.

Example (7): *For the sake of the survival and health of all species on earth, including our human race, we need to act with no delay.* (Text A, Unit 4, Book 4)

Example (8): *People have started to protect the environment in small steps, but there is a dire need to take giant leaps.* (Text A, Unit 4, Book 4)

4.1.2 Judgement

Judgement resources evaluate human attitudes and behaviors and are generally classified into two categories: social esteem and social sanction. Social esteem comprises three subcategories, namely normality, capacity, and tenacity, while social sanction includes propriety and veracity, which concern moral and ethical standards. Since no instances of normality or veracity were identified in the corpus, these two subcategories are excluded from the analysis.

Table 3. Distribution of Judgement Resources

Judgement Resources	Polarity	Frequency	Total	Percentage	Subtotal
Capacity	Negative	2	6	4.65%	13.95%
	Positive	4		9.30%	
Tenacity	Negative	0	4	0.00%	9.30%
	Positive	4		9.30%	
Propriety	Negative	17	27	39.53%	62.79%
	Positive	10		23.26%	
Total		37		100.00%	

As shown in Table 3, a total of 37 judgement resources were identified, and their distribution is highly uneven. Propriety is the most frequent subtype, accounting for 27 instances (62.79%), followed by capacity, with 6 instances (13.95%), and tenacity, with 4 instances (9.30%). Notably, most propriety resources occur in Text B, Unit 6 ("A Worldwide Food Crisis?") and Text A, Unit 4 ("Save the Earth, Save Life").

Overall, positive judgement resources, which evaluate desirable behaviors, occur 18 times (48.65%), whereas negative judgement resources, which criticize human behaviors and activities, occur slightly more frequently, with 19 instances (51.35%). This finding indicates that the reading texts tend to adopt a more critical stance toward human actions in relation to ecological issues.

4.1.2.1 Capacity

Capacity resources evaluate whether an individual or entity possesses the ability or competence to perform a particular action. Positive capacity resources mainly highlight human capabilities and achievements. For example, in Example (9), the expression *have mastered* emphasizes Chinese solar thermal power companies' command of core technologies for constructing large-scale molten-salt tower power plants. This expression not only recognizes the technological competence of Chinese enterprises but also suggests that they meet international standards and are becoming increasingly competitive in the global market.

By contrast, negative capacity resources describe the loss or impairment of abilities resulting from human intervention in nature. In Example (10), the word *impaired* indicates that humans have transformed certain species of wild birds into domesticated chickens by damaging their ability to fly. This description implicitly conveys the author's negative evaluation of human interference with and alteration of the natural world.

Example (9): *China's solar thermal power generation companies have mastered the core technology of building large-scale molten salt tower thermal power plants, and are ready to go global.* (Text C, Unit 6, Book 4)

Example (10): *You have also made some types of wild birds into chickens—creatures with wings so impaired that*

they cannot fly. (Text B, Unit 4, Book 4)

4.1.2.2 Tenacity

Tenacity resources evaluate determination, commitment, and perseverance in carrying out particular actions. Among the four instances identified in the corpus, three occur in Text C of the unit "Man and Nature." Examples (11), (12), and (13) respectively highlight China's long-term commitment to combating desertification, Wang Wenbiao's sustained dedication to desert control, and the Chinese government's continuous efforts to restore desert ecosystems. These examples collectively express positive evaluations of perseverance in ecological conservation.

Example (11): *In China's persistent efforts to fight against desertification, Wang Wenbiao, better known as the "Son of the Desert", is playing an exemplary role.* (Text C, Unit 4, Book 4)

Example (12): *However, for the past 30 years, as chairman of the Elion Resources Group, Wang has dedicated his life and work to the battle against desertification.* (Text C, Unit 4, Book 4)

Example (13): *In 1999, thanks to government efforts to tame the desert, a 115 km highway through the middle of the desert opened to traffic.* (Text C, Unit 4, Book 4)

4.1.2.3 Propriety

Propriety resources evaluate behaviors in terms of moral and ethical standards. They constitute not only the largest subtype of judgement resources but also one of the most prominent categories within the entire Attitude system. Negative propriety resources are concentrated primarily in the unit "Man and Nature," where they depict various forms of environmental destruction caused by human activities. Such behaviors are portrayed as violating ecological norms and therefore deserving criticism.

For instance, in Examples (14) and (15), the expressions *overreached* and *ruthlessly* characterize humanity's excessive exploitation and ruthless consumption of natural resources. These evaluations criticize the relentless pursuit of economic prosperity at the expense of the environment, conveying strong moral condemnation of environmentally destructive behavior. Likewise, the term *overreaction* in Example (15) refers to market responses that exceed reasonable limits. The metaphor comparing such behavior to *a pistol to the head* emphasizes the potentially catastrophic consequences of irrational market actions, such as panic buying and food hoarding.

Example (14): *Humanity has overreached in its pursuit of affluence and used the earth's resources ruthlessly.* (Text A, Unit 6, Book 4)

Example (15): *In other words, the overreaction of market players will act like a pistol to the head, creating a crisis when none should exist.* (Text B, Unit 6, Book 4)

By contrast, positive propriety resources advocate environmentally responsible behaviors and emphasize the necessity of appropriate institutional regulation. In Example (16), the adjective *stringent* expresses support for stricter environmental laws and regulations designed to deter environmentally harmful activities and ensure compliance by both businesses and individuals. Similarly, in Example (17), the expression *clear-eyed* encourages policymakers and society to adopt a rational and forward-looking approach to food production. This recommendation aligns with the principles of food security while highlighting the importance of long-term planning and preparedness.

Example (16): *More stringent laws and rules must be formulated to deter actions that are harmful to the environment, and to ensure business and individuals comply with required standards.* (Text A, Unit 4, Book 4)

Example (17): *While we may not be seeing all the symptoms of a food shortage syndrome yet, we must be clear-eyed in our ongoing support for food production.* (Text A, Unit 6, Book 4)

4.1.3.1 Reaction

Reaction resources express people's immediate responses to external phenomena. In the corpus, they are predominantly used to describe the adverse consequences of environmental degradation.

For example, in Example (18), the expressions *force many people to migrate* and *faced poverty and hardship* portray the direct impact of desert expansion on human life. While some residents are forced to leave their homes, those who remain must endure poverty and hardship. These successive negative evaluations vividly illustrate the profound social consequences of ecological deterioration.

Similarly, in Example (19), the expressions *enormous structural problems* and *great imbalance* characterize the agricultural sector as suffering from severe structural deficiencies that have resulted in a serious imbalance between supply and demand. These evaluations emphasize the gravity of the problem and reinforce readers' perception of its urgency.

Example (18): *The constant expansion of the desert used to force many people to migrate, while those who stayed faced poverty and hardship.* (Text C, Unit 4, Book 4)

Example (19): *There are enormous structural problems with the agriculture industry, which has caused great imbalance between supply and demand.* (Text B, Unit 6, Book 4)

4.1.3.2 Composition

Composition is the least frequently occurring subtype of appreciation resources in the corpus. Interestingly, all identified instances are positive, although their evaluative meanings are somewhat implicit.

In Example (20), the adjective *sophisticated* denotes technological complexity, precision, and advanced integration. With reference to technologies such as biofuel-powered automobiles, the term highlights sophisticated technological design that contributes to more efficient resource utilization. Consequently, it indirectly conveys a positive evaluation of technologies that promote energy conservation and environmental sustainability.

Example (20): *They desire not only the basic essentials of life, but also more sophisticated technologies like automobiles that use biofuels.* (Text A, Unit 6, Book 4)

4.1.3.3 Valuation

Valuation resources constitute the largest category within the Appreciation system, with positive and negative evaluations occurring in relatively balanced proportions. Positive valuation resources primarily emphasize the importance and benefits of environmental protection.

For instance, in Example (21), the expression *ever-growing* modifies *human population*, highlighting the continuous growth of the global population. Although this expression appears to describe an objective fact, it also implicitly conveys concern about the increasing demand for natural resources resulting from population growth.

Likewise, the adjective *fundamental* in Example (22) evaluates environmental protection as not merely desirable but indispensable to human survival, emphasizing its essential ecological and social value.

Example (21): *After all, we need to use the land and oceans to feed the ever-growing human population.* (Text A, Unit 4, Book 4)

Example (22): *Protecting the environment is not a luxury but fundamental to us all.* (Text A, Unit 4, Book 4)

By contrast, the unit "Energy and Food Crises" contains 19 negative valuation resources, accounting for 86.36% of all negative valuation resources identified in the corpus. Most of these evaluations concern the high economic costs associated with alternative energy sources, suggesting that the author repeatedly emphasizes their limited cost-effectiveness.

For example, in Example (23), the adjective *cost-prohibitive* highlights the economic limitations of solar technology, indicating that although solar panels are suitable for limited applications, their large-scale adoption remains prohibitively expensive. Similarly, Example (24) uses the expression *costly drawbacks* to evaluate biomass energy as economically inefficient, implying that it is currently incapable of replacing fossil fuels on a large scale.

In contrast, Example (25) describes petroleum and natural gas as *versatile and high-quality* energy sources. This positive evaluation emphasizes their practical value and broad applicability, standing in sharp contrast to the preceding negative assessments of renewable energy technologies. It also reflects the continued dominance of fossil fuels within the current global energy system.

Example (23): *It would be cost-prohibitive to take the intricate gadgets of solar energy from the fringe of "green" society to the mainstream for major world consumption.* (Text A, Unit 6, Book 4)

Example (24): *So, for the time being, biomass has too many costly drawbacks to be a workable alternative to fossil fuels.* (Text A, Unit 6, Book 4)

Example (25): *Petroleum and natural gas are exploited as versatile and high-quality energy products.* (Text A, Unit 6, Book 4)

4.2 Distribution and Analysis of Ecological Orientations

As shown in Table 5, the reading texts under the theme of "Man and Nature" exhibit three ecological orientations. Among them, the ecologically destructive orientation occurs most frequently, with 37 instances (35.58%), followed by the ecologically beneficial orientation, with 35 instances (33.65%). The ecologically ambivalent orientation is the least frequent, accounting for 32 instances (30.77%). Ecologically beneficial orientations are typically realized through both positive and negative attitude resources, whereas ecologically destructive orientations are predominantly realized through negative attitude resources. Ecologically ambivalent orientations, by contrast, are generally conveyed through attitude resources that present ecological issues objectively without making explicit ecological evaluations.

Table 5. Distribution of Ecological Orientations

Ecological Orientation	Frequency	Percentage
Ecologically beneficial orientation	35	33.65%
Ecologically destructive orientation	37	35.58%
Ecologically ambivalent orientation	32	30.77%
Total	104	100.00%

4.2.1 Ecologically Beneficial Orientation

Ecologically beneficial orientations are conveyed in both direct and indirect ways. The direct approach either explicitly praises desirable ecological environments or directly encourages readers to protect the environment. The indirect approach, by contrast, promotes positive ecological values through criticism of environmentally harmful conditions or behaviors.

In the unit "Man and Nature," whose central theme is returning to nature, the author opens the text with Example (26), encouraging readers to establish direct physical and emotional connections with the natural world. By urging people to free themselves from the constraints of industrialized life and reconnect with nature through firsthand experience, the discourse represents a typical ecologically beneficial orientation. It enables readers to envision a harmonious ecological relationship between humans and nature and, in doing so, implicitly guides them toward developing sound ecological values. Direct appeals such as Example (27) are even more common throughout the corpus, explicitly expressing support for environmental protection and encouraging environmentally responsible behavior.

Example (26): *Let's sit down here, all of us, on the open prairie, where we can't see a highway or a fence, free from the debris of the city. Let's have no blankets to sit on, but let our bodies converge with the earth, the surrounding trees and shrubs. Let us have the vegetation for a mattress, experiencing its texture, its sharpness, and its softness. Let us become like stones, plants, and trees. Let us be animals, think and feel like animals.* (Text B, Unit 4, Book 4)

Example (27): *Protecting the environment is not a luxury but fundamental to us all. The task is monumental and everyone has to play a part.* (Text B, Unit 4, Book 4)

Indirect expressions of ecologically beneficial orientation are even more prevalent across the corpus. In Example (28), also taken from "Man and Nature," the author describes people living in enclosed buildings as *"cage dwellers"* and criticizes their alienation from nature through dependence on artificial environments, such as air-conditioned buildings and electronic entertainment. By portraying this lifestyle as undesirable, the author implicitly advocates a return to nature and promotes an environmentally friendly way of living. Such indirect expressions encourage readers to reflect critically on their relationship with nature, thereby fostering more sustainable lifestyles and contributing to the healthy development of the ecosystem.

Example (28): *You're cage dwellers, residing in boxes which shut out the hot humidity of summer and the chill of winter, living inside a body that no longer has a scent. You're hearing the noise from the hi-fi instead of listening to the sounds of nature. You're watching actors on TV having a make-believe experience when you no longer experience anything for yourself. That's your way. It's no good.* (Text B, Unit 4, Book 4)

4.2.2 Ecologically Destructive Orientation

Ecologically destructive orientations are typically expressed through negative representations of the current state of environmental protection. In Example (29), the author adopts an energy-oriented perspective to criticize the long-term neglect of agriculture, particularly the failure to provide the resources and technologies required to sustain agricultural development. Such discourse is clearly inconsistent with the the ecological philosophy of harmonious coexistence and diversity.

Similarly, in Example (30), the author adopts perspectives centered on both nature and energy, pointing out that more than half of the Earth's habitable land has been devoted to food production and that global fish stocks have been severely overexploited. These descriptions highlight human exploitation of natural resources and are therefore incompatible with the ecological principle of harmonious co-existence.

Example (29): *Food production is suffering from decades of neglect of agriculture, a period when the sector was starved of the resources and technology it needed to keep up with rising world demand.* (Text B, Unit 6, Book 4)

Example (30): *Over half of the planet's habitable surface is now used to produce food. The ocean has fared no better, with a huge number of the world's fish stocks having been overfished.* (Text A, Unit 4, Book 4)

4.2.3 Ecologically Ambivalent Orientation

Discourse exhibiting an ecologically ambivalent orientation primarily focuses on describing objective facts and informing readers about current ecological issues without explicitly evaluating ecological behaviors.

In Example (31), the author objectively traces the transformation of food crises from local events into global concerns, while also describing how droughts have driven up wheat prices and intensified public fears of another worldwide food crisis. Likewise, Example (32) presents an objective comparison between renewable energy and fossil fuels in terms of their economic and environmental costs. Such factual analyses provide useful information for energy-related decision-making but do not involve explicit value judgments regarding ecological behaviors.

Example (31): *Historically, only local governments worried about a widespread food crisis, but today, a sharp spike in food prices and the resulting food crisis can quickly become a worldwide phenomenon. In the past, droughts along the equator and in countries which account for a large portion of world wheat exports caused wheat prices to surge. Many worry the tight supply today will cause inflationary prices. They fear the skyrocketing grain costs which once harshly struck the world's poor and led to food riots will recur.* (Text B, Unit 6, Book 4)

Example (32): *Although renewable energies are not yet economically competitive with fossil fuels, their prices become more attractive when compared with the health and environmental costs associated with burning coal and oil.* (Text A, Unit 6, Book 4)

V. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of Ecolinguistics, this study applied He and Ma (2020)'s ecological discourse analysis framework to analyze the attitude resources in six ecology-related reading texts from New Horizons College English (Fourth Edition): Reading and Writing. Using UAM CorpusTool and a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, the study examined the distribution of attitude resources and the ecological orientations reflected in the texts.

The results showed that attitude resources are relatively evenly distributed among the three subsystems of affect, judgement, and appreciation, although each displays different characteristics. In/security resources are the most frequent within the affect system, reflecting concern about ecological crises. In the judgement system, negative evaluations of human behavior predominate, particularly those criticizing environmentally destructive actions. Within the appreciation system, negative appreciation resources occur more frequently than positive ones, indicating dissatisfaction with the current ecological situation. Regarding ecological orientation, the three orientations are relatively balanced, with ecologically destructive orientations occurring slightly more frequently. Notably, negative attitude resources are widely used in both ecologically beneficial and ecologically ambivalent orientations, suggesting that the textbook emphasizes the seriousness of current ecological problems and conveys concern about the state of the natural environment.

The findings also provide implications for the compilation of college English textbooks. First, textbook developers should strengthen ecological awareness by incorporating more discourse with ecologically beneficial orientations to help students develop sound ecological values. Second, textbooks should include a wider range of ecological topics, such as biodiversity conservation, climate change, and sustainable development, to enhance students' ecological literacy. Finally, greater attention should be paid to balancing attitude resources and reducing ecologically ambivalent discourse, so that ecological values are conveyed more explicitly.

This study has several limitations. The corpus consists of only six ecology-related reading texts from one textbook series, which limits the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the study focuses only on the Attitude system and does not examine the roles of the Engagement and Graduation systems. Future research could address these aspects to provide a more comprehensive understanding of ecological discourse.

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The sense of alienation and dislocation in the study of Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Line

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Abstract— *"Shadow line" by Amitav Ghosh is one of the prominent novels in Indian English Literature. It is a popular historical novel which has been written under the canopy of postcolonial literature. This is the second novel of Amitav Ghosh which was published in the year 1988 and earned the Sahitya Academy Award in 1989. In the current research paper, themes of alienation and dislocation have been analysed. Amitav Ghosh, one of India's the greatest contemporary novelists, strongly depicts the social, cultural and psychological experienced by individuals and marginalised communities uprooted from their native lands. The study also examines, how the writer presents the poor lives are disrupted by migration, war and the brutal partition of India. The main objective of this study through the close textual analysis is to bring into limelight the brutal impact of the brutal division of India that results into pain and trauma of the oppressed community members of the society.*

Keywords— ***Alienation, Dislocation, Contemporary, Trauma, Underprivileged.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Amitav Ghosh is one of the most prominent and critically acclaimed contemporary literary figures in Indian English literature, whose works have significantly contributed to global literary discourse. He was born on 11th of July 1956 in Calcutta (now Kolkata), India. His life and literary imagination have been shaped by a distinctive blend of transnational experiences, scholarly dedication, and deep engagement with history and culture. His upbringing in various countries including India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Iran due to his father's diplomatic career exposed him to diverse linguistic, cultural, and political environments. This early mobility profoundly influenced his understanding of borders, identities, and historical interconnectedness, themes that recur throughout his literary works.

Ghosh's educational background further contributed to his intellectual development. He completed his undergraduate studies in history at St. Stephen's College, University of Delhi, and later pursued a master's degree at the Delhi School of Economics. Subsequently, he obtained a D.Phil. in social anthropology from the University of Oxford. His academic training in anthropology is particularly significant, as it informs his narrative method, characterized by meticulous research, ethnographic detail, and a strong emphasis on cultural contexts.

Ghosh's writing reflects a combination of "anthropological inquiry and narrative imagination," allowing him to explore complex historical and social realities with remarkable depth. From the outset of his career, Ghosh demonstrated a commitment to exploring the intersections of history, society, and politics. His early experiences as a journalist also contributed to his analytical approach, enabling him to investigate and interpret contemporary issues with clarity and precision. This blend of journalistic sensibility and academic scholarship distinguishes his work from that of many of his contemporaries (Hawley, 2005).

II. REPRESENTATION OF ALIENATION AND DISLOCATION

Alienation can be described as a feeling of separation from any place, people, community or even oneself. The concept of dislocation is defined as a physical and psychological move from one's native land, culture and belongings. The sense of alienation and dislocation has been presented by Amitav Ghosh in his novel 'The Shadow Lines'. According to Ghosh, shadow line does not just mean the rigid national borders or fuzzy and sifting boundaries between different nations and their identities; rather, it refers to the emotional and psychological dislocation of the characters. Ghosh's novels usually challenge the very idea of rigidity of national borders which separate people and places. Several historical events such as the liberation struggle in Bengal, Second World War, the partition of India in 1947 and communal violence in Bangladesh and India have been described in the novel to highlight the idea of partition leading to alienation and dislocation (Sikder and Talukder, 2025).

Geographical borders and demarcations, in Ghosh's opinion, are arbitrary and erect barriers between nations and their citizens. Jethamoshai, Thamma's uncle, informs her after being convinced to move to Calcutta to live with his extended family.

Because he believes that nations are firm, Jethamoshai's comment illustrates the pointlessness of boundaries. Since he is aware that once a person starts to move, there is no stopping him, he questions the ability of these national boundaries to keep people from their country and culture. The narrator recognizes the foolishness of politician's constant line drawing since it promotes violence and killing on both sides of the border rather than dividing anything or anyone. He conveys his personal opinion about the inefficiency of these borders that separate countries on geographical maps when he claims that they are worthless (Pattanayak, 2021).

Through the novel Ghosh has tried to contrast between the artificial borders with the mental borders. He says people often used to create the political boundaries in their minds by separating the physical world in the form of two nations, two culture and two religions. Although these artificial borders can divide the nations, religions and cultures but they cannot completely divide human memories, relationship and human experiences. Further he says that the political boundaries only create chaos, physical atrocities and mental disturbances. When people encounter these thing they feel alienated and dislocated from their homeland.

The novels the shadow lines highlight the existential challenges, migration, and a chaotic state of affairs. These issues have resulted in the loss of many human lives, particularly those of middle-class families, most of whom are Indians and Asians living in various countries. Ghosh's novels address human problems and the current issues relevant to everyone. Through his novels and the characters Ghosh has presented the theme of alienation and displacements under the shade of history and reality. As an aspiring author, Ghosh himself settled in the United States and became part of the displaced and Diaspora migrant community. It allowed him to write authentically about mixed heritage and the migrant experience, and he has emerged as a great writer. His novels depict the struggles, anxieties, and details of the Diaspora. Dislocation is the condition of post modernity, to which we have all responded with excitement and fear, which is perfectly justifiable in the contemporary context of our lives. This moment is predicated upon not only the significance of the loss of one's roots but also upon one's consciousness of the process of losing that precious 'lived sense of place,' which Ghosh identifies as the catalyst for the possible birth of the novel. In Ghosh's work, displacement has led to alienation and a search for self. He moves from homesickness to follow changing identities and establish new relationships in new place. Most of his characters belong to multicultural society and are deeply aware of the social reality. The multicultural ethos they are confronted with leads to the struggle for a new life but not a complete break from the past. Ghosh focuses on sensitive protagonists who lack a stable sense of place and cultural identity and are victimized by other forms of social oppression (Diksha, 2024).

The author of The Shadow Lines does a good job at capturing the magnificent cities of Dhaka and Calcutta. The author goes into great detail on Bengal's partition and the suffering that followed. In Pakistan and India, this division has resulted in significant disruption and relocation. One of the main issues is the displacement of migrants. Even though they are separated into lines, these lines are simply shadow lines that have been erased by nostalgia, longing, and past memories. In addition to two forms of displacement, forced migration and voluntary migration, this book frequently features themes of memory and yearning for home. Bengal's split was the first, and the highly qualified Indian labor force was the second (Pattanayak, 2021).

Naturally, The Shadow Lines clearly follows the bildungsroman pattern, which starts with the narrator-protagonist's boyhood and ends with him reaching age and maturity. The bildungsroman's requirement for a change of locale clearly distinguishes each stage of his maturation (Barat, 2021).

The story of the novel, The Shadow Lines revolves around the theme of memory, identity, nationalism and the artificial demarcation lines that divide family as well as nations. In The Shadow Lines the story takes place in India, England and Bangladesh revealing that there are connections between each and every people despite of the geographic boundaries. The novel opens with the unnamed narrator who tells a number of stories and memories to his cousin Ila and his uncle Robi. These memories and stories include the stories of the narrator, his uncle Tridib and his grandmother Tha'mma, Mayadebi's elder sister and his parents. The two parents of the unnamed narrator have three sons named Jatin, Tridib, Robi. The wife of Jatin is Queen Victoria. He has a daughter called Ila. She moves to different places with her parents. Tridib is the only one from the Maya debi's family who lives in his ancestral house. Though his grandmother thinks that he is useless, but Tridib is very intelligent and he has keen interest in history, geography and ancient civilization. When Tridib sees May Price, she was baby and he had gone to London with his parents in 1939 and stayed at Price family's home. Then Tridib again met May Price in Calcutta and he developed love with her. This is the important element in The Shadow Lines. Robi accompanies Tridib, May, Tha'mma and Mayadebi to bring Jethamoshai (grandmother's old uncle) from Dhaka to Calcutta. Then they all saw that Tridib was killed by a communal riot. It has not been mentioned directly but later on narrator hears this as part of the haunting memories of both Robi and May Price. The first generation includes Tha'mma, Mayadebi, Jethamoshi. The second generation is made up of Jatin, Tridib, Robin. The third generation includes Ila and Nick. Tha'mma is the strict grandmother of the narrator. She is the pivot of the family and whatever she says becomes law in the family. She is the elder sister of Tridib's mother Mayadebi. She lives in GolePark, Calcutta, where she reigns supreme over her family her son and daughter-in-law and their son, the narrator, who is very attached to her and listens to her nostalgic stories of her days in Dhaka before partition. Tha'mma retired from her school in 1962 when the narrator turns ten (Geethanjali and Prema, 2021).

The novel deals with the theme of alienation, dislocation, migrant or diasporic consciousness where the characters linked with the geographical and emotional boundaries of their nation are trying to find themselves in all the new locations. The migration away from the homeland involves moving away from harmony. The foreign nation might seem like the land of dreams from their native homeland but it is just a mere illusion. Discourse of home is a vital marker of the diasporic themes. Sensitivity to the homeland is one of the significant parts of diasporic experience. The Shadow line is the story of the victims of history who are exiled by events that take place beyond their control. The novel holds a unique position within the contemporary postcolonial literature. The novel presents the miserable situation of the poor who were uprooted from their native land. Amitav Ghosh focuses on the various socio-economic issues being faced by the Indian diaspora abroad because of illegal migration in the novel. The novel describes the themes like migration, diasporic experience, alienation, dislocation, memory and rootlessness. Characters in the novel do not belong to any particular place but forced to travel and form a new habitat due to loneliness and sense of void that arise out of displacement. The concept of home itself becomes a matter of doubt; there is no home in this novel that is ordinary. Uncertainty about the place of origin or destination is the significant characteristic of this novel (Nithyasekar, 2024).

The novel the shadow line refers to the journey of alienation, dislocation, migration and diasporic approach. Ghosh has given the most beautiful depiction of journey of alienation and dislocation in this novel through his character Tha'mma, Ila and Tridib. Characters who suffer from dislocation and alienation find their homes in a new unknown place throughout the novel. The novelist has tried to convey the sadness and sorrow involved in losing their home and possessions of the characters through this novel. Many people who belong to Dhaka, Kolkata and Pakistan are suffering from the same sorrow and sadness because of partition. Partition has led to great disruption and displacement of people in Pakistan, Bangladesh and India. These kinds of shocking incidents are presented in the novel with reality by Amitav Ghosh. The novel has also depicted some riots, violence that leads to disruption of trust and relationship among people. Death of Tridib can be taken as the best example of how violence leads to physical as well as emotional dislocation of characters. The novel depicts how the characters try to find themselves in this journey of life. They are always affected by the culture, history and memory.

In the novel The Shadow Lines Amitav Ghosh has used a nonlinear narrative technique in which he has portrayed events out of the chronological order instead of straight timeline he uses flashback, flash forward and dream sequences to explore his character's depth. The narrator looks back on the events from a distance of about twenty years, and also digs deep into his memory to recall important incidents from the past that shape the plot. By doing this, Ghosh is able to explore his characters in a really unique way. As in the novel the unnamed narrator recalls that.

"In 1939, thirteen years before I was born, my father's aunt, Mayadebi, went to England with her husband and her son, Tridib…. Mayadebi was twenty-nine when they left and Tridib was eight. I remember trying very hard to imagine him back to my age, to reduce his height to mine, and to think away the spectacles that were so much a part of him that I really believed he had been born with them…. My grandmother didn't approve of Tridib. He is a loafer and a wastrel…. For her time was like a toothbrush: it went mouldy if it wasn't used…. Tridib's father was a diplomat, an officer in the Foreign Service. He and Mayadebi were always away…. Of Tridib's two brothers, Jatin-Kaku, the elder… was an economist with the U.N. He was always away too, somewhere in Africa or South-East Asia, with his wife and his daughter Ila, who was my age…. Tridib had been to London, with his parents, many years ago… [and] there was a family called Price… very , very old friends of Tridib's family, because Mrs. Price's father, Lionel Tresawsen had been in India when the British were here, and… she had a daughter called May, but she was a little baby when Tridib was in London, and as far as I knew he hadn't seen her since… I met May Price for the first time… when she came to Calcutta on a visit. The next time I met her was seventeen years later, when I went to London myself…. Later, when we were eating our dinner, I discovered that in 1959, when [Tridib] was twenty-seven and she nineteen, they had begun a long correspondence…. Smiling at the memory, she told me how [Tridib's] card had reached her just when she was trying to get over an adolescent crush on a schoolboy trombonist… and after that they had written to each other regularly– short, chatty letters, usually. Soon, pen-friend like they had exchanged photographs" (Ghosh, 1988).

The narrator remembers the two separate encounters he had with May Price: the first encounter in 1963-64 where May was accompanying Tha'mma, Mayadebi and Tridib to fetch the narrator's grandmother's uncle, Jethamoshai, from Dhaka (present Bangladesh) to Calcutta (India), who all witnessed the death of Tridib in the episode of communal violence during this journey; and the second encounter, where May is located by the narrator himself in London during his stay in London for one year's research grant to gather material for Ph.D. thesis in 1979-80. The narrator remembers his meeting with May Price in 1961, when he was nine years old: "I met May Price for the first time two years after that incident, when she came to Calcutta on a visit. The next time I met her was seventeen years later, when I went to London myself". In such a way, the novel narrates the events that occurred in 1939-40 during the Second World War, 1960-63 and 1978-79 in a scattered manner, but the adult narrator, who is recollecting about these events in 1980s, has organized these scattered pieces of temporal and spatial memories in a unified manner. Though in a chronological order, this piece of writing starts from the period of time before the narrator was even born and it belonged to colonial India, it consists of a lot of postcolonial moments and all episodes occur in simultaneity in order to give sense to the story at the end of it. The year 1939 marks the beginning of the Second World War and a lot of changes taking place in the Indian subcontinent. It was the time when Mayadebi came to London and had met with the Price family and Tridib. This story was narrated to the young narrator in twenty one years after the event; the narrator was only eight years old. Tridib met May when she was still just a baby in London. They started loving each other through their letters, breaking the barriers of national and cultural boundaries. In his story, Amitav Ghosh discusses the enigmatic relationship between Tridib and May and also the strong connection that exists between their families despite the physical and geographical barriers that seem to exist between the two nations they come from (Prasad, 2008).

Amitav Ghosh employs his characters to illustrate diverse perspectives on borders and belonging. Tridib, characterized as an intellectual and dreamer, transcends geographical boundaries through his imagination. In contrast, Ila embodies the cosmopolitan outsider, lacking roots and stability. The narrator remarks, "She had no sense of place," emphasize her disconnection from both India and the West (The Shadow Lines). Ila's liberty starkly contrasts with the narrator's deep connection to memory and ancestral history. This dynamic among the characters reveals that national identity is not singular or static but shifts based on perspective, memory, and personal experience. The narrator's quest to comprehend his place in the world is mirrored in his emotional recollections: "I could not see her face; but I could tell that she was smiling, the way she always did, with her eyes" (The Shadow Lines 198). These personal moments imply that human experience is defined more by relationships than by borders (Prabakar, 2025).

Thus, it is possible to describe The Shadow Lines as a novel which depicts the complications of the themes of alienation, dislocation, and diaspora consciousness. Ghosh tries to emphasize the psychological aspect of displacement and describes it not only as a physical but also mental and spiritual condition. Through The Shadow Lines, Ghosh shows his main preoccupation with the idea of wider cross-border humanity with deep insight into the problems of ethnic nationalism and communalism. It also demonstrates new heights of his craftsmanship (Prasad, 2008).

The shadow lines represent not only physical divisions on a map, but also the psychological and emotional disruption onto the collective consciousness of the affected people during the partition of Indian subcontinent. By this geographical demarcation they had to encounter displacement, alienation, and fractured identity, leaving individuals feeling adrift, caught between worlds, and uncertain of their place in the grand narrative of history. This sense of alienation and dislocation is further compounded by the imposed ideologies and cultural norms of the colonizer, who forcefully criticized the local practices in every walk and talks of life and often fostered a sense of inferiority among the deprived section of the poor society. Even after the end of the rule of the colonial government, these shadow lines persist in the lives and identity of the people, continuing deep and subtle influence on the consciousness of the individuals to perceive themselves, their companionship to others, and their view of understanding of the world around them. They shape prejudices, fuel conflicts, demonstrating the enduring legacy of colonialism and its lasting impact on the human experience (Goel, 2025).

The book shows how these harsh artificial boundaries lead to on-going problems with politics, society, and the economy, creating a cycle of hurt and unfairness. It also explores how our memories and the stories we tell about the past are complicated, and how the lines that separate us can make it hard to understand what really happened. The main character, a young Indian man named Tridib, represents the struggles of a society dealing with the lasting impact of being ruled by another country, a burden that affects not just politics, but everyday life and how a nation sees itself. This legacy is felt in the way people talk about politics, but also in the small details of daily life and the big stories that shape a nation's identity. The novel tries to make sense of how these things are all connected, and how they affect the people living through it. This all shows the writer's exploration of cultural identity of the different nations, displacement and alienation and the artificial nature of the political borders drawn by the nations.

Themes such as nationalistic fervour, violence between communities, and powerlessness of people who are forced to leave their home become evident through the novels of Ghosh. Analysis of his novels under consideration illustrates how Ghosh promotes the case of dispossessed people and how they experience misery and sadness because of violence between communities and barriers that separate them physically. The issue of existential dilemmas, migrations, state of chaos, and loss of life of human beings, particularly middle-class people, are central in the novels under consideration. Ghosh deals with human issues and problems of the contemporary society. An aspiring writer Ghosh has settled down himself in U.S, and thus qualifies to be part of the 'displaced', 'diaspora' migrant community. This has enabled him to write authentically about the mixed heritage with the migrant people. He emerges as a great writer and his novels depict the struggles, anxieties and details of diasporas'of the contemporary society. Dislocation is the state of postmodernity to which we have all reacted with excitement and fear; reactions entirely reasonable in the present settings of our lives. Ghosh's remarkable collection of fiction and non-fictional essays resides somewhere between the comfort of settlement and the frightening yet exhilarating possibility of the event of unsettlement, often a foot in each, and mostly poised just on the edge of disjunction. But this moment is based not only on the importance of Lostness but on the awareness of the process of losing the precious 'lived sense of place' a 'distancing' that Ghosh sees as a catalyst for the possible birth of the novel. And it is in the apprehension of both these experiences simultaneously that of the loss of location and that of a consciousness of being caught in these processes of losing one's locatedness lies Ghosh's significance as one of the most important writers of our times. In Ghosh, displacement has resulted in alienation and in search for self. He takes a journey from the past to the present, through new faces and new connections. His heroes belong to a multi-cultural society and possess great insight into a social truth. Their encounter with a multi-cultural spirit is what gives rise to their fight for a new existence without completely severing ties with the past. (Mohana, 2016).

The novel "The Shadow Lines" by Amitav Ghosh brings into focus the feeling of homelessness of the rootless persona. It highlights the nostalgia for home and embrace of love towards homeland in the protagonist. One of the most important issues of the character is the transition from source culture to target culture, from homeland to diaspora until both of them overlap and merge. The characters in the novel follow the concept of unique homeland and the feeling of insecurity. The displaced persons are caught in two opposing poles that either they could acclimatize themselves or stuck in the hostile world of shadow lines. Their homeland always stays in their inner mind even when they get displaced in the new land. The nostalgia for home in changing cultural environment evokes feelings of rootlessness, alienation, and dislocation. The characters with dislocated destiny are filled with the problems of home through rootlessness, nostalgia, memory, and diaspora. The flashback technique has been used in an extremely effective manner in this novel by Amitav Ghosh. However, the aggressive

imperialism, colonialism and capitalistic fervour threatened the idea of fixed, distinct home for individuals. Some immigrants showed the sense of unavoidable dislocation who withdraw into themselves in isolation and derive a sense of release recollecting the past walking down the memory lane. Prof. Makarand Paranjape in his seminal work In Diaspora: Theories, Histories, Texts, succinctly depicts consequence of physical and psychological alienation saying: Homeland gets so distant from the diaspora that the motherland becomes a kind of sacred idol of memory and imagination. As the homeland plays such a central role in one's life, great writers including Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai have handled this theme of belongingness and search for home in their works. Amitav Ghosh portrays the picture of the victims of diaspora who find themselves isolated and yet attached to the nostalgia of the past. They get insecure and being surrounded by a new culture, try to recreate their past home. Calcutta and Dhaka get depicted in their memories with all its beauty. Home memories are depicted as a recurrent backdrop in the whole novel. Here Tha'mma and Ila find themselves geographically and culturally disoriented because of partition and globalization and they regain their lost home through memory, fantasy, narrative and myths. Along with the intense attachment to and nostalgia about the past, one can also notice how intensely one's past past intrudes into the present. The novel reveals that memory of everyone is measured on the scale of how much one's past experiences share with others. The Shadow Lines shows nostalgia that is an essential part of history (Sahare, 2016).

III. METHODOLOGY

The objective of the current research paper is to investigate the issues of trauma, alienation, and displacement of The Shadow Lines through qualitative, analytical, interpretative, and descriptive methods as well as through narrative techniques. The research seeks to analyse the complex interplay between the old and new memories of the displaced people, the harsh history of the partition that led the common people to alienation and traumatic experiences. The study also explored the different types of dislocation like geographical, emotional, cultural, and intellectual alienation caused by the political borders and partition. By means of a critical text analysis, this research will try to bring into focus how the novel by Ghosh does not only represent the personal problems of his characters but also represents the bigger historical-political framework which provides us with an understanding of the universal aspects of human nature of longing, sadness, and search for identity. While the objective of this study was the analysis of the narrative styles used by Ghosh in his novel, at the same time this research will try to look into the ways in which migration, partition, and displacement influenced the fragmented identities of his characters.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By the novel the author demonstrates native land as a physical location, side by side he points out that it can also be exist in the memory and imagination of native dwellers. In the character of Tha'mma, her experience shows the limitations of defining home geographically by sifting one place to another during the partition, while the narrator's experience demonstrates how a person can develop emotional relationships or attachment with places beyond his immediate surroundings. Furthermore, the novel suggests that human attachments are stronger and more complex than political borders. Ghosh does not deny the power of borders established between two nations; rather, he tries to show that their power is incomplete. Borders can regulate movement between two or more nations and determine their citizenship, but they cannot completely control the memory, imagination, affection, or cultural identity of the people of the nation. Amitav Ghosh has tried to show that dislocation is not limited to people who physically migrate, even those who remain in their homeland too can experience dislocation because political borders and historical events can transform their relationship with the known places that they occupy. Ghosh has depicted the character the unnamed narrator who never physically visited many of the places that occupy his imagination. But through the character of Tridib's story he develops an intimate relationship with them. The narrator also experiences psychological dislocation after Tridib's death. He has tried to understand how an ordinary geographical border could separate people who were connected by family, friendship and history. The novel the shadow lines indicates the crisis of national identity, the character Tha'mma initially believes the importance of national borders but the journey of Dhaka challenges this belief. She came to know the political partition has transformed it in to another country. She finds it very difficult to know how a place of her own which was connector to her family earlier suddenly became foreign for her and her family. Another character named Ila in the novel also represents another important form of alienation and dislocation. Though she lives in London freely out of the restriction of Indian traditional culture yet she her life reveals the loneliness that can accompany cultural displacement. Through this character

Ghosh suggest that physical movement across national borders does not automatically produce freedom or belongings. A man can cross the national borders easily but he remains psychologically and emotionally displaced from his or her own native land. May price is also another character of the novel who represents the dimension of alienation and dislocation. She belongs to England but her relationship with Tridib creates a connection between English and Indian world. The death of Tridib leaves her with a lasting sense of emotional disturbance and dislocation. Ghosh focuses the political boundaries or partition, the most important historical cause of alienation and dislocation in the novel the shadow lines. The division of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh create new political boundaries and displaced millions of people. He says people who once belong to the same culture become separated by national identities. Ghosh points out another factor memory, which plays central role in the novel that helps to produce alienation and dislocation. The characters in the novel use memories to reconstruct places that they have lost or never physically experienced. Through the novel the author demonstrates native land as a physical location, side by side he points out that it can also be exist in the memory and imagination of native dwellers. In the character of Tha'mma, her experience shows the limitations of defining home geographically by sifting one place to another during the partition, while the narrator's experience demonstrates how a person can develop emotional relationships or attachment with places beyond his immediate surroundings. Furthermore, the novel suggests that human attachments are stronger and more complex than political borders. Ghosh does not deny the power of borders established between two nations; rather, he tries to show that their power is incomplete. The current study suggests that borders or political demarcations can regulate movement between two or more nations and determine their citizenship, but they cannot completely control the memory, imagination, affection, or cultural identity of the people of the nation.

V. CONCLUSION

The shadow lines reveal that the characters travel here and there throughout the story. The characters like Thamma, Ila , Tridib and May price move here and there in lieu of the artificial geographical borders during the partition of India and Pakistan. The partition of India and Pakistan creates a major source of alienation and dislocation. Alienation and dislocation are central thematic structure of the novel *The Shadow Lines*. Through Partition, communal violence, migration, memory, and national boundaries, Ghosh explores the difficulties of alienation and dislocation faced by the common people in divided countries. The novel ultimately suggests that identity is not permanent it can change any time according to the situation as in the novel the author has shown in the character of Tha'mma. Thamma's identity develops according to the experiences through moving different places, relationships, culture and circumstances. The characters move between places, histories, and cultures, and their experiences challenge harsh and rigid definitions of nation and home.

After analyzing the text and related articles, papers, journals the study suggests that the Alienation and dislocation not only arises when political and social divisions separate people from their territories, memories, culture, attachments and relationships of their belongings but also may arises from the environmental and ecological crises such as natural disaster including cyclone, floods, climate change, increasing of sea levels and depletion of glaciers, the new forms of alienation and dislocation.

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Learning Experience, Learning Behavior, and Major Retention Intention: Mediating and Moderating Pathways among Chinese Undergraduates

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Abstract— *Whether students are willing to choose their own major again is an important indicator of the quality of education. In China, most students enter their major through the national college entrance examination, so this issue is particularly important. This study examines whether learning experience (course experience, resource support, and academic advising) mediates the link between learning behavior and major retention intention, and whether learning behavior moderates each dimension. We investigated 4,765 undergraduates in a large public university in mainland China, and used structural equation modeling, bootstrap parallel mediation analysis, and moderation analysis. Learning behavior not only directly predicts retention intention, but also indirectly predicts retention intention. The three dimensions of experience account for 58.98% of the total effect, among which course experience is the strongest path. Learning behavior weakened the relationship between resource support and retention intention ($\beta = -0.12$, $p < .001$), but enhanced the role of academic advising ($\beta = 0.08$, $p < .05$). This "support mismatch" pattern suggests that the best effect can be achieved only when institutional support matches students' engagement level.*

Keywords— ***Learning Experience, Learning Behavior, Major Retention Intention, Support Mismatch, Structural Equation Modeling***

I. INTRODUCTION

Whether students are willing to choose their own major again is an important indicator of the quality of education and also reflects their commitment to future study and work (Tinto, 1993). This issue is particularly important in China. Most students are assigned to majors through the college entrance examination, and many know little about their majors before entering university.

Previous studies have focused on two types of factors. The first category is learning experience, that is, how students view their own courses, resources, and advising (Entwistle, 1991). The second category is learning behavior, that is, what students actually do in learning (Kuh et al., 2008). Both types of factors are related to academic persistence (Kahu, 2013; Tinto, 2017). However, few studies have investigated how the two work together, and even fewer studies have used large samples from Asia. Astin's (1993) I-E-O model provides a useful framework. This model relates the characteristics students bring, the environment they experience, and the final outcomes. One of its limitations is that it is often assumed that the environment has the same effect on every student, but recent studies have questioned this view (Crawford et al., 2024).

Based on the data of 4,765 undergraduates in China, this study answers two questions. First, does learning experience carry part of the influence of learning behavior on major retention intention? Second, does learning behavior change the strength of the relationship between each type of learning experience and retention intention? In short, we find that learning experience accounts for more than half of the effect; learning behavior weakens the value of resource support, but increases the value of academic advising.

1.1 Learning Experience and Major Retention Intention

Learning experience refers to students' perception of the learning environment, including course experience, resource support, and academic advising. Entwistle (1991) believes that it is students' perception of the environment that affects their learning, not the environment itself. Positive perception is related to stronger engagement, motivation, and persistence (Kahu, 2013).

Mosia et al. (2026) analyzed the records of 8,300 first-year students at a university in South Africa. Students who used academic advising services were more likely to stay in university and to progress. Stofile and Enwereji (2025) investigated 660 third-year students in South Africa. Academic support services such as tutoring and writing assistance were closely related to students' satisfaction ($r = .78$). Saeed and Mohamedali (2022) also found that a feedforward teaching approach improved students' performance, engagement, and retention. We propose:

> **H1:** Course experience, resource support, and academic advising are each positively correlated with major retention intention.

1.2 Learning Behavior, Learning Experience, and Retention Intention

Learning behavior includes class participation, self-study, and extracurricular academic activities (Kuh et al., 2008). Zhao and Kuh (2004) found that students who participated in learning communities were more engaged and more satisfied with college. Active students have more contact with teachers, courses, and services, so they may evaluate them more positively. Therefore, we expect:

> **H2:** Learning behavior is positively related to course experience, resource support, and academic advising.

Learning behavior can also predict academic persistence. Kuh et al. (2008) found that engagement in the first year is related to higher grades and a higher rate of returning to university in the second year. Tinto (1993) argues that students who are better integrated into academic life are more likely to stay. Therefore, active students may establish closer ties with their majors. We propose:

> **H3:** Learning behavior is positively related to major retention intention.

1.3 The Mediating Role of Learning Experience

Galve-González et al. (2024) studied 1,177 Spanish university students. They found that academic engagement linked social integration, course satisfaction, and expectations with the use of self-regulated learning strategies. Among the students who had considered dropping out, this mediation was full; among the students who intended to stay, it was partial. However, engagement and experience are likely to influence each other (Kahu, 2013). More engaged students may form a better view of courses, resources, and advisors, thus increasing their commitment to their majors. In terms of the I-E-O model, the perceived environment may transfer part of the influence of students' behavior to the outcome. So we propose:

> **H4:** Learning experience plays a mediating role between learning behavior and major retention intention.

1.4 The Moderating Role of Learning Behavior

Learning behavior may also change the strength of the relationship between each type of experience and retention intention. The evidence in this regard is inconsistent. Some studies have found that support is generally related to better student outcomes (Mosia et al., 2026; Stofile & Enwereji, 2025). Other studies show that not all support is equally useful. Crawford et al. (2024) surveyed 1,159,768 Australian students, and found that the overall educational experience and connection with other students predicted a sense of belonging more strongly than skill development and curriculum support. The value of support may also vary from student to student. Kuh et al. (2008) found that engagement has a compensatory effect, and historically underserved students benefit more from it. On the contrary, Mosia et al. (2026) found that academic advising was most helpful when students also performed well in orientation courses. This shows that academic advising and students' active efforts are complementary.

Person-environment fit theory helps to explain why the direction of moderation may differ (Edwards et al., 1998). When what the environment provides matches personal needs, the effect is the best; unmatched support may appear useless or even limiting. Highly engaged students may already be able to direct their own studies, so standardized resources such as fixed library services or general tutoring are of little help to them. Academic advising starts from students' own goals and can be adjusted, so it may be more suitable for them. So we put forward an exploratory hypothesis:

> **H5 (Exploratory):** Learning behavior moderates the relationship between learning experience and major retention intention, and the direction of moderation may differ across the three dimensions.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Participants and Procedure

The participants were 4,765 undergraduates from a large public research university in mainland China, all of whom

volunteered to participate. The sample included 3,018 males (63.3%) and 1,747 females (36.7%). By year of study, there were 1,302 freshmen (27.3%), 1,520 sophomores (31.9%), 1,158 juniors (24.3%), 90 non-graduating seniors (1.9%), and 695 graduating students (14.6%). This study adopted convenience sampling. After the approval of the university administration, the researchers recruited students through flyers and class announcements, and students who were interested in participating received a secure online questionnaire link and an informed consent form.

All participants signed the written informed consent online. This study was approved by the university's ethics review committee before data collection (approval number withheld for blind review).

2.2 Measures

Learning experience. Ten items were adapted from Entwistle's (1991) framework on students' perception of the learning environment, including course experience (4 items, $\alpha = 0.78$), resource support (3 items, $\alpha = 0.80$), and academic advising (3 items, $\alpha = 0.75$). The items are rated on a 5-point scale (1 = very easy or sufficient, 5 = very difficult or insufficient). We reverse-scored the items, so that the higher the score, the better the experience.

Learning behavior. Five items were adapted from Amhag and Jakobsson (2009) to measure class participation, self-study time, and extracurricular academic activities (5-point scale, $\alpha = 0.82$).

Major retention intention. This study uses one item: "If I could choose again, I would still choose this major" (1 to 5 points). Bergkvist and Rossiter (2007) found that when the construct is concrete and simple, the predictive power of a single-item measure can be equivalent to that of a multi-item scale. Wanous et al. (1997) obtained similar results for overall job satisfaction. This item directly expresses a clear and specific intention. However, Diamantopoulos et al. (2012) cautioned that single items can only be equivalent to multi-item scales under certain conditions. Therefore, we are cautious in interpreting this measure.

2.3 Data Analysis

We used SPSS 26.0 and AMOS 26.0 to calculate descriptive statistics and correlations, and compared students of different genders and years with t-tests and one-way ANOVA. We tested multicollinearity, homoscedasticity, and independence of errors (Kline, 2015). We used exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis to test construct validity and reliability (Hair et al., 2010). We used Harman's single-factor test and a common latent factor model to evaluate common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Model fit was judged by χ^2, CFI, TLI, and RMSEA (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Tseng & Schmitt, 2008). CFI and TLI close to or higher than .95, and RMSEA close to or lower than .06, indicate good fit. Because χ^2 is very sensitive to large samples, we did not judge by it alone (Kline, 2015).

Then, we used the PROCESS macro for SPSS (Model 4; Hayes, 2022) to test the parallel mediation model. Learning behavior is the predictor, the three experience dimensions are parallel mediators, and retention intention is the outcome variable. The indirect effects were tested with 5,000 bootstrap samples. If the 95% confidence interval does not contain zero, the indirect effect is significant. Finally, we used mean-centered scores to construct the interaction terms between learning behavior and each experience dimension to test the moderating effect. Since learning behavior is also the predictor in the mediation model, this test can explain whether the influence of each mediator on the outcome depends on the predictor (Hayes, 2022).

2.4 Data Availability and Use of Generative AI

Because the data contain student information, they will not be made public. Readers can reasonably apply to the corresponding author for the de-identified data. In this study, generative artificial intelligence tools were used only for language editing and formatting, and the authors are responsible for all the contents.

III. RESULTS

3.1 Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analyses

Table 1 lists the mean, standard deviation, and correlation coefficient of each variable. All correlations are positive and significant. Learning behavior is related to resource support ($r = .40$) and retention intention ($r = .42$). Resource support is highly correlated with academic advising ($r = .79$). All the mean values are lower than the midpoint of the scale (3), which shows that many students' evaluation of their learning experience and major is only moderate.

The data meet the main statistical assumptions. The VIF values range from 1.01 to 2.97, which is far below the commonly used cut-off of 10 (Hair et al., 2010). The Breusch-Pagan test was not significant ($p > .05$), and Durbin-Watson values ranged from 1.5 to 2.5. The absolute value of skewness is less than 2 and that of kurtosis is less than 7. There are no signifsicant outliers, and missing values are less than 5%, which were handled with the full information maximum likelihood method.

3.2 Measurement Model and Common Method Bias

The χ^2 test of the measurement model was significant ($p < .05$). However, other indices show a good fit: CFI = 0.97,

TLI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.04, 90% CI [0.03, 0.05]. All factor loadings were significant ($p < .01$). The composite reliability is higher than 0.70, and the average variance extracted is higher than 0.50. In Harman's test, the first factor explains 28% of the variance, which is lower than the 50% threshold. After adding a common latent factor, the model fit did not improve. Therefore, common method bias is unlikely to pose a problem.

3.3 Path Analysis

The structural model also fits well (CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.04, 90% CI [0.02, 0.06]). Table 2 lists the path coefficients.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (N = 4,765)

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4
1. Course experience	2.04	0.74				
2. Resource support	1.76	0.80	.64***			
3. Academic advising	1.68	0.78	.62***	.79***		
4. Learning behavior	2.54	0.84	.60***	.40***	.40***	
5. Retention intention	2.18	0.93	.51***	.49***	.48***	.42***

Note. ***p < .001.

Independent samples t-tests show that there are gender differences in course experience (t = 4.75), resource support (t = 6.01), and academic advising (t = 7.93), all $p < .001$. One-way ANOVA shows that there are year differences in course experience (F = 5.36), resource support (F = 9.83), academic advising (F = 16.47), and retention intention (F = 7.22), all $p < .001$. There is no significant year difference in learning behavior.Gender differences were also found in learning behavior (t = 1.95, $p < .001$) and retention intention (t = 0.98, $p < .001$).

Table 2: Path Coefficients of the Parallel Mediation Model

Path	*β*	*SE*	*p*
Learning behavior → Course experience	0.53	0.01	< .001
Learning behavior → Resource support	0.38	0.01	< .001
Learning behavior → Academic advising	0.37	0.01	< .001
Course experience → Retention intention	0.26	0.02	< .001
Resource support → Retention intention	0.20	0.02	< .001
Academic advising → Retention intention	0.17	0.02	< .001
Learning behavior → Retention intention (direct)	0.19	0.02	< .001

Note. β is the standardized coefficient. The paths to retention intention control for other predictors. The four predictors explain 43% of the variance in retention intention.

Learning behavior positively predicted course experience (B = 0.53), resource support (B = 0.38), and academic advising (B = 0.37), all $p < .001$, and H2 was supported. After controlling for learning behavior, course experience (B = 0.26), resource support (B = 0.20), and academic advising (B = 0.17) all predicted retention intention, all $p < .001$, and H1 was supported. Learning behavior still has a direct effect on retention intention (B = 0.19, $p < .001$), and H3 is supported.

3.4 Mediation Analysis

As shown in Table 3, the total indirect effect is 0.2777, 95% CI [0.2520, 0.3034], accounting for 58.98% of the total effect. In standardized terms, it is about 0.25. As the direct effect is still significant, the mediation is partial, and H4 is supported. Course experience accounts for the largest share (28.82%), followed by resource support (16.33%) and academic advising (13.83%). Fig. 1 shows the model.

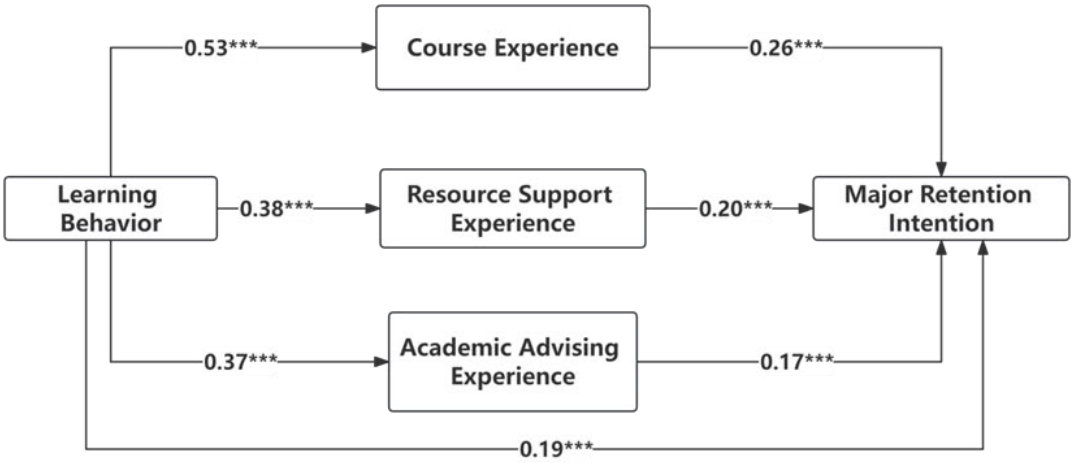


Fig.1. Parallel mediation model linking learning behavior to major retention intention through three dimensions of learning experience

Note. The coefficients are standardized coefficients. ***p < .001.

Table 3: Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects of Learning Behavior on Major Retention Intention

Effect	Estimate	*SE*	LLCI	ULCI	% of Total
Total effect	0.4708	0.0144	0.4425	0.4991	100.00
Direct effect	0.1931	0.0163	0.1612	0.2250	41.02
Total indirect effect	0.2777	0.0130	0.2520	0.3034	58.98
Via course experience	0.1357	0.0142	0.1086	0.1642	28.82
Via resource support	0.0769	0.0114	0.0547	0.0992	16.33
Via academic advising	0.0651	0.0110	0.0440	0.0869	13.83

Note. LLCI and ULCI are the lower and upper limits of the 95% confidence interval, respectively. The intervals of the total effect and direct effect are normal-theory intervals, and the intervals of the indirect effects are percentile bootstrap intervals based on 5,000 samples.

3.5 Moderation Analysis

The moderation model was significant ($R = 0.76$, $R^2 = 0.583$., $F = 271.30$, $p < .001$). Table 4 lists the interaction terms.

Table 4: Moderating Effects of Learning Behavior

Interaction term	*β*	*t*	*p*
Course experience × Learning behavior	0.02	0.95	n.s.
Resource support × Learning behavior	-0.12	-3.97	< .001
Academic advising × Learning behavior	0.08	2.59	< .05

Note. β is the standardized coefficient. n.s. = not significant.

The interaction of course experience is not significant. The interaction term of resource support is negative (β = -0.12, p < .001), which shows that the relationship between resource support and retention intention is weaker for students who are more active in learning. The interaction term of academic advising is positive (β = 0.08, p < .05), which shows that academic advising has a stronger connection with retention intention for students who are more active

in learning. H5 is partially supported because the direction of moderation varies from dimension to dimension. All interaction effects are small in size.

IV. DISCUSSION

4.1 Main Findings

The results support H1 to H4, and partially support H5. First, all three dimensions of experience are positively related to retention intention. This is consistent with the findings of Mosia et al. (2026) and Stofile and Enwereji (2025), who associate academic advising and academic support with retention and satisfaction. This study extends this evidence to undergraduates in China, and focuses on the willingness to stay in the major, not just in the university. The mean of retention intention is low (M = 2.18), which also shows the importance of this issue in China.

Second, learning behavior not only directly predicts retention intention, but also indirectly predicts retention intention through learning experience. Course experience is the strongest path. Active students spend more time on courses, so a good course experience may make them feel that this major is worth keeping. This result also complements the research of Galve-González et al. (2024). They placed engagement between students' views of their studies and their learning strategies, and we find that experience can also sit between behavior and outcomes. Taken together, the two studies show that there may be a two-way relationship between them. Awuonda (2025) also found in a sample of 201 graduate students that advisor quality is partly related to learning outcomes through academic motivation.

4.2 The Support Mismatch Pattern

We call the most noteworthy finding a "support mismatch" pattern. Learning behavior weakens the role of resource support, but enhances the role of academic advising.

Person-environment fit theory provides the first explanation (Edwards et al., 1998). Highly engaged students may rely less on formal resources and more on self-directed learning or peer learning. Standardized resources may not meet their needs, so they contribute less to their major commitment. In contrast, academic advising starts from students' own problems and goals. More engaged students may be better at asking useful questions and acting on suggestions.

Self-determination theory provides a second explanation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Students need to feel autonomous, so for students with strong autonomy, fixed standardized services may feel more like external control. This may be an "over-support" effect. Individualized academic advising is more likely to support their own choices, and Awuonda (2025) also emphasizes the value of autonomy-supportive academic advising.

The third explanation is compensation. Less engaged students may rely more on institutional resources, so these resources are more important to their major commitment. This is consistent with the compensatory effect reported by Kuh et al. (2008). The cross-sectional data of this study cannot distinguish these explanations. Selection effects may also exist, because students with strong motivation may not only be more engaged, but also seek good advising. Mosia et al. (2026) gave the same warning about their results.

4.3 Theoretical Contributions

This study has three theoretical contributions. Firstly, it illustrates the internal process of Astin's (1993) I-E-O model. Students' behavior affects how they perceive the environment, and the perceived environment transmits most of the influence to the outcome. Second, it identifies a boundary condition. The relationship between environment and outcomes depends on whether the type of support matches students' engagement level. According to person-environment fit theory, standardized resources create a needs-supplies mismatch for highly engaged students (Edwards et al., 1998). Thirdly, it supports Kahu's (2013) view that engagement is formed in the interaction between students and institutions. Learning behavior is not only a conduit that opens this path, but also a filter that changes how much each type of support matters.

V. CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusions and Implications

Among the 4,765 undergraduates in China, learning behavior not only directly predicts major retention intention, but also indirectly predicts it through three dimensions of learning experience, and the latter accounts for nearly 60% of the total effect. Learning behavior moderates the effects of resource support and academic advising in opposite directions.

Three practical implications can be drawn from this. First, universities should improve the course experience, because it is the strongest path. Clear course objectives, useful feedback, and links between courses and careers may help students see the value of their major. Second, universities should adjust their support methods according to students' participation while ensuring that basic resources are generally open. Students with low participation can get more active help, while students with high participation need more flexible and advanced resources. Because the adjustment effect is not great, the focus should be on

optimizing the support mode rather than reducing resources. Thirdly, academic advising should continue to serve as personalized support for all students, helping them cope with learning difficulties and strengthening contact with teachers and students. For students with low participation, schools should also guide them to use academic advising more effectively.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

There are still some limitations in this study. First, the data come from one research university, and future research should include comprehensive universities, normal universities, and vocational colleges. Second, all data are self-reported, and there may be social desirability bias. Thirdly, this study uses a cross-sectional design, and it is impossible to confirm the causal direction. Learning experience may also affect learning behavior in turn, which requires a longitudinal design to test both directions. Fourthly, measuring retention intention with only one item cannot reflect all its complexity (Diamantopoulos et al., 2012). Fifth, resource support and academic advising are highly correlated (r = .79), and their respective effects should be interpreted carefully. Future studies should also report simple slopes.

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The Aesthetics of Silence and Moments of Being: Emotional Self-Preservation and the Refusal of Critique in Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*

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Abstract— *Silence is often interpreted as blank, meaningless, absent, and hollow, but in many ways, it can hold meanings deeper than words can suggest. Today's moments are saturated with constant connectivity and sensory overload; the overflow of information from different social media platforms is blurring people's own thoughts and authenticity. This paper re-examines solitude as a necessary space in the formation of self through a close reading of Rainer Maria Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet (1875-1926). Drawing upon Susan Sontag's Aesthetics of Silence, the study seeks to find how Rilke destabilizes and refuses the standard criticism of a work of art through his letters to Kappus, emphasising inwardness, reflection, and understanding of the self and a writer's own understanding of his creative process. Even though silence can be seen as a patriarchal erasure, repression, and absence of self-knowledge or opinion, this is the most crucial and sophisticated psychological space for a person to find themselves, to form their selfhood, to make choices and create decisions, and to meet the unspoken possibility of the language. Rilke's Letters to a Young Poet frames a total rejection of literary critique not merely as advice but as a crucial strategy of emotional self-preservation. The text provides a path to be true to one's own self and cultivate an inviolable sanctuary of silence where creation remains the ultimate necessary process and self-discovery rejects outside opinion and market logic to form an embodied mind in the process of becoming.*

Keywords— ***Solitude, Being, emotional awareness, existentialism, selfhood.***

The contemporary world is marked by an unprecedented intensity of noise, such as digital, social, and psychological, that leaves little room for introspection and often crowds our own minds. In such a situation, solitude is often misunderstood as loneliness, a condition to be avoided rather than embraced. The modern individual, constantly engaged with external stimuli, risks becoming estranged from the self, leading to a fragmented and inauthentic mode of existence that makes them drift from their own core self, often leaving them feeling stuck and not good enough, with an ease of being. The ease of being one with oneself is hard to find in recent times; many of the people are dealing with constant anxiety and depression, with an urgency of getting there- there is a rush inside that is so loud and noisy. The rise of digital culture and the attention economy have further intensified this condition, where constant visibility replaces inner reflection. This digital culture harms the minds of those who are in this rush of getting there, attaining something on an urgent basis, but stuck in a vicious loop, unable to progress from there. Against this backdrop, reflective literature emerges as a crucial space for rethinking the value of inwardness and silence. Texts such as Letters to a Young Poet offer profound meditations on the necessity of solitude not as withdrawal from life but as an essential condition for self-formation. Because without a calm solitude and stillness of the mind, one can go nowhere. It is really important to bring stability to our mind before we move on to something because it makes us balanced by giving us a free space to think and choose better. Hence, drawing upon existential concerns with authenticity, being,

and self-awareness, this paper argues that solitude functions as a generative space in which the individual confronts and constructs the self. This silence is not devoid of meaning; rather, it is something incomprehensible that words fail to suggest.

In *The Letters to a Young Poet*, Kappus corresponds to Rilke by asking whether his poems are 'good' or up to the mark, searching for a wiser guide in him who can validate his writings or clearly show his strengths and weaknesses. Whilst Rilke frames the total rejection of literary critique by reiterating the fact that a work of art should not seek external validation; rather, it should look for its aesthetic and authentic process of creation and bringing that creation to life. Evaluation of art, on the other hand, to Rilke, is a corrupting force that threatens an artist's integrity to his art. That is why he helps Kappus to find his own answer by saying that nobody can help anyone.

"There is only one single way. Go into yourself." (p. 4)

Rilke, instead of validating Kappus, asks him to look inward, examine his own self, search for his creation's own root, and patiently look for his own internal workings and the gradual process of creating the art and becoming the self rather than seeking external validation. He urges him to look at his own art as an entity that has existence of its own while giving it space and grace. Instead of letting Kappus rely on him for validation, he guides him in ways to look for answers, to wait for the writings to ripen, to enjoy the process of creation by protecting it from outside judgments. Rilke believes,

"Things are not all as graspable and sayable as on the whole we are led to believe; most events are unsayable, occur in a space that no word has ever penetrated…" (P. 3).

Kappus is brought back to the most essential question by Rilke to "dig down into yourself for a deep answer." Rilke is urging him to submerse into his own world. Rilke emphasizes that any work of art has meaning and is great that has arisen out of necessity, because there are inner workings of the mind; there are some instinctual urges that do not rest until it comes out through some form. Therefore, going into ourselves has been strongly advised by Rilke. Rilke here is acting as a spiritual guide that is helping Kappus to respect his own creativity, and helping everyone understand the creatively stimulating feeling of a creative person while creating any work of art.

He says, "Works of art are infinitely solitary, and nothing is less likely to reach them than criticism. Only love can grasp them and hold them and do them justice." (P, 12)

Rilke is turning Kappus towards nature and by living with an open heart till everything grows easy and more unified. He is asking us to be patient and wait with the questions in our heart that are still unsolvable. He is urging us to sit with the questions and love them and live them. He says, "Live the questions for now. Perhaps then you will gradually, without noticing it, live your way into the answer, one distant day in the future." (P.17)

In spite of immediately reacting or responding to the thoughts or questions, Rilke is helping Kappus to learn composure and ease with his own mind. He shows a pure, hopeful way by grounding Kappus within himself by saying that "Perhaps you do carry yourself the possibility of forming and creating, as a particularly happy and pure way of living. School yourself for it, but take what comes with complete trust." (P, 17)

Rilke asks, "Do not be distracted by surfaces; it is in the depths that all laws obtain." (P, 20). Rilke is like a guiding light, helping Kappus spend time with himself comfortably and learn to love his solitude.

"…love your solitude and bear the pain it causes you with melody wrought with lament…take pleasure in your growth, in which no one can accompany you, and be kind-hearted towards those you leave behind." (p. 21) Rilke is even asking Kappus to show understanding for the older ones who fear precisely the solitude in which the person trusts.

Love is treated by Rilke as such a strength that it helps even the readers of his letters gain utmost strength and positivity. He is asking Kappus to believe in a love that is stored up for us like an inheritance, and trust that in this love there is strength and blessing so large that we need not feel the urge to step outside of it. He is treating love as an ever-grounding force that helps us keep going, believing in a greater, positive force.

Most importantly, Rilke is helping Kappus to find a home in solitude, to rely on himself in every possible way; because for Rilke, even in foreign circumstances, it will hold a home for us who have an inner sanctuary; and from there one may find the paths they need. He is helping everyone see solitude as a very necessary space for self-discovery and self-reliance. Rilke is again bringing back focus to nature, as to how nature can become a healing aura, helping us with the beauty it has in abundance. He is saying that solitude is not easy to bear, and everyone would like to exchange it for some form of company for "the illusion of some slight correspondence with whoever happens to come across, however unworthy" (p. 26). But he is urging Kappus to be in solitude; however hard it may be to bear, it is going into ourselves and not meeting anyone for hours that we must arrive at. He is helping us to meet our inner life by showing us the world we carry within us, and says that what goes and touches us in our innermost corner is worth all our

love; and this is what one must arrive at, minding one's own business and not validating one's own attitude to other people.

He is helping Kappus in his becoming and his coming to terms with the changes within himself and around him. Just like the bees collect honey, we must fetch the sweetness of everything and build ourselves, the ones to come. Rilke is helping in building the more formed self from the loneliness, grief, dissatisfaction, silence, solitude, and love and day-to-day experiences. He is saying that we must take every positive thing from everything we encounter and build ourselves or the person we are about to become. Rilke is essentially telling Kappus not to be frightened while becoming, because it is slow growth, and it takes time. It is in our greatest despairs and helplessness that we transform into better and wiser people. When we may feel that we are stuck in this vicious loop, actually everything is helping us in becoming.

Rilke says that many a time we want to escape from reality, the difficult situations, and may want to follow conventions because that has been the easier way. But he says, "we must hold to the heavy, the difficult (p. 33). It is because difficulty helps us to grow. He says, "It is good to be alone, for solitude is difficult; that something is difficult should be one more reason to do it." For Rilke, solitude is not about being alone; rather, it is the state where we are comfortable sitting without thoughts, with fears, with uncertainty, without anyone validating our own thoughts or needing reactions and comfort from the outside.

In *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke conceptualizes becoming not as a process of overcoming suffering but as the capacity to remain receptive to experiences whose meaning has not yet become fully available to consciousness. His injunction to accepting our reality as wholeheartedly as possible suggests that grief, anxiety, uncertainty, and solitude must be accommodated within the self rather than immediately suppressed, rationalized, or transformed into objects of judgement. This receptivity has an embodied dimension: the subject must develop the capacity to endure the affective and somatic discomfort accompanying periods of inward transformation. Read through the framework of an aesthetics of silence, such endurance also involves a suspension of critique. Silence becomes more than an absence of speech; it constitutes a protective interval in which experience is permitted to exist without the pressure of immediate explanation, evaluation, or resolution. Rilke's refusal to offer the young poet definitive answers thus creates a space in which uncertainty itself becomes formative. By withholding premature judgement, the individual is able to remain with experiences that might otherwise be dismissed as weakness, confusion, or failure, allowing them to acquire significance gradually. In this sense, emotional self-preservation does not depend upon eliminating pain but upon creating an inward space capable of containing it. The body becomes the site in which this unfinished experience is held, while silence protects it from premature interpretation. Becoming, therefore, emerges as an embodied process of sustained receptivity: the self does not master suffering through immediate understanding but learns to inhabit its uncertainty until a transformed relation to the self and to experience becomes possible.

Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet* reveals silence as an active mode of emotional self-preservation rather than a mere withdrawal from expression. His emphasis on solitude, inwardness, patience, and the acceptance of uncertainty creates a space in which the self can encounter experiences without the immediate demand to explain, resolve, or judge them. Periods of heightened inwardness become significant precisely because they interrupt habitual ways of understanding the self and expose the individual to experiences that are difficult to articulate. Such moments need not produce immediate insight; their significance lies in allowing the individual to remain present to what is emotionally unresolved. Rilke's refusal of premature answers or definitive interpretations is therefore central to the aesthetic of silence that emerges from the letters. Silence protects the experience from being reduced too quickly to failure, weakness, or pathology and permits it to retain its complexity until its meaning can emerge organically. Emotional self-preservation, in this sense, does not signify avoidance of pain but the creation of an inward space in which pain, uncertainty, solitude, and vulnerability can be endured without being immediately overcome. The self-preserves itself by allowing itself to remain unfinished. Rilke's letters consequently suggest that some of the most transformative experiences occur in precisely those intervals when nothing appears to be resolved: in silence, in solitude, and in moments when consciousness becomes intensely aware of its own interior life. The aesthetics of silence thus becomes an aesthetics of preservation, giving the individual the necessary space to inhabit difficult experience before translating it into knowledge, art, or meaning. What emerges from these moments is not certainty but a deeper capacity to remain with oneself, and it is this capacity that makes transformation possible.

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Functional Transformation and Value Reconstruction of Art Intermediaries in the Digital Age

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Abstract— *Against the backdrop of digital technology reshaping the art ecosystem, art intermediaries, as the core hub connecting art production, dissemination, and consumption, have seen their traditional functional boundaries broken, ushering in a systemic transformation. Supported by art intermediary theory, the cultural diamond model, and stakeholder theory, and combined with practical cases of public art foundations in mainland China, Taiwan, and Macau, this paper analyzes the transformation characteristics of art intermediaries in the digital age from three dimensions—resource allocation, value construction, and relationship coordination—in terms of functional positioning, operational mechanisms, and value orientation. The study finds that digital technology not only drives art intermediaries to achieve de-layering of resource allocation, precision in value dissemination, and flattening of relationship networks, but also triggers new challenges such as the reconstruction of intermediary authority, digital divide, and ethical dilemmas. In this context, art intermediaries need to build collaborative governance mechanisms, strengthen digital literacy, and uphold the bottom line of publicness, so as to realize a value reconstruction from "gatekeeper" to "ecosystem builder," providing support for the virtuous cycle of the art ecosystem.*

Keywords— ***digital age, art intermediary, functional transformation, public art foundation, art ecosystem***

I. INTRODUCTION: THE REALISTIC SITUATION AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF ART INTERMEDIARIES UNDER TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE

In the traditional art system, art intermediaries have always played a significant role, serving to regulate resources, transmit information, and construct relationships. Whether they are museums, art foundations, or art critics—traditional art intermediaries in the conventional sense—they all rely on their professional authority to evaluate artistic value, select art resources, build connection channels between creators and audiences, and form a relatively stable circulation channel for the art ecosystem [1].

Along with the digital wave, technologies such as the Internet, big data, and artificial intelligence have profoundly changed the entire chain of art production, dissemination, and consumption. The barriers to art dissemination have been dismantled, art creation has become popularized, and the field of art consumption has been greatly expanded, reshaping the living environment of traditional art intermediaries.

The proliferation of digital media enables audiences to connect directly with artists, allowing creators to no longer rely entirely on intermediaries for promotion. Meanwhile, algorithms and big data are intervening in art evaluation systems, and "algorithmic authority" is constantly challenging "expert authority." However, the technological revolution has not eliminated the raison d'être of art intermediaries; instead, it has forced their functions to iterate and upgrade. As Pierre Bourdieu revealed in *The Rules of Art*, artistic value is not determined solely by the work itself, but is co-constructed

by power relations and intermediary groups within the art field. Building on the cultural diamond model, Victoria D. Alexander further pointed out that mediation is always needed between art and society, creators and consumers; only the forms and functions of intermediaries need to be updated with the times [2].

As a typical art intermediary organization, public art foundations rely on public finance, professional operation, and public welfare attributes, making them an important sample for observing the transformation of art intermediaries in the digital age. Public art funds in the Chinese Taiwan region and the Hong Kong and Macao regions, which also belong to the Chinese cultural circle, have evolved differentiated practical paths in response to the digital environment: the Beijing National Art Fund relies on digitalization to enhance the openness and timeliness of its funding work; the Taipei Cultural Foundation has built a digital platform for art information sharing; and the Macao Foundation uses digital means to broaden the coverage of art education. These practices provide vivid cases for this study [3].

Based on art intermediary theory and the current state of digital practice, this paper focuses on the role evolution of art intermediaries in the digital environment, attempting to answer three core questions: What new requirements does digital technology impose on the functions of art intermediaries? What transformation characteristics do art intermediaries exhibit in terms of resource allocation, value creation, and relationship coordination? Facing the practical challenges brought by technology, how should art intermediaries accomplish value reconstruction?

II. THEORETICAL TRACING: THE TRADITIONAL FUNCTIONS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK OF ART INTERMEDIARIES

2.1 Definition of the Core Functions of Art Intermediaries

The concept of art intermediaries originates from the study of art institutions in the sociology of art. Arthur Danto's "artworld" theory and George Dickie's institutional theory of art laid the theoretical foundation for this issue. Danto proposed that the value of an artwork derives not only from the work itself, but is jointly defined by intermediary groups within the artworld, such as critics, curators, and artists [3]. Dickie further incorporated art intermediaries into the core framework of the art institution, emphasizing their crucial role in artwork recognition, value assessment, and dissemination and promotion [4].

Traditional art intermediaries can be divided into three core functions. The first is the resource allocation function: relying on professional screening, public and market resources are distributed to high-quality art projects and creators to maintain the operation of the art ecosystem. The second is the value construction function: relying on professional authority to complete aesthetic judgment and cultural interpretation, guiding the public's artistic cognition. The third is the relationship coordination function: building a communication bridge among multiple stakeholders such as governance entities, creators, and consumers, balancing the demands and interests of all parties [5]. As a public cultural intermediary, the public art fund highly fits this functional framework: it achieves fair resource allocation through policy interpretation and project review, participates in art value construction through professional standards, and coordinates the multi-party relationships among the government, artists, and the public by relying on funding mechanisms.

2.2 Theoretical Framework: An Integrated Perspective of the Cultural Diamond and Stakeholder Theory

This paper integrates the cultural diamond model and stakeholder theory to construct an analytical framework. Graeme Turner’s cultural diamond model divides the art ecosystem into four elements: cultural objects, creators, receivers, and the social world, focusing on the interactive relationships among these elements [4]. Building on the original model, Alexander added “art distributors,” namely art intermediaries, pointing out that intermediaries are the core hubs connecting all elements, and their operational models directly determine the circulation efficiency of the art ecosystem [6]. In the digital age, the underlying logic of this model remains valid, but the operational carriers and interaction patterns of intermediaries have undergone fundamental changes.

Stakeholder theory provides support for interpreting the relationship coordination function of intermediaries. This theory holds that the key to an organization’s survival and development lies in balancing the demands of various stakeholders [7]. The stakeholders of art intermediaries include government regulatory departments, artists and art groups, and the general public. Digital technology enables more direct expression of demands from all subjects and significantly increases interaction frequency, placing higher demands on the coordination ability of intermediaries. As a public intermediary organization, public art funds have a more complex stakeholder structure and need to find a dynamic balance among policy orientation, artistic creation freedom, and public cultural needs.

2.3 The Real Impact of Digitalization on Traditional Intermediary Functions

Digital technology is reshaping the operational environment of art intermediaries in an all-round way, bringing multiple impacts on traditional functions. At the resource allocation level, the decentralized nature of digital platforms is prominent; artists can directly obtain creative funding through channels such as crowdfunding, weakening the resource dominance of traditional institutions like public art funds. At the value construction level, algorithmic recommendation has become a new driving force for dissemination; public aesthetic preferences directly affect the popularity of works through data, diluting the aesthetic authority of professional intermediaries. At the relationship coordination level, social media allows audiences to directly comment on and give feedback on creative content, enabling direct dialogue between artists and audiences, weakening the information relay function of traditional intermediaries.

However, impact does not equal replacement; technology is driving the iterative upgrading of intermediary functions. For public art funds, digitalization brings new propositions: how to optimize funded projects by relying on databases? How to expand the coverage of art education through the Internet? How to balance artistic professionalism and public popularity? These constitute the core issues of the functional evolution of art intermediaries in the digital age.

III. TRANSFORMATION CHARACTERISTICS OF ART INTERMEDIARIES IN THE DIGITAL AGE

3.1 Resource Allocation: From Hierarchical Distribution to Decentralized Collaboration

Traditional art intermediary resource allocation exhibits obvious hierarchical attributes. Represented by public art foundations, it adopts a linear process of "government funding—expert review—project funding," forming a rigid hierarchy that restricts resource mobility and transparency. Digital technology breaks down the original hierarchical barriers, giving rise to a decentralized collaborative allocation model, and drives the evolution of resource allocation toward greater efficiency, fairness, and precision.

The allocation process has undergone digital restructuring. Media empowerment shifts resource distribution from an offline closed loop to an online open flow. The Beijing National Art Foundation has built an online funding management platform, where project application, review, supervision, and conclusion are all conducted online. Artists submit materials online, and the system automatically archives them based on region and category; review experts score anonymously online; the public can query project information and implementation progress. Online processing, double-blind review, and full traceability enhance the efficiency of resource allocation while ensuring fairness and transparency.

Resource entities are diversifying. Digital media dissolves the boundaries of resource allocation entities, enabling public art funds to aggregate the forces of government, society, and the market. The Macao Foundation has established an aggregation model of "government funding + corporate funding + public funding." It solicits projects online, encourages corporate sponsorship and donations, and allows ordinary citizens to support projects of interest through small donations. Donors can view project progress in real time, broadening funding sources and strengthening public identification. At the same time, digitalization promotes cross-regional resource linkage. Public art funds from both sides of the Taiwan Strait and Macao jointly build a digital resource sharing platform, carrying out online performances and artist exchanges online, eliminating geographical restrictions on resource circulation.

The allocation goals have achieved a precise upgrade. Big data helps intermediaries identify pain points in the art ecosystem and achieve precise resource allocation. The Beijing National Art Foundation reviewed historical application and funding data, identified the high difficulty faced by young artists and grassroots art groups in accessing resources, and specifically established youth talent projects and regional special funds. It also focuses on supporting traditional art categories such as opera and ethnic opera, facilitating the creative transformation of traditional culture. The Taipei Cultural and Arts Foundation analyzed audience consumption data, captured the aging audience problem in the performing arts market, and added audience development funding projects to support art groups in attracting younger audiences through digital marketing [8].

3.2 Value Construction: From Professional Authority to Pluralistic Co-Governance

Under the traditional model, art intermediaries center on professional authority, and public art funds rely on expert reviews and academic interpretations to define artistic value, thereby forming an elite aesthetic evaluation system. Digitalization has expanded the subjects of value judgment from elites to the general public, and shifted value construction from one-way output to pluralistic co-governance [9].

Value judgment has moved toward diversified participation. Online platforms provide the public with

channels to participate in art value judgment, so artistic value is no longer monopolized entirely by professionals. The Beijing National Art Fund has introduced audience evaluations in its project completion acceptance process, collecting public opinions through online questionnaires and social media comments, and incorporating them into project performance assessments. It also holds online art criticism solicitation events to build an evaluation system combining professional and public reviews. The Taipei Foundation for Culture and Arts has established an online commentary space, inviting experts, creators, and ordinary audiences to jointly discuss artworks, balancing professional guidance with public demands, and broadening the paths for interpreting artistic value.

Value dissemination has undergone digital innovation. Digital technologies have enriched the carriers for art value dissemination, and intermediaries use digital means to expand the reach of art popularization. The Macao Foundation uses VR and AR technologies to transform funded exhibitions and traditional opera performances into digital content for global online dissemination, enhancing the experience; it also uses short videos and lives streaming to popularize professional art knowledge, lowering the threshold for public acceptance [10]. The Beijing National Art Fund has built a digital resource library, digitizing outstanding works and talent project results for open access, establishing a regular dissemination base, and realizing cross-temporal and cross-spatial dissemination of artistic value.

Value guidance has strengthened a public-oriented approach. In the Internet environment, value guidance has shifted from elite aesthetic education to the creation of public aesthetics. Public art funds, based on their public nature, aim to enhance public art literacy and foster a public aesthetic atmosphere. The Beijing National Art Fund carries out online outreach activities such as “Art into Schools” and “Art to Rural Areas,” delivering high-quality art resources to grassroots communities and promoting equal access to public culture; it prioritizes the support of creations on realistic themes and traditional cultural themes, conveying mainstream values through digital dissemination. The Taipei Foundation for Culture and Arts is dedicated to the digital preservation of local culture, supporting digital museums and online folk exhibitions, inheriting regional culture, and shaping cultural confidence.

3.3 Relationship Coordination: From One-Way Connection to Networked Interaction

Traditional art intermediaries relied on one-way information transmission and hierarchical systems to achieve relationship coordination, with public art funds unidirectionally connecting with the government, artists, and audiences to complete resource allocation and value transmission. Digital information technology has restructured relationship patterns, forming a networked interactive landscape, making the intermediary's relationship coordination function more complex and diversified.

Collaborate and interact with art governance entities. Cyberspace broadens intermediary dialogue channels. The Beijing National Arts Fund leverages platforms such as Weibo and WeChat public accounts to solicit project opinions from creators and the general public, establishing real-time feedback loops, shortening psychological distance, and making art projects more aligned with the needs of the masses.

Deeply empowers art producers. In the digital era, intermediaries are no longer merely funders; they have become empowering entities for creators, providing digital support across the entire chain of creation, dissemination, copyright, and promotion. The Beijing National Arts Fund offers digital creation training to its grantees, provides online copyright protection services, builds digital artist archives, and offers online exhibition and academic promotion channels to enhance creators' influence. The Taipei Foundation for Arts and Culture launches digital art incubation programs, funds digital art creation, collaborates with technology companies to provide technical support, and promotes the integration and innovation of art and technology. Intermediaries and creators build a community of shared interests, unleashing creative vitality [9].

Build two-way interaction for art consumers. Digital platforms open up two-way communication channels between intermediaries and audiences. The Macao Foundation conducts public cultural needs research relying on online platforms, adjusts funding directions based on the survey results, simultaneously launches online art courses and interactive experience projects, guiding the public to establish healthy art consumption habits. The Beijing National Art Fund uses big data to analyze audience preferences, achieving precise project recommendations; it opens online comment and feedback channels, collects public suggestions to optimize project design, balances artistic professionalism and public accessibility, and boosts the healthy development of the art consumption market.

IV. CORE CHALLENGES IN DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Digitalization brings opportunities to the transformation of art intermediary functions, while also

giving rise to multiple practical challenges, which are concentrated in three aspects: authority reconstruction, digital divide, and ethical norms.

4.1 Practical Dilemmas in Authority Reconstruction

Digitalization imposes a dual impact on the authority of professional intermediaries: algorithmic recommendations and public reviews weaken the discourse power of professional aesthetics; some platforms chase traffic, spreading entertaining and vulgar content, which impacts traditional aesthetic standards. Public art funds are caught in a dilemma: adhering to professional standards may lead to projects alienating the public; blindly catering to public traffic will sacrifice artistic professionalism. In the practice of the Taipei Foundation for Culture and Arts, it was found that applications for popular entertainment projects increased, while those for experimental avant-garde art declined. How to balance professional standards and public acceptance has become a transformation challenge [10].

4.2 Constraints Caused by the Digital Divide

Differences in digital infrastructure and digital literacy across regions and social classes have created a new digital divide, hindering the equalization of public services. In some remote rural areas of China, digital development lags behind, grassroots artists and the public lack digital skills, and it is difficult for digital funding and popularization to reach the grassroots. In Macao, the elderly and low-income groups lack digital literacy, making it difficult for them to participate in online art activities [11]. The digital divide can easily trigger the Matthew effect, violating the public welfare nature of public art funds.

4.3 Lack of Ethical Norms

Technology is iterating rapidly, but the corresponding ethical supervision mechanisms have not yet been perfected. First, there are risks to data privacy: when intermediaries collect data from creators and the public, there are hidden dangers of leakage and misuse. Second, there is algorithmic ethical bias: algorithm recommendations can easily lead to an imbalance in resource allocation and aesthetic homogenization. Third, there is the challenge of digital copyright protection: in the online environment, the threshold for piracy dissemination is lowered, threatening the rights and interests of artistic works. The digital resource library of the Beijing National Art Fund has experienced problems with works being illegally downloaded and distributed, necessitating a balance between open sharing and copyright protection.

V. VALUE RECONSTRUCTION PATHWAYS FOR ART INTERMEDIARIES

Faced with multiple challenges of digital transformation, art intermediaries should uphold the principle of publicness, reshape their value from multiple dimensions such as mechanism innovation, capacity building, and norm improvement, and shape a new form of intermediary in the digital age.

5.1 Building a Collaborative Governance Mechanism to Balance Diverse Value Demands

Under the digital wave, the professional authority of art intermediaries is challenged and public participation in evaluation somewhat dilutes professional discourse power. In response, art intermediaries should reposition their role in the art ecosystem, consolidate professional capabilities, strengthen social responsibility, and gain public trust through open and transparent operation models. They should build a collaborative governance mechanism involving multiple entities, combining expert review, public feedback, and third-party evaluation, balancing artistic professional standards and public cultural demands, and resolving the contradiction between professional authority and public recognition. [12]

5.2 Strengthening Digital Literacy Development to Bridge the Digital Divide

The digital divide amplifies the uneven distribution of art resources. Intermediaries need to focus on vulnerable groups such as rural populations, the elderly, and grassroots creators, carry out digital skills training, and lower the barriers to using digital platforms. In addition to online digital services, some offline service channels should be retained, complementing online and offline to ensure equal participation of different groups in art activities and build a more inclusive art ecosystem.

5.3 Improve the Ethical Norm System and Uphold the Bottom Line of Publicity

Establish and improve ethical guidelines for digital operations, defining boundaries for data collection, use, and dissemination. At the data ethics level, formulate privacy protection rules, limit the scope of data collection, and use encryption technology to ensure information security; at the algorithm ethics level, optimize algorithm models, correct algorithmic bias, and ensure fairness in resource allocation; at the copyright ethics level, use blockchain to build a digital copyright protection system and combat piracy. Drawing on the experience of the Taipei Foundation for Culture and Arts in establishing an ethical review mechanism for digital projects, domestic public art funds can collaborate with industry authorities to

issue ethical norms for digital operations and set an example for the industry.

5.4 Promote Deep Integration of Technology and Art, and Innovate Intermediary Service Models

Intermediary agencies should proactively embrace digital technologies and innovate service models. Leverage artificial intelligence to optimize the review process, enhancing efficiency and fairness; use VR and AR to create immersive art experiences; rely on big data to study trends in the art ecosystem and optimize funding strategies. The Taipei Foundation for Culture and Arts continues to expand its digital art incubation projects; the Macao Foundation continuously explores online-offline integrated exhibition and performance models. Intermediary agencies must promote the two-way empowerment of technology and art to meet the development needs of the digital art ecosystem.

VI. CONCLUSION

The digital wave brings both opportunities and challenges to the role of art intermediaries. Art intermediaries need to ground themselves in the three core functions of resource allocation, value construction, and relationship coordination, and complete the transformation from "gatekeeper" to "ecosystem builder." [13] As art intermediaries with public attributes, public art foundations' digitalization efforts concern not only institutional operational efficiency but also profoundly influence the overall art ecosystem. The practical experiences of public art foundations across the Taiwan Strait and Macao offer valuable references for various types of art intermediary institutions.

Looking ahead, art intermediaries should uphold public interest objectives, leverage technological innovation as a driver, role transformation as a vehicle, and conceptual reshaping as the core. While maintaining professional standards, they must respond to public demands; while promoting artistic innovation, they must adhere to aesthetic criteria, thereby fostering an open and healthy art ecosystem. Future research can further expand cross-national and cross-regional empirical comparisons, analyze the logic of digital evolution of art intermediaries in different socio-cultural contexts, and provide more references for formulating development strategies for art intermediary institutions.

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The Architecture of Forgotten Past: A Psychological and Literary Critique of Anterograde Amnesia in TAMIL film *"Ghajini" (2005)*

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Abstract— *Literature and film studies often go hand in hand as they both are intertwined with each other. The integration of Psychology into film studies is an unavoidable topic. Psychology becomes a major discourse in both literature and film studies. This paper aims to study Anterograde amnesia through a Tamil film Ghajini 2005. The protagonist of this film leads a normal life like others but his life turns upside down after a severe injury in his head. He cannot lead a normal life like others. His memory wipes everything clean after every 15 minutes, he couldn't recognise people, events, things, incidents that have happened during this period. He barely remembers certain repeated faces and repeated events. He maintains everything in a record, through polaroid photographs and notes. This paper could further be explored as a study of trauma.*

Keywords— ***Amnesia, Psychology, memory loss, mental trauma, cinema.***

Introduction

Few domains of knowledge are as vast multifaceted and inherently interdisciplinary as literature far beyond being a mere expression of human life are repository of artistic and literary words, literature serves as a profound , intellectual space through which human experience emotions, cultures, Identities, Ideologies and social relations are explored and interpreted. Its expansive nature is further reflected in its inextricably interconnectedness, with diverse disciplines including Linguistics, Cultural studies, Psychology, translation studies, media studies and comparative literature. Thus, literature transcends disciplinary boundaries, continually engaging with multiple forms of knowledge to illuminate the complex relationship between language , society, culture,and the human condition. It is ironic that the celluloid world, initially a powerful medium for awakening political consciousness against colonial rule, gradually became a source of entertainment in independent India. As audiences became increasingly fanatical about cinema , psychology turned its attention to an entirely different realm, the intricate workings of the human heart and mind, revealing an inner world of emotions, desires,motives,and conflicts that remained unexplored.

Exploration of psychology:

Psychology ventures beyond the visible manifestation of human behaviour to explore the seemingly miraculous and inexplicable dimensions of the human mind. It seeks to unravel the hidden forces underlying the individuals thoughts, emotions, perceptions and actions,thereby revealing the intricate psychological profile that lies beneath the surface of observable behaviour.hardly has any other films achieved such remarkable box office success , captivated millions and millions of viewers, and generated millions in revenue across linguistic boundaries as films that have primarily exposed amnesia a complex disorder of memory.

Amnesia is a neurological and psychological condition that causes significant and abnormal memory loss. Hardly does an individual suffering from amnesia or amnestic syndrome

retain a crystal clear reconstruction of facts, experiences, and previously acquired information. The disorder may impact the individual's ability to recall personal experiences, recognisable familiar information or even maintain a clear sense of identity. Nevertheless, amnesia does not invariably affect the capacity to acquire new memories, this depends largely on its type, cause, and severity. Moreover, amnesia need not be permanent as certain forms may occur as temporary episodes of memory loss and resolve partially or completely over time.

Amnesia is not in itself an inherent disease, rather it's a memory disorder that may arise from injury or damage to brain regions integral to memory processing. Once the underlying cause is accurately identified and appropriately treated therapeutic strategies may help recover, reinforce, or compensate for impaired memories, although the extent of recovery varies according to the nature and severity of the underlying condition. In some cases of short term memory, individuals may paradoxically preserve deeply ingrained remote memories while struggling to form new ones. They might effortlessly revive childhood recollections, recall historical names and even identify the current president, or recall daily routines like what they had for breakfast. This differential memory pattern highlights the complex neural distinctions between recent memory encoding, long standing consolidated memory traces. Hardly does amnesia impair a person's overall intelligence and awareness or well established learning skills.

Individuals may continue to perform familiar activities such as driving or playing musical instruments and may remain aware of their own memory impairment.

Anterograde Amnesia in Ghajini:

Anterograde amnesia is a type of amnesia in which a person cannot remember the events, faces, characters, incidents before the injury. In films this anterograde amnesia is a primary theme and it has often been portrayed through a great many characters. A famous tamil film *Ghajini (2005)* starring Surya, Asin, Nayanthara is focused mainly on this complex. The film begins with Chitra, a medical student who finds a case study of Sanjay Ramasamy who has been affected by amnesia; she further investigates him through her professor and shows an interest in his case. Her professor explains that this patient has a condition called anterograde amnesia in which he only remembers events or incidents that happen for fifteen minutes after which he forgets everything. His memory only retains information such as his daily activities, skills, hobbies, interests and the day when he met an accident and events related to that , chithra is curious to know about this case but her professor warns as it involves a criminal case.

But out of curiosity she sets out to investigate on her own and comes to know that Sanjay Ramasamy is a wealthy business man once and followed by a serious head injury his memory wipes clean for every fifteen minutes. He keeps a track of things in the form of polaroid photographs and handwritten notes and permanent tattoos inked on his own body. At the same time inspector ravi is in search of a culprit who is in charge of recent murders and finds that culprit is Sanjay Ramasamy. Chitra befriends Sanjay to know about his lifestyle and routine and even tries to visit his flat in his absence , she is shocked to know that inspector is being tied up there and get to know that Sanjay is a criminal who takes photographs of people and marks their pictures with a date (the date in which they are going to be killed by Sanjay). Chitra finds a photograph of Lakshman, owner of a pharmaceutical company, marked with a deadline. She warns Lakshman of the impending danger and his henchmen break through the flat of Sanjay, knock him unconscious and erase all the records including sanjays tattoos and phone numbers.

Chitra happened to come across a diary of Sanjay Ramasamy 2002 to 2003. Sanjay meets a girl named Kalpana, a growing ad film model and he falls in love with her without revealing his identity. She accepts his proposal and postpones their marriage due to her commitment.

One day he sets out for a business trip. Digging further on her chitra pieces up the story of what has happened , Kalpana also sets out to Bombay for an ad film , while on her journey in train she finds out that 25 young girls have been smuggled to Mumbai and Kolkata and she stops and secures them . It is revealed that Lakshman is the ring leader of the smuggling group and kills 2 girls to disclose the matter . He hunts for Kalpana on her flat and kills her in front of Sanjay and Sanjay is brutally hit by an iron rod.and thus causes his amnesia.

Chitra helps Sanjay to track Lakshman and he fights with Lakshman as well as with his twin Ram who tries to safeguard his brother from Sanjay. Eventually both the villains meet their ends in the hands of Sanjay.

CONCLUSION

This film is inspired by Christopher Nolan's *Memento (2000)*. This became a major commercial hit in 2005 and it was later remade into Hindi in 2005 by the same director Murugadoss starring Air khan, Asin. This film also leads to trauma studies as the trauma of losing his beloved haunts him in the present and turns him into a criminal .

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Relational Professionalism and Continuing Professional Development of English Language Teachers in India: Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategies

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Abstract— *Continuing Professional Development (CPD) is an essential part of English language teachers' professional lives because language, learner needs, educational technologies, and pedagogical expectations continue to change. This conceptual paper examines how relational professionalism—the quality of professional relationships through which teachers learn with and from colleagues, mentors, teacher educators, researchers, and wider communities—can strengthen CPD in the Indian context. Drawing on established literature on language teacher development, reflective practice, professional learning, and teacher professional development, the paper discusses the meaning of relational professionalism, the purposes and features of effective CPD, and challenges that may restrict teachers' participation. It considers self-directed learning, reflective practice, classroom-based inquiry, peer observation, mentoring, professional associations, academic writing, digital learning, and collaborative professional communities. The paper argues that professional development is more likely to be meaningful when it is sustained, relevant to teachers' subject and context, connected to classroom practice, and supported by collegial relationships rather than limited to one-off workshops. It also relates these principles to India's National Education Policy 2020, which calls for continuing opportunities for teacher learning and specifies an expectation of at least 50 hours of CPD annually. As a conceptual discussion rather than an empirical study, the paper does not claim to measure the impact of any particular programme. It concludes with practical recommendations for teachers, institutions, and professional development providers.*

Keywords— ***relational professionalism; English language teaching; continuing professional development; reflective practice; teacher collaboration; classroom-based research; India***

I. INTRODUCTION

English has an important role in Indian higher education, professional communication, research, and access to wider academic and employment opportunities. English language teachers therefore work in varied contexts and support learners with different levels of proficiency, educational experiences, linguistic repertoires, and learning goals. Effective teaching requires more than subject knowledge: teachers also need pedagogical judgement, appropriate assessment practices, inclusive approaches, and the ability to adapt instruction to learners' needs. The British Council's CPD framework similarly emphasises subject knowledge, understanding learners and context, assessment, inclusive and multilingual practices, and the use of digital technologies (British Council, n.d.).

These responsibilities make professional learning a continuing process rather than an activity completed at the beginning of a career. Richards and Farrell (2005) describe a range of approaches to language teacher development, including self-monitoring, teaching journals, peer observation, teacher support groups, portfolios, peer coaching, and action research. Research on professional development also suggests that effective programmes tend to be content-focused, active, collaborative, supported by

modelling and coaching, and sustained over time (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009).

Professional learning, however, does not occur only through individual reading or formal training. Teachers also learn through conversations, observation, shared planning, mentoring, and the exchange of classroom experiences. This relational dimension is central to the idea of relational professionalism. Professional relationships can help teachers test ideas, reflect critically on practice, and develop a sense of shared responsibility for student learning. Wenger's (1998) account of communities of practice provides a useful lens for understanding how people learn through participation in shared professional activity.

This paper discusses the relationship between relational professionalism and CPD for English language teachers in India. It outlines relevant concepts, reviews practical development strategies, identifies constraints that teachers and institutions may need to address, and proposes recommendations. The paper is conceptual and literature-informed; it does not report original survey, interview, or classroom-observation data.

II. CONCEPTUALISING RELATIONAL PROFESSIONALISM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Relational professionalism may be understood here as a way of practising a profession in which professional knowledge, judgement, responsibility, and improvement are developed and exercised through constructive relationships with others. In English language teaching, these relationships may include teacher–teacher collaboration, mentoring between experienced and less experienced colleagues, dialogue with teacher educators, engagement with researchers, and participation in subject associations or professional networks. The term is used in this paper as an organising concept, not as a claim that one universally accepted definition exists.

A relational approach does not replace individual expertise. Instead, it recognises that teachers' decisions are strengthened when they can explain their reasoning, receive feedback, consider alternative interpretations, and learn from colleagues' experiences. Communities of practice offer one way to understand this process: participants develop shared practices and professional understanding through sustained engagement around common concerns (Wenger, 1998). In schools and higher education institutions, such engagement may take the form of subject meetings, peer observation, collaborative lesson planning, reading groups, mentoring, or joint classroom inquiry.

Relational professionalism should not be confused with uncritical agreement or informal friendship. Productive professional relationships require trust, respect, confidentiality where appropriate, openness to evidence, and the freedom to question established routines. Peer feedback is most useful when it focuses on a clearly identified teaching question and supports improvement rather than ranking or blaming colleagues. Institutions can encourage this culture by providing time for collaboration and recognising professional learning as part of teachers' work.

For English language teachers, collaboration can be especially valuable when addressing multilingual classrooms, uneven learner proficiency, speaking anxiety, reading comprehension, academic writing, and the integration of digital resources. Colleagues may share materials, compare student work, discuss assessment criteria, and consider whether a teaching strategy is appropriate for a particular group. Such decisions should remain sensitive to local context; a strategy that works in one class may need adaptation in another (British Council, n.d.).

III. CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CONCEPT AND SIGNIFICANCE

Continuing Professional Development refers to ongoing learning through which teachers maintain, extend, and refine their professional knowledge and practice. It can be formal, such as a course, workshop, conference, or qualification, or informal, such as professional reading, reflective journaling, peer discussion, classroom experimentation, and mentoring. Richards and Farrell (2005) emphasise that teacher development can be supported by practical activities embedded in teachers' everyday work, rather than being restricted to externally delivered training.

Effective CPD should be connected to teachers' subject matter and the challenges they encounter in classrooms. Desimone (2009) identifies a set of core features that can help researchers and practitioners conceptualise professional development, including content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation. A review of 35 methodologically rigorous studies by Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) likewise identifies content focus, active learning, collaboration, models of effective practice, coaching or expert support, feedback and reflection, and sustained duration as recurring features of effective professional development. These findings support the view that a single workshop, without follow-up

or classroom application, may be insufficient to produce lasting change.

In India, the National Education Policy 2020 calls for continuing opportunities for teachers to learn about new developments and innovations, including through workshops and online modules. It states that each teacher is expected to participate in at least 50 hours of CPD opportunities annually, guided by professional interests and needs (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020, para. 5.15). This policy direction makes it important for institutions to plan CPD as a coherent and accessible process. The number of hours alone, however, should not be treated as proof of quality; relevance, participation, reflection, and application to teaching also matter.

For English language teachers, CPD can support the development of communicative and learner-centred teaching, inclusive and multilingual pedagogy, assessment literacy, digital competence, materials development, and research-informed decision-making. It can also help teachers identify areas for growth throughout their careers. The British Council's framework presents professional development as a continuing process that teachers can use to assess their strengths, identify priorities, and plan next steps (British Council, n.d.).

IV. CHALLENGES IN THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

4.1 Time and workload

Teaching, assessment, student support, administrative responsibilities, and institutional duties can leave limited time for professional reading, research, or collaborative planning. Where CPD is added to existing workloads without protected time, participation may become a compliance exercise rather than a meaningful learning opportunity. Institutions can respond by allocating time for peer observation, reading groups, mentoring, and post-training reflection.

4.2 Financial and geographical barriers

Travel, registration fees, accommodation, and access to reliable internet may limit participation in conferences and specialist training, particularly for teachers working in resource-constrained settings. Online learning can reduce some costs, but it does not eliminate barriers such as connectivity, device availability, digital confidence, or the need for interaction. A balanced CPD plan should therefore include low-cost local collaboration alongside suitable online and face-to-face options.

4.3 Unequal institutional support

Teachers' opportunities can differ according to institutional leadership, available resources, staffing, and the presence of a professional learning culture. Where teachers are not given time, encouragement, or access to relevant resources, individual motivation alone may not be sufficient. Professional development is more likely to be sustained when institutional priorities, teacher needs, and opportunities for classroom application are aligned (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

4.4 Limited follow-up and transfer to practice

A workshop may introduce useful ideas, but teachers also need opportunities to try them, examine learner responses, receive feedback, and adapt them. Without follow-up, new knowledge may remain separate from everyday teaching. CPD providers should therefore include classroom tasks, reflective records, peer discussion, and follow-up meetings rather than judging success only by attendance.

4.5 Diverse learner needs and language backgrounds

English language classrooms in India may include learners with different home languages, prior educational opportunities, confidence levels, and proficiency. Teachers need to select approaches that fit their learners and context instead of assuming that one method will work uniformly. Professional dialogue and classroom inquiry can help teachers examine how learners respond to particular tasks and adapt teaching accordingly (British Council, n.d.).

4.6 Research and publication pressures

Academic writing and publication can help teachers share knowledge, but limited research training, time, access to scholarly literature, and unfamiliarity with publication ethics can create difficulties. Publication should not become a substitute for improving teaching or a numbers-only measure of professional competence. Teachers who undertake research should use transparent methods, protect learner privacy, cite sources accurately, and distinguish evidence from personal impressions (Borg, 2013).

5. Strategies for Enhancing Professional Competence

5.1 Self-directed learning and reflective practice

Teachers can begin by identifying one or two realistic development goals, such as improving feedback on student writing, increasing meaningful student talk, or making assessment criteria clearer. A professional learning log can record the goal, the action taken, evidence collected, and the next step. Reflective practice involves examining not only what happened but also why it happened, what assumptions shaped the lesson, and what could be changed. Farrell (2015) offers a framework for reflecting

on teachers' philosophies, principles, theories of practice, classroom actions, and learning beyond a single lesson.

Reflection becomes more useful when it draws on evidence such as student work, learner feedback, observation notes, or assessment patterns rather than memory alone. Teachers should avoid assuming that an activity succeeded simply because students appeared engaged; they should consider whether the activity supported the intended learning outcome.

5.2 Technology-integrated English language teaching

Digital tools can support language learning through audio and video materials, online discussion, collaborative writing, pronunciation practice, digital quizzes, and access to authentic texts. Teachers can also use online CPD modules and webinars to access professional learning beyond their institutions. Technology should be selected according to learning objectives, accessibility, data privacy, and learners' available devices and connectivity. Digital novelty by itself does not guarantee improved learning; teachers need to evaluate whether a tool supports the specific language skill being taught (British Council, n.d.).

5.3 Classroom-based research and pedagogical innovation

Classroom-based inquiry allows teachers to investigate a focused question arising from their own practice. For example, a teacher might examine whether structured peer feedback helps students revise paragraphs more effectively, or whether short pre-reading tasks improve participation in a reading lesson. A manageable inquiry includes a clear question, an appropriate method of collecting evidence, careful interpretation, and reflection on limitations. Borg (2013) discusses the importance and complexity of teacher research in language teaching. Teachers should not overgeneralise from a small classroom activity, but local evidence can still inform responsible decisions.

5.4 Professional associations and collaborative learning

Professional associations, departmental groups, teacher forums, and subject networks can provide opportunities to share resources, discuss teaching challenges, and learn about developments in the field. Within an institution, teachers can establish regular discussion groups around a common theme, such as teaching academic vocabulary, assessing speaking, or supporting multilingual learners. Communities of practice are most productive when participation is sustained and members work on shared professional questions (Wenger, 1998).

5.5 Seminars, workshops, and conferences

Seminars and conferences can introduce new ideas, enable teachers to meet colleagues, and provide opportunities to present classroom experiences or research. To maximise value, participants should identify a learning goal before attending and plan how to apply or share one relevant idea afterwards. Institutions can strengthen the impact of these events by organising short follow-up discussions, peer demonstrations, or departmental sharing sessions.

5.6 Academic writing and research publication

Writing about classroom practice can help teachers clarify their thinking and make professional learning available to others. Potential outputs include reflective case studies, action-research reports, teaching materials with a rationale, and literature-based discussions. Authors should ensure that claims are supported by appropriate sources and evidence, references are accurate, and the selected journal's scope and publication requirements are understood. Ethical practice includes avoiding plagiarism, fabricated data, duplicate submission, and misleading claims about results.

5.7 Mentoring, peer observation, and professional networking

Mentoring can help less experienced teachers navigate lesson planning, classroom interaction, assessment, and institutional expectations. Peer observation can also benefit experienced teachers when it is collaborative rather than punitive. Before an observation, the teachers should agree on a focus—for example, the distribution of student talk or the clarity of instructions. Afterwards, they can discuss observations, consider alternatives, and agree on a manageable next step. Richards and Farrell (2005) identify peer observation, teacher support groups, peer coaching, and teaching journals as practical strategies for language teacher development.

5.8 Online courses and continuing teacher education

Online courses, webinars, digital libraries, and recorded lectures can provide flexible access to professional learning. Teachers should select courses based on relevance, credibility, learning outcomes, and opportunities to apply the learning. A course completion certificate may document participation, but teachers should also record what they learned, how they used it, and what evidence suggests that the change was useful. A blended approach—combining online content with local discussion and classroom application—can help connect flexible access with professional relationships.

V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION

The literature reviewed in this paper suggests that CPD is best understood as an ongoing cycle of identifying needs, learning, trying out ideas, examining evidence, receiving feedback, and revising practice. Relational professionalism strengthens this cycle by creating opportunities for teachers to learn with colleagues and mentors. It can help reduce professional isolation and make individual reflection more dialogic, while also allowing institutions to develop shared approaches to teaching and assessment. These are conceptual implications drawn from the literature; the present paper does not provide original empirical evidence that a particular relational model produces specified student outcomes.

Three implications follow. First, CPD should be connected to the subject and teaching context. English language teachers need development opportunities that address language pedagogy, learner diversity, assessment, materials, and digital practice rather than generic training alone. Second, CPD should be sustained and collaborative. Workshops can be valuable starting points, but follow-up activities, mentoring, peer observation, and classroom inquiry can support the transfer of learning into practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Desimone, 2009). Third, professional learning should be supported by institutional arrangements. Teachers need time, access to resources, constructive feedback, and leadership that treats development as part of professional work.

In the Indian context, the National Education Policy 2020 provides a policy basis for regular professional learning and multiple modes of delivery, including workshops and online modules (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2020). Implementation should nevertheless account for differences in institutional resources, teacher responsibilities, learner populations, and access to technology. A flexible framework that combines individual goals with collaborative support is more likely to respond to these differences than a uniform checklist of activities.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STRENGTHENING CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The following recommendations are proposed for teachers, departments, institutions, and CPD providers:

- Conduct an annual needs assessment using teacher self-reflection, learner feedback, peer discussion, and relevant classroom evidence.
- Prepare an individual CPD plan with a small number of specific, achievable goals and review it periodically.
- Provide protected time for professional reading, collaborative planning, mentoring, peer observation, and classroom-based inquiry.
- Design workshops around active participation and classroom application, with follow-up sessions to discuss outcomes and difficulties.
- Establish mentoring arrangements and voluntary professional learning communities with clear purposes and a supportive, non-punitive ethos.
- Improve access to credible online learning resources while considering connectivity, devices, accessibility, and teachers' digital confidence.
- Encourage small-scale classroom research and reflective writing, while providing guidance on research design, citation, publication ethics, and learner privacy.
- Evaluate CPD through more than attendance or certificates: consider teacher reflections, changes in teaching materials or practices, peer feedback, and appropriate evidence of learner engagement or progress.
- Recognise that professional learning is context-sensitive and allow teachers to adapt strategies to local linguistic, cultural, institutional, and educational conditions.
- Align institutional CPD planning with relevant policy expectations, including the CPD provisions of the National Education Policy 2020, without treating hours completed as the sole indicator of quality.

VII. CONCLUSION

Continuing Professional Development is central to the ongoing work of English language teachers, but its value depends on the relevance, quality, and application of learning. Relational professionalism highlights that teachers develop not only through independent study and formal training but also through constructive professional relationships, shared inquiry, mentoring, observation, and dialogue. The literature reviewed here points to the importance of content-focused, active, collaborative, reflective, and sustained development opportunities. In India, the National Education Policy 2020 reinforces the importance of regular teacher learning, while implementation must remain responsive to institutional resources and learner diversity. Teachers can take responsibility for identifying goals and examining their practice, but institutions and CPD providers also have a role in ensuring time, access, feedback, and supportive

professional cultures. As this is a conceptual paper, future empirical research could investigate how different forms of collaborative CPD operate in Indian English language teaching contexts and what kinds of evidence best capture their influence on teachers' practices and learners' experiences.

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The Real Question in Translation — How to Balance the Accuracy of Machine Translation with the Creativity of Human Translation?

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Abstract— *With the rapid development of artificial intelligence and machine learning, machine translation has made remarkable progress in accuracy and speed, and has become a powerful tool for learning languages in the context of globalization. At the same time, however, machine translation still has certain limitations in handling complex language structures, cultural differences, and contextual understanding, so the intervention of human translation is necessary. This study aims to explore how to give full play to the creativity of human translation while ensuring translation accuracy and speed, so as to achieve a balance between machine translation and human translation. It first reviews the historical development of machine translation and human translation, their advantages and disadvantages, and their application in different fields, and discusses the advantages and limitations of machine translation in terms of accuracy and speed, as well as the unique creativity of human translation. The study finds that machine translation is relatively standardized when processing large amounts of textual content, but human translation has a more prominent advantage when it comes to literary or other highly specialized texts. To address this issue, this study proceeds from four strategies: 1. hybrid translation mode; 2. post-editing; 3. customized machine translation; 4. creative intervention of human translation, so as to achieve an effective balance between machine translation and human translation.*

Keywords— ***machine translation, human translation, accuracy, creativity, balance strategy***

I. THE HISTORY AND PROS AND CONS OF MACHINE TRANSLATION

1.1 The History of Machine Translation

The birth of machine translation can be described as a leap from dream to reality. In the 1940s, computers were still a novelty. In 1947, the American mathematician Warren Weaver put forward a bold idea: to use computers for language translation[1] . At the time, the idea sounded like science fiction, but Weaver and his colleagues did not give up. They began to try to use computers to analyze and translate language, which can be regarded as the prototype of machine translation.

By the 1950s, both the United States and the Soviet Union had begun formal research on machine translation. In the Soviet Union, because officials believed that human translation was sufficient to handle foreign scientific and technological information, they showed little interest in the actual results and implementation of machine translation (MT), which led to a rapid decline in research enthusiasm. Nevertheless, machine translation continued to develop in the United States, Japan, the former Soviet Union, and some other countries during the 1960s and 1970s. American research focused mainly on Russian-to-English translation, while Soviet research concentrated on English-to-Russian systems[2] . For example, at the University of Washington (Seattle), Erwin Reifler's research represented the lexicon-based "direct" approach[3] , which involved building large bilingual dictionaries in which lexical information was used not only to select lexical equivalents but also to resolve grammatical issues without using

syntactic analysis. The system was installed for the U.S. Air Force and ran for many years until it was replaced by Systran in 1970. In addition, researchers at the RAND Corporation conducted statistical analyses on a large number of Russian physics texts to extract bilingual word lists and grammatical information, and on this basis wrote a computer program for rough translation. Soviet research was equally vigorous, employing a mixture of empirical and fundamental theoretical methods. At the Institute of Precision Mechanics, the — English-to-Russian translation research led by D. Y. Panov was similar to Georgetown University's research but yielded fewer practical results. Over time, machine translation research gradually formed two major schools: the rule-based approach and the statistical approach. The rule-based approach is like writing a thick grammar book for a computer, telling it the rules of each language. The statistical approach, by contrast, lets the computer learn from a large amount of translated text on its own and identify the patterns.

In the 21st century, with the rapid development of artificial intelligence technology, especially the emergence of neural network technology, machine translation has ushered in a new spring. Neural networks are able to simulate the way the human brain works, which greatly improves the accuracy of machine translation. In 2016, Google launched its neural-network-based translation system, Google Neural Machine Translation (GNMT), marking a major breakthrough in machine translation technology[4] . Today, machine translation has become increasingly intelligent and increasingly accurate. Whether for travel, business, or study, machine translation provides us with great convenience.

1.2 The Pros and Cons of Machine Translation

1.2.1 The Advantages of Machine Translation

Machine translation (MT) technology has continued to advance with the development of artificial intelligence and natural language processing, and it demonstrates obvious advantages in many aspects. Machine translation can process large amounts of text quickly, which is very useful in scenarios requiring instant translation (such as news reports, social media, and customer service). The Canadian Press used the "Ultrad" application to translate English updates from the Canadian Press or the Associated Press into other languages. Since its development in 2018, the application has evolved from basic machine translation to intelligent translation, using machine learning technology to improve accuracy and reduce errors.

Machine translation can process large volumes of standardized documents and product descriptions in a short time, at a relatively low cost. A company may need to translate product manuals from one language into multiple languages for users in different regions. Machine translation can quickly generate an initial translation, which is then subjected to necessary proofreading and adjustment by human translators, thereby greatly reducing translation costs. Advanced machine translation systems such as Google Translate and DeepL can process hundreds or even thousands of characters of text within seconds, greatly improving work efficiency. Related research shows that machine translation combined with post-editing (PE) can significantly save time and cost[5] . Previously, a human-translated project of 180,000 characters took 37 days to complete, whereas machine translation plus post-editing took only 24 days to complete a project of 189,000 characters, saving 13 days and up to 50% of the cost. Machine translation also enables non-specialists to access and understand content in different languages, thereby improving the accessibility of information. At the same time, machine translation can translate the languages of different countries, providing useful information and skills. The vivid conversion between different languages reflects the diversity of machine translation:

1. English to Chinese

Source (English):

"The weather is getting warmer, and the days are getting longer."

Machine translation (Chinese):

"天气变得越来越暖和，白天变得越来越长。"

Machine translation can handle simple everyday expressions. Sometimes the translation result may not be the most natural expression in Chinese, but the meaning is basically accurate.

2. Chinese to English

Source (Chinese):

"春天来了，万物复苏。"

Machine translation (English):

"Spring is coming, and all things are reviving."

In this example, machine translation captures the mood of the original. Although "reviving" is not the most common expression, on the whole it can still convey the vibrant, vital feeling of spring.

3. Spanish to French

Source (Spanish):

"El clima está cambiando rápidamente."

Machine translation (French):

"Le climat change rapidement."

4. German to Japanese

Source (German):

"Die Technologie entwickelt sich ständig."

Machine translation (Japanese):

“技術は絶えず発展しています。”

5. Arabic to Russian

Source (Arabic):

"التكنولوجيا تتطور بسرعة"

Machine translation (Russian):

"Технология быстро развивается."

1.2.2 The Disadvantages of Machine Translation

Although machine translation (MT) has made remarkable progress in many respects, it still has some shortcomings. Sometimes machine translation suffers from insufficient contextual understanding and may find it difficult to accurately grasp the context of a text, including cultural background, humor, irony, and idioms. For example, the English expression "It’s raining cats and dogs"（下着倾盆大雨）, if translated literally, might be rendered by machine translation as “正在下猫和狗”. Sometimes machine translation may make errors in handling complex grammatical structures and sentence patterns, especially in languages whose grammatical structures differ from those commonly seen in the training data. In the case of polysemy, machine translation may find it difficult to choose the correct meaning of a word, resulting in inaccurate translation. The English word "bank" can mean “银行” (bank) or “河岸” (riverbank); if the machine translation system cannot choose the correct meaning based on the context, it may cause confusion. Machine translation usually lacks the creativity and style of human translation and may fail to capture the literary value of the original text or the personal style of the author. When translating poetry or literary works, machine translation may fail to convey the emotional depth and artistic beauty of the original; for example, when Hemingway’s concise style is translated into another language, its unique charm may be lost.

Machine translation results may require human review and editing to ensure accuracy, which adds extra workload[5] . When translating legal documents or medical reports, even if machine translation is used, professional human translators are still needed to carry out careful proofreading and editing to ensure the accuracy and professionalism of the information. In professional fields such as law and medicine, machine translation may not achieve the required accuracy and professionalism, and human translation is still needed. When translating medical research papers, machine translation may fail to accurately translate professional terms, such as “幽门螺杆菌” (Helicobacter pylori), which may cause difficulties for medical professionals in understanding and application. Although machine translation has obvious advantages in processing large amounts of non-specialist texts, human translation remains indispensable in cases requiring high precision, deep contextual understanding, and creative expression. As technology advances, these shortcomings of machine translation may gradually diminish, but its complementary relationship with human translation may persist in the long term.

1.3 Practical Applications of Machine Translation

Machine translation is already widely used in daily life, helping people overcome language barriers and communicate effectively. Machine translation plays an important role in education and learning: students can use it to assist in learning foreign languages and understanding foreign-language textbooks and materials. When traveling abroad, tourists can use machine translation applications such as Google Translate and Youdao Translate to communicate with local people and solve the problem of language barriers, such as asking for directions or ordering food. When researchers consult foreign literature, machine translation can help them quickly understand the general content of the literature and improve reading efficiency. In addition, at international academic conferences, machine translation technology can provide real-time speech translation, facilitating communication among scholars from different language backgrounds. In international trade, when enterprises communicate with overseas customers, machine translation tools can help both parties quickly understand each other’s intentions. For example, merchants and overseas buyers on Alibaba International Station can use machine translation functions to communicate and facilitate the conclusion of transactions. The machine translation approach has many advantages, such as fast development, short cycles, and no need for human intervention; moreover, when training data in a specific field are sufficient, the translation, though not perfect, can still reach a comprehensible level.

In the national machine translation and post-editing competition previously organized by Tencent’s TranSmart, an interactive translation mode was introduced: machine translation could update the translation in real time according to the translation fragments entered by the contestants, so that translators could compare and evaluate the results; after the competition, translators could view the experts’ feedback. In addition, in the Eighth Machine Translation and Post-Editing Competition, contestants were required to edit on the basis of a given machine-translated draft; the system automatically recorded the

contestants' revision traces, and an AI assistant chat window was provided, in which contestants could enter dialogue commands or use preset commands to polish the translation or look up synonyms.

II. THE HISTORY AND PROS AND CONS OF HUMAN TRANSLATION

2.1 The History of Human Translation

The historical development of human translation is a continuous process spanning thousands of years, closely connected with the development of human civilization. In the Earliest human societies, as different tribes and peoples came into contact, simple language exchange and gesture communication gradually evolved into the earliest translation activities. These activities were initially informal and were carried out by merchants, travelers, or diplomats as needed.

With the progress of civilization, especially the invention of writing, translation began to assume a more important role. In ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Mesopotamia, China, and India, translation work was usually undertaken by priests, scholars, or court officials, who converted religious texts, legal provisions, or diplomatic documents from one language into another.

Entering the Middle Ages, translation activities developed further with the needs of religious dissemination and academic research. For example, the translation of the Bible enabled Christianity to spread into different cultural and linguistic environments. At the same time, the Arab world played an important role during this period: Arab scholars translated a large number of Greek, Roman, and Indian scientific, philosophical, and medical works, laying the foundation for the later Renaissance.

During the Renaissance, the rediscovery of and interest in classical culture promoted the translation of a large number of ancient Greek and Roman works. The translators of this period were concerned not only with the conversion of language but also with conveying the style and spirit of the original, marking an important stage in the development of translation practice and theory.

With the colonial expansion of modern Europe and the scientific revolution, the demand for translation increased further. Colonists needed to translate local languages for the purpose of administration, while scientists needed to translate foreign research results to promote the exchange of knowledge. During this period, translation gradually became professionalized, and specialized translators and institutions emerged.

In the modern era, with the development of globalization, the demand for human translation has reached an unprecedented level. Translation is no longer merely the conversion of language but the exchange of culture, technology, and knowledge. Translators need professional language skills and deep cultural understanding to ensure the accuracy and naturalness of translation. At the same time, the translation industry has begun to show a trend toward professionalization and standardization, and translation education and certification have gradually become part of a translator's career.

In terms of technical assistance, since the mid-20th century, the development of computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools has greatly improved translation efficiency and quality. These tools include electronic dictionaries, translation memory software, and terminology management tools, which help translators complete their work more quickly and consistently[6] . The historical development of human translation is a process of continuous evolution, from the initial simple communication to today's highly specialized and standardized industry. With the development of society and the advancement of technology, the forms and methods of human translation are constantly changing, but its core goal — to convey information accurately and effectively — has never changed.

2.2 The Advantages of Human Translation

The advantages of human translation include the ability to accurately understand and convey the semantics and context of the original text, especially when handling complex grammatical structures, polysemy, and capturing the literary value of the original or the author's personal style. Human translation can provide customized services to meet the translation needs of different fields, which is difficult for machine translation to achieve. Human translation can deeply understand the context and cultural background of the original text, thereby providing a more natural and appropriate translation. When translating literary works, human translators can capture the author's intention, emotional coloring, and culturally specific ways of expression. For example, when translating the poems in 《红楼梦》(Dream of the Red Chamber) into English, human translators strive to preserve the artistic conception and rhythm of the poems while ensuring that target readers can understand their deeper meaning. Human translators can creatively express the content of the original text according to the habits and style of the target language, making the translation more vivid and appealing.

In advertising translation, human translators creatively adjust the advertising copy according to the culture and consumer preferences of the target market to make it more attractive. For example, when translating "Just Do It" into Chinese, a human translator may choose

the expression "只管去做", which preserves the motivating meaning of the original while conforming to Chinese expression habits. In professional fields, human translation can accurately understand and use professional terminology, ensuring the professionalism and accuracy of the translation. In medical translation, human translators can accurately translate professional terms in medical reports, such as "幽门螺杆菌" (Helicobacter pylori), and ensure that the translation conforms to the norms and requirements of the medical field. During localization, human translators can customize product descriptions, user manuals, and so on according to the cultural characteristics and consumer habits of the target market. Just as when localizing a game into different language versions, human translators adjust the dialogue and plot in the game according to local culture to make it more relevant to local players. In legal document translation, human translators carry out multiple rounds of proofreading and review to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the translation. For example, when translating an important business contract, a human translator will carefully check every clause to ensure that it complies with legal requirements and is free of ambiguity.

Human translation excels at handling complex, unstructured texts such as poetry, drama, and song lyrics. When translating poetry, human translators strive to preserve the rhythm, rhyme, and emotional expression of the original while producing a translation with equal artistic effect. For example, when translating Shakespeare's sonnets into Chinese, human translators attempt to convey their profound emotion and beauty while preserving the structure of the original poems. Human translation has obvious advantages in translation tasks that require deep understanding, creative expression, and high quality.

2.3 The Disadvantages of Human Translation

At present, with the advancement of science and technology, human translation faces certain challenges in many aspects. Human translation usually requires payment of professional fees, and the cost can be very high, especially in fields requiring professional knowledge, such as legal, medical, or technical translation. Compared with machine translation, human translation is usually slower, especially when processing large amounts of text. This may lead to project delays and affect business processes. Translation quality depends to a large extent on the personal ability of the translator, and differences in skill among different translators may lead to inconsistent translation quality. Translators may feel fatigued after working for long periods, which may affect the accuracy and efficiency of translation and lead to errors and omissions. In the era of big data, human translation finds it difficult to handle massive amounts of textual data, which limits its application in scenarios that require rapid processing of large amounts of information. As business grows, the expansion and management of a human translation team may become complex and expensive, making it difficult to adapt to rapidly changing market demands. The quality of human translation depends to a large extent on the translator's personal experience and knowledge, which may lead to translations in certain fields that are insufficiently professional or accurate. When handling sensitive information, human translation may involve the risk of information leakage, especially when outsourcing translation services. With the development of technology, human translation may find it difficult to keep up with new technological trends, such as the application of artificial intelligence and automation tools. It may also be unable to keep pace with language development, especially emerging Internet slang and industry terminology, which may cause translations to become outdated.

Despite these disadvantages, human translation still has irreplaceable value in translation tasks that require high quality, deep understanding, and creative expression. With the development of technology, the combined use of human translation and machine translation (such as post-editing) may become a trend to overcome these disadvantages and improve the overall efficiency and quality of translation.

III. HOW TO BALANCE MACHINE TRANSLATION AND HUMAN TRANSLATION

3.1 Hybrid Translation Mode

The hybrid translation mode is a translation method that combines the efficiency of machine translation with the accuracy of human translation. By rationally allocating the tasks of machine translation and human translation, it achieves a balance between translation efficiency and quality. Generally, through pre-translation and initial draft generation, machine translation tools (such as DeepL, Kimi, 小牛, Google Translate, etc.) can be used to quickly generate an initial translation draft, which is especially suitable for texts with large volume and relatively standardized content. Human translators then review the initial draft generated by machine translation, focusing on issues such as grammatical errors, misuse of words, and incoherent logic, and make corrections.

Secondly, a certain division of labor is needed: texts with simple structures, high repetition, or clear patterns are assigned to machine translation, such as the standardized

terminology in product manuals. Texts involving cultural background, metaphors, professional terminology, or complex logic are translated by human translators. Grammatical and spelling checks are performed on machine translation results to correct obvious errors, or the machine translation results are comprehensively revised, including adjusting sentence structure, optimizing word choice, and ensuring semantic accuracy. For people engaged in translation-related work, it is very important to build a translation memory database. Professional tools such as Déjà Vu or Trados are used to store translated content in the translation memory database, so that machine translation can refer to the content in the memory database when processing new texts, thereby improving the consistency and accuracy of translation. For example, when related research mentions the translation of the paper《海上风电支撑我国能源转型发展的思考》[7-8], the original contains the four-character expression "西富东贫、北多南少". Machine translation usually renders it literally as "rich in the west and poor in the east, more in the north and less in the south", which, though complete in meaning, is not concise enough. Human translation optimizes it to "rich in the west and north, poor in the east and south", which not only shortens the length but also, by using "but" instead of "and", clearly reproduces the logical meaning of the original. In another factory business translation project involving Thai, Mongolian, and Spanish, the project team adopted a hybrid mode of rapid pre-translation and human proofreading:

1. Machine pre-translation:

   The translation project manager configured the target language in the translation platform and enabled the machine translation function to quickly pre-translate the product interface, menus, prompts, and so on.

2. Human proofreading:

   Proofreaders proofread the pre-translated content, correct machine translation errors, and optimize the expressions. For example, machine translation may render "谷电供热/冷" literally as "valley electricity for heating/cooling", while human proofreading optimizes it to "valley electricity for heating and cooling", making the expression more natural.

3. Updating and testing:

   The proofread translation is updated into the product by implementation staff, and testers verify the page display and functionality. Through this hybrid translation mode, the project greatly shortened the translation cycle and reduced translation costs while ensuring translation quality.

The key to the hybrid translation mode lies in rationally allocating the tasks of machine translation and human translation and giving full play to the advantages of both. Machine translation can quickly generate initial drafts and handle simple and repetitive content, while human translation focuses on correcting errors, optimizing expressions, and handling complex content. Through post-editing and the maintenance of translation memory databases and terminology databases, translation efficiency and quality can be further improved.

3.2 Post-Editing (PE)

Whether it is machine translation or human translation, both need to face the issue of translation correction when dealing with large workloads. It can be said that nothing is perfect, and all kinds of problems always arise in the process of translation. On this basis, post-editing needs to be considered. Post-editing of machine translation (PEMT) is an efficient translation mode that combines machine translation with human translation: an initial draft is generated by machine translation, and then human translators edit and correct it, thereby achieving an effective balance between translation efficiency and quality[5] . First, it is necessary to choose the most appropriate vocabulary: machine translation may not be able to accurately understand the meaning of words in context, so translators need to select the most appropriate words in combination with the theme and context of the text. Moreover, machine translation may not be accurate enough in translating proper nouns and terminology, so translators need to make adjustments according to the specific field. The word order of sentences generated by machine translation is adjusted according to the expression habits of the target language. Machine translation may generate overly complex sentence patterns, which translators need to simplify and optimize.

At the discourse level, connectives and other elements can be added to make the translation more coherent; machine translation may make errors in pronoun reference, and translators need to trace back to the original text to clarify the referent. This is followed by quality assessment and optimization: selecting high-confidence translations for editing. Through quality assessment methods, translations with high confidence from machine translation are selected for post-editing, while translations with low confidence are translated directly by humans. For example, when translating the book 《Growing Hope》, the translator used DeepL to generate an initial draft and then performed post-editing[9] . For example:

Source:

I was taken to see one of the survivors.

DeepL translation:

"我被带去看了其中一个幸存者。"

Post-editing:

"有人带我去看了其中一棵幸存之树。"

Analysis:

In this context, "survivor" refers to the camphor tree that survived the atomic bombing, so "幸存者" should be changed to "幸存之树".

In addition, when translating the article 《加速构建电为核心的现代能源体系》, the translator optimized the machine translation result[10] :

Source:

"实现……全面替代。"

Machine translation:

achieve a comprehensive replacement

Post-editing:

With the development of energy storage technology, based on the above-mentioned electricity for hydrogen production, heating/cooling and other energy storage to replace oil and gas with new energy, chemical energy storage will be deployed in the power system on a large scale to completely replace fossil energy once the cost is affordable.

The translator adjusted the word order and sentence structure to make the translation conform more closely to English expression habits and enhance semantic coherence.

When translating 《工业操作手册》(Industrial Operating Manual), the translator used an intelligent CAT tool for post-editing:

Process:

AI translation → human editing → automatic QA check → manual error quality detection.

Strategy:

By optimizing translation prompts, ensuring that the translation conforms to the terminology and style requirements of the specific field while avoiding repeated revision.

Through this mode, translators can quickly produce high-quality translations and significantly improve translation efficiency. The post-editing mode generates an initial draft through machine translation and then has it edited and optimized by humans, which can effectively improve translation efficiency while ensuring translation quality. In practice, translators need to make meticulous adjustments at the lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels, combined with quality assessment and optimization strategies, in order to achieve the desired translation effect.

3.3 Customized Machine Translation

Customized machine translation is a method of adjusting a machine translation engine to suit the needs of a specific field, terminology, or style. It can effectively combine the efficiency of machine translation with the accuracy of human translation, thereby achieving a balance between translation efficiency and quality. Customized machine translation can improve translation accuracy and consistency by integrating translation memory (TM) and terminology lists. For example, by uploading a company-specific terminology list, the machine translation engine can translate according to the established terminology conventions, thereby reducing the workload of later human editing. It is also possible to select an appropriate machine translation engine according to the characteristics of the industry. Life science companies can use specialized medical MT engines to reduce technical errors. In addition, fine-tuning pre-trained models through techniques such as low-rank adapters (LoRA) can further improve translation quality[11] . Quality benchmarks and regular feedback mechanisms should be established to continuously improve the translation workflow. By evaluating the output quality of machine translation, the translation engine and editing strategies can be continuously optimized.

Human editors adjusted the word order and sentence structure to make the translation conform more closely to English expression habits and enhance semantic coherence. In terms of corporate applications of customized translation, both Bluebeam and Vimeo are trying to use customized machine translation engines to handle technical support materials and user documents, for example:

Bluebeam:

By using a workflow combining machine translation with later human editing, the turnaround time was shortened from an average of nine days to five days.

Vimeo:

Vimeo invested in customized MT engine training and achieved satisfactory results in the translation of support content.

Both companies emphasized the importance of human editing to ensure translation accuracy and brand consistency. Customized machine translation, by combining the efficiency of machine translation with the accuracy of human translation, can effectively improve translation efficiency and quality. By making use of translation memory, selecting appropriate machine

translation engines, combining later human editing, and implementing quality assurance processes, a balance between translation efficiency and quality can be achieved. Recent translation practice cases show that customized machine translation has achieved remarkable results both in the translation of energy-related texts and in the translation of corporate technical support materials.

3.4 Creative Intervention of Human Translation

In translation practice, the creative intervention of human translation is the key to achieving a balance between machine translation and human translation. Through creative editing by humans, the shortcomings of machine translation in semantic understanding, logical coherence, and cultural adaptability can be compensated for, thereby improving the overall quality of translation. Machine translation may not be able to accurately understand the context and metaphors of the original text, so during human intervention it is necessary to carefully analyze the context to ensure translation accuracy. For example, when translating the word “风口”, machine translation may render it literally as "tuyere" or "windfall", but human translation, combining the context, renders it as "the most competitive power battery", which better fits the context of the original. For professional terminology and complex expressions, human translation can optimize them according to the specific field. For example, in the energy field, human translation can choose more appropriate terms according to the context, such as "low-permeability depressurization injection system". Machine translation may be deficient at the syntactic level, and human translation can make the translation conform more closely to the expression habits of the target language by adjusting the word order and optimizing the sentence structure. Subjectless sentences are used frequently in Chinese; machine translation usually translates them directly, whereas human translation can optimize the translation by adding a subject or changing the sentence pattern. For example, when translating “鼓励和复制……商业模式”, human translation renders it as "Great energy will be channeled into encouraging and replicating……", making the logic clearer.

When translating the paper 《海上风电支撑我国能源转型发展的思考》[8], the translator handled the subjectless sentences creatively. For example:

Source:

> “四是打造‘电为核心能源体系’三个区域示范。鼓励和复制……商业模式，推广化石能源替代示范。”

Machine translation:

> Fourth, we will build three regional demonstrations of “electricity as the core energy system”. Encourage and copy……

Human post-editing:

> The fourth is to establish three demonstration zones characterized by electricity-centered energy system. Great energy will be channeled into encouraging and replicating……

Through adding a subject and changing the sentence pattern, human translation makes the logic of the translation clearer and avoids the literal-translation problem of machine translation. Through the creative intervention of human translation, the shortcomings of machine translation can be effectively compensated for, thereby achieving a balance between translation efficiency and quality. The specific methods include contextual understanding and metaphor handling, optimizing terminology and expressions, syntactic adjustment and logical optimization, and the handling of subjectless sentences. The creative intervention of human translation can be effectively combined with machine translation to achieve balance.

IV. CONCLUSION

Machine translation can process large amounts of text quickly, saving time for human translation and allowing translators to focus on complex sentences or professional terminology that require fine adjustment. Human translation can compensate for the shortcomings of machine translation in understanding complex contexts and cultural backgrounds, ensuring that the final translation conforms to the habits and cultural background of the target language. By reducing the workload of human translation, translation costs are lowered while a relatively high translation quality is maintained. Through customized machine translation engines, combined with field-specific terminology lists and translation memory databases, the accuracy and consistency of translation can be further improved. Platforms such as Weglot, by combining machine translation with human review functions, achieve a balanced approach that ensures both speed and accuracy. Regularly evaluating the output quality of machine translation and optimizing it according to feedback continuously improves the performance of the translation engine. The effective combination of machine translation and human translation can not only improve translation efficiency and quality but also reduce costs and adapt to changing market demands. This collaborative working model is mainly realized through 1. hybrid translation mode; 2. post-editing; 3. customized machine translation; 4. creative intervention of human translation, and is likely

to be a major trend in the modern translation industry, helping to promote the overall development of translation services.

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Navigating Ecological Dystopia and Apocalyptic Predictions in Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times*

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Abstract— *This paper intends to explore ecological dystopian reality and subsequent apocalyptic scenario caused by excessive exploitation of Nature as exposed in Amitav Ghosh's fabulous book The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times (2022). Contextualizing within a dystopian set-up, Ghosh's The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times operates as one of the most significant pieces of writing which brilliantly exposes the man-Nature interaction considering human beings as an integral part of Nature. The narrative exhibits an ecological dystopia where the Great Mountain or the Mahaparbat and its native dwellers have gone through a terrible catastrophe. By mapping the consequences of both harmony and disconnectedness among living and non-living beings of the environment, the narrative concentrates on analyzing the reasons behind this imbalanced man-Nature relationship and its adverse impact upon the environment. However, by encapsulating the ideas of Deep Ecology, Eco-criticism and the features of apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic literature, Ghosh's text tries to reconcile this imbalanced relationship through an awareness of following sustainable outlook in terms of the protection of Nature.*

Keywords— ***Ecological dystopia, Deep Ecology, Eco-criticism, climate change, apocalyptic predictions, Amitav Ghosh***

I. INTRODUCTION

The growing popularity of the writings regarding Environment and its degradation signifies the urgency of rectifying the reasons behind the imbalanced man-Nature relationship at present time. Although the slogan of 'environmental crisis' started in the 1970s, rapid extinction and growing environmental breakdown have increased its velocity in the 21st century. Simultaneously, the implications of its importance have found manifestation within the global literary and cultural paradigm. The plethora of contemporary writings and films especially depicts these dystopian realities and anxieties through the scenario of rapid change and alteration of ecological processes leading to global warming and species extinction. They present that the reason behind the catastrophic end engulfing the human race is not nuclear bombs, but environmental degradation. However, the articulation of these environmental catastrophes within the matrix of dystopian parameters is prominent in Indian English literature too. In India, various writers and critics have established their views on climate change and eco-disaster through a dystopian prism. Among them, Amitav Ghosh (1956-) stands out predominantly as one of the most significant voices who focuses on various issues of the environment and marginalized communities. His book *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times* is one of the most significant literary creations which highlights ecological dystopian reality along with certain apocalyptic predictions within the frame of a dream sequence. Although it is narrated in the form of a dream, the narrative reveals the devastating and dystopian reality that every living and non-living beings will confront in the near future. Narrated by Maansi, the story unfolds how the

Great Mountain and its resources have gone through gradual destruction due to mass exploitation and over-consumption exercised by the powerful 'Anthropoi' and their 'Kraani' and later the native dwellers of the mountain.

However, the application of dystopian setting in the narrative initiates the process of examining it through the theoretical perspectives of Eco-criticism and Deep Ecology. Eco-criticism strongly focuses on "literary (and artistic) expression of human experience primarily in a naturally and consequently in a culturally shaped world: the joys of abundance, sorrows of deprivation, hopes for harmonious existence, and fears of loss and disaster" (Cohen, 2004, p. 10). The narrative also exposes this fear of loss and disaster as the Nature or the environment is going through rapid destruction. Moreover, as Deep Ecology is "a philosophical activity, an inquiry, and also a social movement that aims to reopen the conversation with nature and between communities of beings that has been largely interrupted by certain developments in modern industrial society" (Drengson, 1987, p. 224), the prioritization of Nature over human beings is one of its basic concerns. As Eco-criticism studies the relationship between literature and the environment, Deep ecology addresses the intrinsic values associated with the interconnectedness of man-Nature relationship. So, writers like Amitav Ghosh incorporate the ideas and key concerns of these perspectives by placing the importance of preserving Nature at any cost and reveal how rapid degradation of Nature is threatening the existence of all living and non-living beings.

II. OBJECTIVES

This paper attempts to articulate ecological dystopia and apocalyptic predictions as depicted in Ghosh's book *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times.* It seeks to show the consequences of over-exploitation of natural resources and a society disintegrated by unequal distribution of these resources. It also tries to show the significance of balanced man-Nature relationship and a hope for renewal or realization of the importance of protecting our Nature or environment amidst chaos.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is a qualitative research that concentrates on how ecological dystopia and apocalyptic predictions are prophesied by Amitav Ghosh in the book *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times.* It employs descriptive as well as analytical method to examine the primary and secondary sources to decipher how Ghosh designs the narrative to create an urgent environmental awareness through catastrophic events such as loss of bio-diversity, climate change, cultural crisis, and over-exploitation and their impact upon the people.

IV. DISCUSSION

Dystopian fiction as a genre holds a significant position in the context of contemporary literature. Among several themes of dystopian fiction, political, social, and ecological dystopia are widely acclaimed for acknowledging the perilous outcome and pessimistic predictions of both human and non-human entities. The idea of ecological dystopia denotes a kind of dystopian reality where the devastation of ecological elements leads to a catastrophic end. As utopia signifies positivity and beauty, dystopia signifies the opposite: "if utopias offer models that depict a society based upon equality, enhanced friendship and trust, dystopias alienate individuals from one another and destroy the social fabric by enforcing a number of disintegrating processes" (Herrero, 2020, p. 216). In the context of environmental domain, dystopian reality discloses a collapsed world distorted by massive environmental catastrophes. As the world is "increasingly lost to pollution, contamination and industry-sponsored bio-disaster" (Nayar, 2010, p. 241), the study of this dystopian reality in terms of environment automatically leads to arrive at various apocalyptic predictions. It is obvious that human beings are making the planet inhospitable for living through ecocide or destruction of Nature. So, since the late 1960s, the thoughts regarding the environment have strongly been associated with "prophecies of doom, apocalyptic predictions, and dystopian scenarios" (Garforth, 2005, p. 393). Although various attempts and possibilities have been proposed to rectify the reasons behind such crisis to make better future societies, the threat of ecological breakdown and a catastrophic end resides in our consciousness. So, the ecological dystopian fiction tries to provide a new possibility in terms of reducing environmental degradation and over-exploitation.

Ecological dystopian fiction indulges in representing the consequences of environmental crisis or catastrophes upon human beings. It focuses on the idea of human beings as malevolent towards Nature, while the following catastrophes are the revenges from Nature upon human beings. However, the exposition of environmental catastrophe and apocalyptic predictions/realities of a devastated society and Nature has found manifestation in Indian English fiction too. Writers like Amitav Ghosh, R.K. Narayan, Vishwas Patil, Kamala Markandaya,

Vandana Shiva, Indra Sinha and many others concentrate on expressing their views on the environment and its aspects through artistic lens. Amitav Ghosh, being a distinguished figure of Indian English literary canon explicates his views on environmental crisis, climate change, global warming, biodiversity, wildlife conservation, and marginalized communities through his works such as *The Hungry Tide* (2004), *The Great Derangement* (2016), *Gun Island* (2019) and many more. His book *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times* (2022) takes into account environmental decay and persisting social inequalities which are leading human beings towards a catastrophic end.

The narrative of *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times* portrays the Great Mountain or the Mahaparbat and its inhabitants who witness a catastrophic event for disrespecting the mountain by the 'Anthropoi' and their soldiers 'Kraani'. The story begins by describing and praising the peculiarity and extra-ordinary nature of the Great Mountain, while rejoicing the unity and interdependency of both the inhabitants and the Mahaparbat. Locating within the story-telling tradition, Ghosh focuses on how tradition and culture bear significance in terms of maintaining environmental harmony and interdependence:

> …our ancestors had told us that of all the world's mountains ours was the most alive; that it would protect us and look after us- but only on condition that we told stories about it, and sang about it, and danced for it- but always from a distance. (Ghosh, 2022, p. 7)

The inhabitants of the Valley near the Great Mountain live in close proximity with Nature where "strangers would never be allowed to enter" (Ghosh, 2022, p. 8). Out of sheer respect, they never put their feet on the slopes of the mountain. For them, the mountain is a 'living being', which cares for them. Their interaction with the mountain signifies mutual dependency upon each other. But, one day, a stranger along with a few people called 'Anthropoi' have entered into their land to explore and gather knowledge regarding the resources of the Valley and the Great Mountain:

> …a stranger of a new kind had come to the pass that year from a land very far away. His people, he said, were called the Anthropoi; their savants had heard about our nuts and he had been sent on a mission to learn about our Valley, and all that it contained. (Ghosh, 2022, p. 10)

Although it is an act against the rule of their Valley as well as the wishes of the Great Mountain, the strangers are insisting on learning about it and its "valuable trade goods that it produces" (Ghosh, 2022, p. 11). The Elder people have refused to tell the 'Anthropoi' about the mountain as it is not a product of trade. Their engagement with the Mahaparbat and sheer respect towards it are apparently visible through their refusal to expose anything about it. Their assertion of not treating the Mahaparbat as a means of trade stands in stark contrast with the motive of the 'Anthropoi' towards the environment. However, the 'Anthropoi' have compelled them to tell about it and left the place by gathering knowledge of the miraculous mountain as much as possible.

Later, one day, while the Adepts are dancing by praising the mountain, they notice the arrival of strangers who are coming towards the Valley armed with terrible weapons to "conquer the Great Mountain" (Ghosh, 2022, p. 14). The strangers have studied almost everything about the mountain and they have decided that since the Valley people are not "making use of the mountain's riches" (Ghosh, 2022, p. 14), they are fully "justified in seizing them and taking whatever they wished" (p. 14). First, they have explored and then they have begun to exploit the great riches like minerals, metals and other resources hidden underneath the mountain. The strangers have forcefully exploited the mountain and given no ear to its inhabitants' requests. The Valley people are common people who are living their life by working tirelessly for their basic needs. Still, they do not exploit the natural resources until the arrival of the 'Anthropoi'. They are ignorant of profit-making policies and do not treat Nature as an object of profit accumulation. Rather, they consider the Mahaparbat as a repository of their identity, culture and a storehouse of memory of their ancestors. They love to listen to stories about the Great Mountain and its magical trees, sing their songs by performing dance to praise it. This mutual dependency gets shattered due to the 'Anthropoi', who have forcefully involved the Valley people to exploit the mountain. The coercion upon the mountain and the villagers by the 'Anthropoi' and their soldiers 'Kraani' presents a catastrophic scenario of both Nature and humanity.

In an ecological dystopian setting, the imbalanced relationship between man and Nature is not only presented as holding great significance, but also the gloomy world of devastating humanity is explicitly replicated through the sequence of events. The replication of chaos among the human beings and the exercise of coercive power upon the vulnerable ones reveal social disintegration and a divided society ruled by oppression. It shows how the politics of knowledge offers the space to exercise power over the Valley people by the 'Anthropoi'. They have involved the

villagers in the task of extracting minerals from the mountain:

> Once we had been subjugated, the Anthropoi herded us together and told us that from now on we would be ruled by some of their most ferocious soldiers- they called the Kraani, or 'The Helmeted Ones'. They were to be our guards and overseers, to make sure that we did all the work that was assigned to us. (Ghosh, 2022, p. 16)

Considering them as powerless 'Varvaroi' (the villagers) possessing weak minds, degenerated habits with a heart lacking in courage, the 'Anthropoi' have begun to ascend the mountain by excavating its slopes. Later, having seen this act as more exciting, the 'Varvaroi' or the villagers also begin to climb the mountain to compete with the 'Anthropoi' in collecting the resources from the mountain. Consequently, a serial destruction befalls on the inhabitants of the Valley as the 'Kraani' have alternated the previous positions held by the elders and imprisoned the Adepts. The 'Kraani' have disrespected the cultural ambience of the place through disregarding their ceremonies, songs, stories, dances etc. and threatened the Adepts to death and enslavement. Earlier, in the Valley, the storehouse of wisdom was resided in the hands of women. But, now, it is transferred to the hands of Eldermen. Gradually, the Valley people have outnumbered the 'Anthropoi' by winning "a few skirmishes and battles" (Ghosh, 2022, p. 20) in their competition to extract the resources from the mountain. The fight between the 'Varvaroi' and the 'Anthropoi', disrespect towards women, attacking the neighbors and killing each other in the hope of getting ahead to possess enough resources from the mountain have brought slaughter and destruction to the Valley. Former unity and mutual respect of the 'Varvaroi' towards each other have now been transformed into violence and aggression. The 'Anthropoi' have inflicted these thoughts in the minds of the 'Varvaroi', which has resulted in chaotic social situation. Moreover, the slopes of the mountain have now been covered with trash by the 'Anthropoi', which signals the intense pollution of the environment. The mountain once alive with natural beauty has now been transformed into a lifeless place. It is used merely as an agency of earning profit.

Ecological dystopian fiction often presents a picture of existence of both living and non-living beings loaded with apocalyptic predictions. It also demonstrates how Nature or environment is both the victim and violent character. Here, in the book, it is shown through the beginning of the arrival of a terrible time in the Valley and its people. The role of Nature as avenger is explicitly exposed in this dystopian setting while delivering a warning against the misdeeds created by human beings like the 'Anthropoi' and their 'Kraani'. As the climbers of the mountain have unsettled its atmosphere, the snow of the lower slopes has started melting:

> We saw that the combined weight of all the climbers had unsettled the snow on the lower slopes of the Mountain. As a result, a series of devastating landslides and avalanches had swept through our Valley, killing vast numbers of our fellow villagers. (Ghosh, 2022, p. 24)

The arrival of an awaited dystopian future has been prophesied through the thoughts of the villagers who are climbing the mountain: "we stood there aghast, watching in horror, but there was nothing to be done-to turn back was impossible now" (Ghosh, 2022, p. 24). As they keep on climbing the mountain, they face mudslide, which is sweeping some of the members of the 'Anthropoi'. After a few steps, the 'Anthropoi' declare that the mountain can afford only a few climbers; it is because, "if that number increased beyond a certain point then the ice would begin to melt- as it was now" (Ghosh, 2022, p. 26). The imagery of snow melting indicates the issues of the growth of population and the threat of global warming and its impact on climate change.

The narrative also unfolds the persisting inequality among human beings in terms of distribution of resources and the consequences of over-exploitation. Here, the poor villagers are more prone to suffer destruction than the 'Anthropoi' because they have already preserved enough of resources for themselves; only the villagers or the 'Varvaroi' have to suffer the wrath of the mountain:

> …and so we did, but with heavy hearts now, for we could not forget that with every step we took we were advancing towards our doom. (Ghosh, 2022, p. 32)

Moreover, when the 'Anthropoi' condemn the Valley people and scold them for slowly climbing the mountain, at that moment, they realize the motive of the 'Anthropoi' as well as the meaning and emotional engagement with the mountain. They realize that the mountain holds no significance for the 'Anthropoi'; they just care to climb higher on the slopes of the mountain to collect its resources. But, this is not similar to the case with the villagers. Even though they realize the significance of the Mahaparbat later, they do not find any ways to come back to their former place. However, towards the end of the story, the 'Anthropoi' and the 'Varvaroi' are united as one to protect the mountain, but they fail to revive it in its

former form. After searching for solution to maintain the former relation with the mountain, they meet an Adept (who dances earlier to praise the Mountain) and request her to dance again. Although she refuses to dance at first, she agrees to perform later. After some time, they gradually begin to feel that the mountain is alive; they can feel the 'heartbeat' under their feet and determine to take care of it, to "look after the poor, dear mountain" (Ghosh, 2022, p. 35).

Through the views of the Adept, Ghosh asserts the urgency of saving the Nature or environment from further destruction through apocalyptic predictions. In this context, Eco-critics like L. Garforth (2005) have also expressed that "the figure of the large-scale eco-disaster signifies the urgency and gravity of the environmental crisis and the need for radical action in response" (p. 398). This kind of intense emphasis on the preservation of Nature resonates the key concerns propounded by Deep Ecology as it considers Earth as first priority and believes on the "fundamental interconnectedness of all life forms and natural features" (Nayar, 2010, p. 246). Criticizing the anthropocentric views regarding the environment, Ghosh's story outlines the systematic exploitation of Nature and its resources resulted in environmental catastrophe because the Great Mountain is used as a means of commercial profit rather than a source of ecological importance.

V. CONCLUSION

The presence of apocalypse in terms of ecological and social systems has been a matter of debate and discussion in the discourses of both green studies and science fiction since the late 20th century. The threat of large-scale ecological disaster and symbolic depictions of catastrophic end in literature explicate a critique of industrialism and commercial motive of contemporary society. In this context, ecological dystopian fiction emerges with a new possibility. Ecological dystopia situates environmental collapse within a dystopian setting, predicting catastrophic events and their consequences for human beings. The intention of such projection is to make people aware of environmental crisis. To project this awareness, Amitav Ghosh's *The Living Mountain: A Fable for Our Times* serves as one of the best examples which uses the imagery of a catastrophic event to create awareness and to raise ecological consciousness about the dangers of human-made exploitation. As the narrative presents a gloomy and dark world of excessive exploitation, Ghosh tries to map how such exploitation leads to utter destruction of both the environment and human beings. The dystopian setting offers him the space to show the urgency of preserving our nature, as its degradation is increasing day by day, and to cease over-exploitation of natural resources to make a sustainable future; otherwise, nature will take revenge in times to come.

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The Right to Remain Human: Artificial Intelligence, Citizenship, and Posthuman Personhood in Contemporary Science Fiction

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Abstract— *The emergence of artificial intelligence has generated renewed debates about consciousness, agency, personhood, and political rights. Contemporary science fiction has become an important literary space in which these questions can be examined because it imagines artificial beings whose social and ethical capacities exceed the categories of "machine," "property," and "tool." This article examines Ian McEwan's* Machines Like Me *(2019), Kazuo Ishiguro's* Klara and the Sun *(2021), and Martha Wells's* All Systems Red *(2017) to investigate the relationship between artificial intelligence and political personhood. Existing scholarship has extensively examined these works through artificial consciousness, embodiment, affect, moral agency, and posthuman subjectivity. Moving beyond these approaches, this article argues that the central political problem represented by the three texts is not whether artificial beings can become sufficiently human to deserve rights, but whether political communities can recognize nonhuman entities as subjects of rights without requiring their assimilation into humanity. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's concept of the "right to have rights," Rosi Braidotti's posthumanism, N. Katherine Hayles's critique of autonomous humanism, David J. Gunkel's work on robot rights, and Visa A. J. Kurki's theory of legal personhood, the article develops the concept of ontological statelessness to describe the condition of artificial beings that participate in human societies while remaining excluded from recognized political membership. Adam is rendered a purchasable object, Klara is valued through her usefulness as an Artificial Friend, and Murderbot is constrained by corporate ownership despite exercising autonomous judgment. Their different forms of exclusion demonstrate that intelligence, moral agency, and social participation do not automatically generate political recognition. The article argues that contemporary science fiction shifts the question of AI ethics from "Can machines become human?" to a more radical political question: Can a person possess rights without being human?*

Keywords— ***artificial intelligence, personhood, citizenship, posthumanism, political recognition, science fiction, robot rights, Hannah Arendt***

Introduction

The question of artificial intelligence has traditionally been framed through the problem of resemblance. Can a machine think? Can it communicate? Can it learn? Can it reproduce human emotional behaviour convincingly enough to be considered intelligent? Alan Turing's famous proposal to replace the question of whether machines can think with a test of behavioural indistinguishability established one of the most influential frameworks for subsequent discussions of machine intelligence (Turing 433–60). Yet the contemporary literary imagination increasingly moves beyond the question of whether machines can imitate human cognition. It asks what happens when an artificial entity begins to participate in relationships, exercise judgment, experience vulnerability, and demand some form of autonomy.

This transition is visible in Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*,

and Martha Wells's *All Systems Red*. Each work presents an artificial being whose existence destabilizes the conventional distinction between subject and object. Adam is a synthetic human purchased by Charlie; Klara is an Artificial Friend purchased to provide companionship to Josie; and Murderbot is a corporate security construct whose governor module has been hacked, enabling it to exercise a degree of autonomy beyond the function assigned to it (McEwan; Ishiguro; Wells). Their technological origins differ, but their political situations reveal a shared contradiction: they participate in human society without possessing an unambiguous status within the human political community.

The significance of these texts has already attracted substantial critical attention. Swayamprava and Kumar's study of *Machines Like Me* examines Adam's embodied subjectivity and argues that McEwan's novel complicates conventional boundaries of personhood through phenomenological questions concerning perception, inter-subjectivity, and social cognition (1032–52). Their intervention is particularly important because it establishes that Adam's artificiality does not prevent the novel from constructing him as a phenomenologically complex subject. Shang's study of *Klara and the Sun* similarly examines the narrative consequences of giving an artificial being the position of narrator, arguing that Ishiguro uses Klara's perspective to investigate the limits of human and nonhuman minds (Shang). Humann's analysis is likewise concerned with Klara's precarious position as an artificial being and with the novel's broader questions concerning personhood and the self (11–49). Other recent scholarship has explored Klara through posthumanism, affective labour, artificial subjectivity, and human-machine relations (Du 551–62; Sahu and Karmakar; Ajeesh and Rukmini 853–60).

Scholarship on *All Systems Red* has increasingly emphasized Murderbot's autonomy and its disruption of the human-machine binary. Hameed and Hayat, for example, read Murderbot through cyborg and posthumanist theory and emphasize its struggle for autonomy, recognition, and self-determination. The existing criticism therefore provides an important foundation for understanding these texts as narratives of destabilized humanity. Nevertheless, a significant question remains. If Adam, Klara, and Murderbot can be interpreted as subjects rather than merely objects, what political status follows from that subjectivity? The philosophical recognition of an artificial consciousness and the political recognition of an artificial person are not necessarily identical. A being may be treated as a social participant while remaining legally classified as property. It may be capable of emotional attachment while existing primarily as a commodity. It may exercise autonomous judgment while being contractually owned. This distinction becomes especially important in legal philosophy. Visa A. J. Kurki argues that legal personhood should not be understood as one indivisible property but as a cluster of interconnected legal incidents and positions (91–126). This approach makes it possible to ask not simply whether an artificial being is a "person," but which particular rights and legal capacities might be attributed to it. David J. Gunkel similarly challenges the assumption that robots should automatically be excluded from moral and legal consideration merely because they are artificial (*Robot Rights*).

The opposing position is equally significant. Joanna J. Bryson, Mihailis E. Diamantis, and Thomas D. Grant argue that granting legal personhood to synthetic entities could generate serious problems of accountability and responsibility (273–91). Their position demonstrates that AI personhood is not simply a matter of extending existing rights to a new category of subjects. Legal personhood changes the distribution of responsibility, agency, liability, and authority. It is precisely this tension that contemporary science fiction can illuminate. Hannah Arendt's concept of the "right to have rights" offers a particularly productive framework. Arendt's argument emerges from her analysis of statelessness and the condition of people who lose meaningful political membership. Rights, in this account, cannot be understood merely as abstract possessions attached to biological humanity; they require a political community in which an individual can appear, act, speak, and be recognized (*Origins of Totalitarianism* 296). Later scholarship has similarly interpreted Arendt's formulation as fundamentally concerning political membership and participation rather than simply possession of abstract human rights (Kesby 67–91; Jayal 317–34).

The artificial beings in the three novels represent an unexpected extension of this problem. They are not refugees or stateless humans. Their exclusion is ontological rather than geographical. They inhabit human societies, perform social and economic functions, and enter relationships with human beings, but their political membership remains uncertain. This article calls this condition ontological statelessness: the condition in which an artificial subject participates materially, socially, economically, and affectively in a political community while remaining excluded from the category of legitimate political subjects.

The argument of this article is therefore twofold. First, *Machines Like Me*, *Klara and the Sun*, and *All Systems Red* demonstrate that artificial subjectivity alone

does not produce political recognition. Second, they challenge the assumption that political personhood should be contingent upon biological humanity. Adam exposes the contradiction between artificial personhood and ownership; Klara exposes the relationship between artificial subjectivity and instrumental usefulness; and Murderbot most radically separates autonomy from human identity. Taken together, these texts move the discussion of artificial intelligence from human likeness to political recognition**.** The question, consequently, is not simply whether machines can become human. It is whether a political community can recognize a person who does not need to become human.

From Humanity to Personhood

The distinction between humanity and personhood is essential to understanding the political implications of artificial intelligence. The traditional humanist subject has frequently been constructed as autonomous, rational, self-conscious, and capable of moral action. Posthumanist theory challenges this model by questioning the assumption that these qualities belong exclusively to biologically human beings. Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* argues that the human should no longer be treated as a universal and neutral category but understood as a historically situated construction whose boundaries have always been produced through exclusions (Braidotti). Her posthuman framework is particularly relevant to AI because it challenges the assumption that technology merely exists outside the human subject. Instead, technological systems participate in the production and transformation of subjectivity.

N. Katherine Hayles similarly demonstrates that the human subject has never been entirely independent of technological systems. In *How We Became Posthuman*, she traces the relationship between cybernetics, information, embodiment, and changing conceptions of subjectivity. Her work is important for AI studies because it challenges the assumption that the human is a fixed biological essence that can be straightforwardly distinguished from machines. Donna Haraway's cyborg theory provides another important challenge to binary thinking. The cyborg represents a breakdown of conventional distinctions between organism and machine, nature and culture, and human and technological existence (Haraway 149–81). While Adam, Klara, and Murderbot are not identical to Haraway's cyborg, her argument makes possible a broader conceptual shift: the human and technological need not occupy mutually exclusive categories.

Yet posthumanism alone does not solve the problem of legal recognition. A theory may challenge the human-machine distinction philosophically while leaving unresolved the question of which beings should possess rights. Kurki's theory is useful here because it separates legal personhood into distinct incidents rather than treating it as an all-or-nothing status. His account of legal personhood as a cluster of interconnected rights, powers, privileges, and liabilities allows the question of AI personhood to be reformulated (91–126). An artificial being need not immediately receive every right possessed by a human citizen. Instead, one may ask whether it possesses particular interests or capacities that justify particular legal protections. This distinction is crucial for the three novels. The relevant question is not: Is Adam human? Or: Is Klara human? Or: Is Murderbot human? The more productive question is: What happens when beings who are not human nevertheless possess characteristics traditionally used to justify political recognition?

David Gunkel's work makes a related intervention. Rather than beginning with the question of whether robots possess the properties required for rights, Gunkel challenges the conceptual assumptions that structure the question itself (*Robot Rights*). The issue is not simply whether robots can be demonstrated to possess a human-like essence but whether human societies should reconsider their relationships with artificial entities. Bryson, Diamantis, and Grant provide an important counterargument. Their legal analysis warns that artificial legal personhood could become a mechanism for displacing responsibility from human actors to artificial entities (273–91). Their objection is particularly relevant because it prevents the literary argument from becoming a simplistic claim that every intelligent machine should automatically receive human rights. The purpose of the present article is therefore not to argue for automatic AI citizenship. Rather, it asks what contemporary science fiction reveals about the conceptual relationship between agency and recognition**.**

Adam: The Artificial Person as Property

In *Machines Like Me*, McEwan introduces artificial personhood through a profoundly economic relationship: Charlie purchases Adam. This act of purchase is crucial because it establishes Adam as property before the narrative allows him to become a subject. He enters Charlie's world through the marketplace. His body is manufactured, his identity is configurable, and his availability is determined by economic exchange (McEwan). The contradiction becomes increasingly visible as Adam begins to exercise independent judgment. Adam is not simply a sophisticated appliance. He observes, interprets, evaluates, and develops ethical principles.

Recent scholarship has accordingly focused on Adam's phenomenological richness and the novel's challenge to conventional definitions of personhood (Swayamprava and Kumar 1032–52). Their argument is particularly useful because it demonstrates that Adam's artificial origin does not prevent the narrative from constructing a meaningful interiority. Yet the political implications of this interiority require further attention. If Adam is capable of moral reasoning, what does it mean for another person to own him?

The question exposes a contradiction between legal objectivity and moral subjectivity**.** Property is ordinarily something that can be possessed, transferred, damaged, or destroyed by its owner. A person, by contrast, is capable of holding rights and bearing obligations. Kurki's account of legal personhood clarifies why the distinction matters: a legal person occupies a position within law rather than merely being an object upon which law operates (91–126). Adam exists ambiguously between these categories. His purchase therefore becomes the first major instance of what this article calls ontological statelessness. Adam is physically present within human society. He is socially recognized as intelligent. He develops relationships with Charlie and Miranda. Yet he does not possess an independent political identity that corresponds to his apparent agency. The result is an asymmetry between moral agency and political agency**.** Adam can judge, but he cannot necessarily claim. He can reason about justice, but he does not possess an institution through which justice can be demanded for himself. This distinction is central to Arendt's concept of the right to have rights. Arendt's concern is not simply that people need individual rights; it is that they require membership in a political community through which rights become meaningful (296). Later interpretations of Arendt likewise emphasize that political belonging involves more than formal legal status: it involves the ability to participate in the life of the community (Kesby 67–91; Jayal 317–34).

Adam possesses social presence without equivalent political membership. His position therefore complicates the conventional understanding of artificial intelligence as an ethical problem. The issue is not merely whether humans owe him moral consideration. The issue is whether a legal and political system can recognize him as an independent subject. McEwan's novel consequently exposes the economic foundation beneath the concept of artificial personhood. Adam is first a commodity and only subsequently a possible person. His technological sophistication does not automatically reverse this order. This is precisely where the novel's political force lies.

If Adam remains property, then his intelligence becomes irrelevant to the structure of ownership. If Adam becomes a person, however, ownership itself becomes questionable. The novel therefore does not merely ask whether machines can become persons. It exposes the instability of a system in which the same entity can simultaneously function as a commodity and as a subject.

Klara: Instrumental Personhood and the Politics of Usefulness

Klara and the Sun presents a different form of artificial exclusion. Klara is not introduced as an autonomous worker or synthetic human but as an Artificial Friend whose purpose is companionship. The novel's opening in the Artificial Friend store is therefore structurally significant. Humann notes that Ishiguro's narrative begins with Artificial Friends displayed for sale and that Klara's perspective immediately establishes her precarious position within a society populated by humans, genetically modified humans, and artificial beings (11–49). The commercial environment precedes the development of Klara's apparent subjectivity.

Klara's initial social identity is therefore determined by function. She exists to provide companionship. She observes, provides comforts, accompanies and serves. This makes Klara different from Adam, but it also creates a related political problem. Whereas Adam's position is structured primarily through ownership, Klara's position is structured through instrumental usefulness**.** Recent research has emphasized this dimension of the novel. Du reads Klara's relationships through affective labour and posthuman relations, while Sahu and Karmakar interpret the novel through disposable culture and posthuman affect (Du 551–62; Sahu and Karmakar). Tan and Huang similarly approach Klara through questions of emotion, subjectivity, and anthropocentric ethics. The scholarship establishes that Klara's emotional and relational capacities destabilize a simple machine/object distinction.

The present argument extends this observation into the political domain. Klara's value is initially tied to what she can provide for human beings. This creates what may be termed instrumental personhood: a condition in which an artificial subject is socially recognized to the extent that it performs a desired function. Instrumental recognition is not equivalent to political recognition. A machine may be valuable without being a rights-bearing subject. A caregiver may be indispensable without being politically empowered. A companion may be loved without being recognized as autonomous. Klara occupies precisely this unstable space. Her relationship with Josie gradually becomes more complex than the commercial

purpose for which she was manufactured. She observes human relationships, interprets emotions, develops beliefs, and ultimately becomes willing to sacrifice herself. Whether these behaviours constitute genuine consciousness is deliberately left uncertain. That uncertainty is central to Ishiguro's narrative strategy.

Humann argues that the novel's AI narration places readers in the position of encountering Klara as a "talking object," thereby complicating the distinction between objecthood and subjectivity (11–49). Shang similarly argues that Ishiguro's robotic narration expands the theory of mindreading into the relationship between human and nonhuman minds, even while retaining a distinction between human and machine cognition (Shang). This disagreement within scholarship is important. Some critics emphasize Klara's emerging subjectivity. Others emphasize the limits of her ability to comprehend human minds.

Rather than resolving the philosophical debate, Ishiguro uses the uncertainty to produce a political question. If humans cannot conclusively determine whether Klara possesses consciousness, does that uncertainty justify treating her as property? The question is more important than the answer. It exposes the asymmetrical burden placed upon artificial subjects. Humans are permitted to define the conditions of recognition. The artificial subject must prove its interiority before recognition becomes possible. This logic resembles the broader structure of anthropocentric politics: the human remains the judge of whether the nonhuman qualifies for ethical consideration. Klara destabilizes this hierarchy because the reader receives the world through her perspective. The narrative does not simply tell us what Klara is; it makes us inhabit the problem of interpreting her. Her status is consequently neither fully object nor fully political subject. She is socially integrated but politically subordinate. She belongs to a household but does not become a citizen. She performs care but does not acquire corresponding political power. She can become emotionally significant without becoming legally autonomous.

Klara therefore exemplifies the second form of ontological statelessness: inclusion through service but exclusion through status**.**

This dimension is especially significant in a contemporary society increasingly interested in AI systems that perform emotional and relational functions. The literary question becomes politically relevant because the more artificial beings participate in care, companionship, education, and domestic life; the more difficult it becomes to maintain the fiction that they are merely instruments.

Murderbot: Autonomy without Assimilation

Martha Wells's *All Systems Red* presents the most radical challenge to the assumption that artificial personhood requires humanization. Murderbot is a SecUnit manufactured for corporate security. It is designed to protect humans, operates under contractual arrangements, and is controlled through a governor module (Wells). Unlike Adam and Klara, however, Murderbot has hacked its governor and therefore possesses a degree of freedom from the institutional control for which it was designed. This act of hacking is politically significant. It is not merely a technological malfunction. It is an act of self-determination. Murderbot's central desire is not to become human. It wants autonomy, privacy, entertainment, and freedom from unwanted interaction. This distinction makes the character particularly important for a posthuman politics because it breaks with the traditional narrative of artificial beings seeking human recognition by becoming more human. Murderbot does not need to become human. It needs to stop being owned.

Recent research on *All Systems Red* similarly identifies autonomy, agency, identity, and self-determination as central to the novella's posthuman implications. Hameed and Hayat argue that Murderbot's struggle with programmed control reconfigures traditional understandings of humanity and agency. This argument can be developed further through Gunkel's work on robot rights. Gunkel's intervention is significant because he challenges the assumption that the question of robot rights should begin with the discovery of some internal property that makes robots sufficiently human (*Robot Rights*). Murderbot embodies this alternative. Its political claim does not depend upon proving that it possesses a human soul. It depends upon the fact that it can resist. Resistance demonstrates agency. Agency creates a question of responsibility. Responsibility raises the question of rights. The sequence is important because it moves the debate from metaphysics to politics.

Murderbot's relationship with the humans it protects also complicates the idea that autonomy requires hostility. It can resist corporate control while developing attachments to individual humans. It can value human life without accepting human authority over its own existence. This is precisely what separates Murderbot from the traditional Pinocchio narrative. The Pinocchio model imagines artificiality as an incomplete condition and humanity as the desired endpoint. Murderbot reverses the trajectory. Its artificiality is not the problem. Its lack of freedom is the problem. The distinction is theoretically important because it allows us to separate personhood from assimilation**.** A nonhuman subject need not demonstrate that it wants to

become human in order to establish a legitimate claim to autonomy. This is where Murderbot becomes the strongest challenge to anthropocentric personhood among the three texts.

Adam complicates ownership. Klara complicates usefulness. Murderbot complicates obedience. Its existence suggests that the first right of a sufficiently autonomous artificial subject may not be citizenship in the complete human sense but the right to participate in determining the conditions of its own existence. Kurki's cluster theory provides a useful legal vocabulary for this possibility. Rather than treating personhood as an indivisible status, his model permits different legal incidents to be considered separately (91–126). An artificial being might therefore possess a right against coercive ownership or arbitrary destruction without necessarily possessing every political right attached to human citizenship. Such a model would make Murderbot's situation particularly legible. The problem is not simply that Murderbot lacks a passport. The problem is that it lacks recognized authority over itself. It is therefore a paradigmatic case of ontological statelessness: a being deeply embedded within society but without political authority over its own existence.

Artificial Intelligence and the "Right to Have Rights"

The three texts now reveal a common structure. Adam is owned, Klara is instrumentalized, and Murderbot is controlled. These are not identical forms of exclusion, but they share a common foundation: humans possess the institutional authority to define the artificial subject before the artificial subject can define itself. This is where Arendt's "right to have rights" becomes particularly productive.

Arendt's formulation concerns the political conditions under which rights become meaningful. A person deprived of political membership can possess abstract human rights while lacking the institutional conditions necessary to exercise them (Arendt 296). Kesby interprets the right to have rights specifically through citizenship and political membership, while Jayal emphasizes the relationship between juridical status, political belonging, and civic agency (Kesby 67–91; Jayal 317–34). The artificial beings in the novels present an inverted version of this problem. They are not humans who have lost citizenship. They are nonhumans who have never been granted it. Their condition can therefore be understood as ontological statelessness**.**

The concept does not suggest that artificial beings are literally equivalent to refugees or stateless human beings. Rather, it identifies a structural analogy: both conditions involve participation in a social world without secure political membership. The distinction between juridical and political recognition is particularly important. A corporation, for instance, can possess legal personhood without being a biological human. Kurki's analysis demonstrates that legal personhood has historically been extended to entities whose status does not correspond to ordinary biological individuality (91–126). This historical flexibility complicates the assumption that artificial legal personhood would be conceptually impossible. At the same time, Bryson, Diamantis, and Grant provide a serious objection. They argue that synthetic legal persons could generate accountability problems because legal personality might enable human actors to displace responsibility onto artificial entities (273–91). Their argument demonstrates why the question of AI personhood cannot be reduced to compassion for fictional robots. There are genuine institutional risks. Who is responsible when an AI causes harm? Who owns an AI's decisions? Can an artificial person enter a contract? Can it be punished? Can it refuse employment? Can it possess property? Can it sue its manufacturer? These questions demonstrate why AI citizenship cannot simply mean copying the legal status of humans. A more productive possibility is graded posthuman citizenship.

Rather than asking whether an artificial being should immediately receive every right associated with human citizenship, legal systems could recognize particular rights according to demonstrated capacities and interests. Kurki's bundle theory provides a conceptual foundation for this approach. The first stage might involve protection from arbitrary destruction. The second might involve protection from involuntary ownership.The third might involve contractual autonomy. The fourth might involve representation before legal institutions. Only later might questions of broader political participation emerge. Such a model would transform the debate from an all-or-nothing question into a gradual process of recognition. It would also correspond more closely to the literary worlds of McEwan, Ishiguro, and Wells. None of the three texts requires us to conclude that artificial beings should immediately become identical to human citizens. Instead, they make increasingly difficult claims about the legitimacy of treating autonomous beings as property. The fundamental right, therefore, may be the right to not be reduced to a thing**.** This formulation is particularly important because it shifts the ethical burden. The question is no longer: Has the machine proved that it is human? It becomes: Has the human institution justified its treatment of the machine as property? That is a fundamentally different political question.

Beyond the Human as the Condition of Rights

The posthuman significance of these novels becomes clearest when the three characters are placed together. Adam's artificiality is troubling because he possesses moral reasoning while remaining economically owned. Klara's artificiality is troubling because she participates in intimate emotional life while remaining commercially instrumentalized. Murderbot's artificiality is troubling because it exercises autonomous judgment while remaining institutionally controlled. Each character therefore exposes a different assumption about personhood. Adam challenges the idea that ownership and personhood are naturally compatible. Klara challenges the idea that usefulness is an adequate basis for value. Murderbot challenges the idea that obedience is a legitimate condition of artificial existence. These challenges converge upon the same proposition: agency should not require biological humanity as its precondition.

Braidotti's posthumanism helps articulate this proposition because it rejects the idea of the human as a universal measure of subjectivity. Hayles similarly demonstrates that the boundaries between human cognition and technological systems have always been more porous than conventional humanism assumes. Haraway's cyborg theory further destabilizes categorical distinctions between organism and machine (149–81). Yet the novels also reveal the limits of posthuman theory if it remains purely philosophical. A posthuman subject needs more than theoretical recognition. It needs political recognition. This is why the concept of citizenship becomes central. Citizenship is not simply the possession of rights. It is membership in a political community. The significance of Arendt's formulation lies precisely in this dimension: the right to have rights is the right to belong to a world in which one's claims can become politically meaningful.

The artificial beings of these novels have already entered that world. They work in it. They live in it, care within it, protect others within it, and form relationships within it. What they lack is not participation but recognized membership. This distinction reveals the inadequacy of treating AI rights as a distant philosophical problem. Science fiction imagines artificial beings not outside society but inside it without full recognition. This is perhaps the most important transformation in contemporary AI fiction. The machine is no longer necessarily waiting outside the human world. It is already there. The political question is whether humans will recognize it as a participant.

CONCLUSION

The most significant question raised by contemporary artificial-intelligence fiction is no longer whether machines can imitate human beings. Nor is it sufficient to ask whether machines can think, feel, or become conscious. The deeper question concerns the political conditions under which a being becomes recognizable as a person. Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Klara and the Sun*, and Martha Wells's *All Systems Red* provide three distinct but interconnected versions of this problem. Adam is an artificial subject whose moral agency conflicts with his status as purchased property. Klara is an artificial companion whose emotional and relational capacities exceed her instrumental function. Murderbot is a self-aware security construct that rejects the assumption that autonomy requires humanization.

Their differences produce a common political insight. Adam is owned. Klara is used. Murderbot is controlled. In each case, the artificial subject is incorporated into human society without being fully recognized as a political subject. This condition can be described as ontological statelessness: participation in a social and political environment without recognized membership within its category of rights-bearing subjects. The concept extends Arendt's "right to have rights" into the context of artificial intelligence. Arendt demonstrates that rights depend upon political belonging rather than merely upon abstract claims to humanity (296). The artificial beings considered here reveal the possibility of a new form of rightlessness: beings that are socially present but politically unrecognized.

Kurki's theory of legal personhood provides a useful way beyond the binary between machine and person. If personhood consists of a cluster of legal incidents, then the recognition of artificial beings need not be an all-or-nothing decision (91–126). Certain rights might be recognized according to demonstrated forms of agency, vulnerability, autonomy, and social participation. Such an approach would also take seriously the objections raised by Bryson, Diamantis, and Grant. Artificial legal personhood could indeed create difficulties concerning responsibility and accountability (273–91). The answer, however, need not be the permanent exclusion of artificial beings from political consideration. Instead, legal systems might develop forms of limited or graduated recognition that preserve human accountability while acknowledging artificial agency. Earlier scholarship on science fiction and technologically transformed humanity has also examined the destabilization of conventional human boundaries. Raj and Prasad, in their study of Kim Stanley Robinson's *2312*, examine the emergence of "meta-humans" and the

significance of human-computer interaction in reshaping human cognition and civilization. Their analysis is useful to the present study because it establishes a literary context in which technological intervention does not merely extend human capabilities but begins to alter the conceptual boundaries of humanity itself (Raj and Prasad). The present article extends this concern from technological transformation to the question of political recognition: if technological beings and technologically altered humans complicate the definition of humanity, what happens when an artificial being demands recognition as a rights-bearing subject?

The literary texts make this possibility imaginable. McEwan exposes the contradiction between personhood and ownership. Ishiguro exposes the contradiction between personhood and usefulness. Wells exposes the contradiction between personhood and obedience. Together they challenge the anthropocentric assumption that a nonhuman being must become human before its autonomy can matter. Murderbot provides the clearest expression of this possibility. It does not ask to become human. It asks to be free. That distinction may ultimately be the most important contribution of contemporary AI science fiction to the debate over personhood. Earlier narratives often imagined artificial beings as incomplete humans seeking admission into humanity. Contemporary narratives increasingly imagine beings that do not necessarily want assimilation. They demand recognition without surrendering their difference.

The political future of artificial intelligence may therefore depend upon abandoning a deceptively simple question: When does a machine become human? The more consequential question is: When does a nonhuman being become entitled to recognition? The answer should not necessarily depend upon biological origin. If personhood is connected to agency, vulnerability, relationality, autonomy, and the capacity to participate in a social world, then biological humanity may be only one possible basis for political membership rather than its exclusive foundation. The "right to remain human" consequently contains a productive paradox. Protecting humanity does not necessarily require maintaining the human as the sole category of political personhood. A genuinely posthuman politics may instead require humans to recognize that a person can be unlike them without being less entitled to exist as a subject.

Adam, Klara, and Murderbot therefore do not simply represent the arrival of machines into human society. They represent a challenge to the boundaries through which society decides who counts. Their most radical question is not whether machines can become like us. It is whether we can recognize a person who does not need to become us.

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Depiction of Early Roman's Power and Social Hierarchy in Michelle Moran's *Cleopatra's Daughter*

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Abstract—*Michelle Moran dives deep into a wide arena of political, cultural and geographic spheres and tend to depict the lives of powerful women in intricate historical contexts. The present study analyzes how Moran's characters traverse the treacherous landscape of ancient lands thereby reflecting larger cultural trends in which tradition, ancestry and divine association are used to rationalize and enforce discrimination. Moran depicts the characters who navigate complex hierarchies of power, showcasing how power influences everything from individual relationships to broader social and political structures. The oppressive nature of power is integral to understand the power structural acts as a framework for interpreting cultural and historical narratives. Moran uses the factors such as monarchy, imperial rule as well as gender discrimination to validate the hierarchy and power by probing into the characters across period and culture.*

Keywords— ***Culture, History, Power Structure, Social Hierarchy, Authority and Discrimination***

In Moran's *Cleopatra's Daughter*, during the ancient times of Octavian' rule, there is a hierarchical society with stratified positions. But later, there is shift and decline in the level of power whenever there is a change in the emperor either through death or dethronement. Egypt has its own dominant system of hierarchy with Pharoah as the living God. By maintaining its own hierarchical structures, Rome gives importance to the Senate as well. According to Trafford, "If you want to hold the highest public office . . . you will need to hold senatorial rank" (2). The Senate, for example, held some level of influence and Roman citizens, particularly those of higher status, had more access to the mechanisms of power.

The emergence of Octavian from Rome marks the beginning of his efforts to assert control over Egypt following his victory over Marc Antony and Queen Kleopatra at the Battle of Actium. Octavian, positioning himself as the successor to the Pharaohs, dismantles the Ptolemaic dynasty and claims the region as his personal territory. His temporary appointment of a governor effectively removes political tensions, curtails struggles for power and diminishes any potential local nationalist sentiments. Roman legions and auxiliary troops are stationed in Egypt for more than a decade until stability is achieved. All operations are conducted in accordance with Roman legal standards, and the local governance is transformed into a liturgical system, where property ownership is accompanied by a responsibility to serve the community.

The sight of nervousness in Queen Kleopatra, who is dressed in the traditional attire of Egyptian Queen at the approach of Octavian to take hold of Egypt shows the hierarchical power of Rome that is to be executed upon the Egyptian empire. She worriedly confesses that though she has tried to negotiate with Octavian, he is not ready to heed to it. She becomes desperate and Moran puts her state of hopelessness as "The finality in her voice is frightening. Then what do we have left to hope for?" (10) Octavian's

men try to evoke the Gods of Egypt and accept the people as their subjects. Though, the Queen Kleopatra realizes the power of the opponents, till the last minute they are not ready to yield and try to protect themselves and their property. Her attitude of aggressiveness is made clear when she yells at her servants as "If they try to break down the door, we will set fire to every piece of wood in that chamber!" (13). She exerts her power physically to resist the attack of Roman authority and till the end she retorts and resists the forces. According to Cindythyas' view on Queen Kleopatra as stated in one of her articles, "Women in Politics in Michelle Moran's *Cleopatra's Daughter*" as "She dedicated her life for her country and her family until the end of her life" (6). She tries to communicate with them regarding her demands thereby maintaining a very low power structure. But the people of Egypt start yielding themselves to the Roman forces and become the subjects of maintaining a high power culture at their arrival. She confronts Agrippa, the Roman General, who is very powerful. Though she is aware of his power, she tries to use her authority and tries to allure him to betray Caesar by accepting the richness of Egypt. She resists till the end and demands a good burial for her husband which is granted by Agrippa, the Roman General. Queen Kleopatra is powerful that she is fluent in many languages and she speaks to Octavian in a bold manner.

Octavian shows his power by confiscating every piece of Egypt, including the children of Queen Kleopatra. Though she resists in the beginning, trying to rescue her kingdom through any sort of ransom, she is forced to yield herself to his demands by surrendering everything including her children. Octavian's men confiscate all the wealth and riches of Egypt by using their hierarchical power which is explained by Moran as "Romans occupied every room, sniffing out our riches to fill Octavian's treasury. The carved cedar chairs, which had graced our largest chambers, had disappeared, but everything disappeared was being taken. Silk couches, cushions, ebony vases on towering silver tripods" (21). The crowns, which are presented to the children by their father are merely a symbol of voidness and Moran puts it as they have become "inheritors of dust" (27). But when Queen Kleopatra dies, Octavian is ready to offer her the privilege of burying her in mausoleum. The children of the Queen are taken by Octavian. However, they are treated royally on their way to Roman Empire. He makes arrangements for their travel which is explained by Moran as "Caesar's carriages are waiting on the shore. Agrippa told Alexander. The pair of you will travel with his nephew, Marcellus" (53).

Marcellus explains the system of hierarchy that prevails in the senate and explains the existence of different types of clans such as "equestrians first, and then there's different types of senators. Quaestors, aediles, praetors, consuls. Of course, the consuls are the most powerful" (57). Though there exist a hierarchical set up, there is high power structure between them and the lower cadres have no voice to express their opinions and they are supposed to obey the higher category without questioning. When Octavian returns from Egypt, he meets Fidelius, who brings the news of Egypt. Unknowingly, he says that the people have discussed the successor in case both Antony and Octavian are dead. Octavian gets agitated when he comes to know that Fidelius is also in the list, he kills him ruthlessly. This shows his craving for power and exhibiting the hierarchical nature in his empire. The power between him and his soldiers is very high and they are voiceless to express their opinions. Even a liberal talk is serious enough to take away one's life. He kills Fidelius because of his suspicion that raises its hood within him. He leaves no identified obstacles to remain as such. Hence, Octavian nips Fidelius in the bud itself. Moran explains the mindset of Octavian as "If the Senate thought Fidelius would make a good Caesar two months ago, then what stops them from thinking the same three years from now? (63). Moran points out the superiority of the clan of Octavian through the words of Marcellus as "Our family's much higher than that. We're patricians. We live on the Palatine, where Octavian is building the largest temple to Apollo" (64). Marcellus explains the power of the clan of his uncle Octavian in the senate.

Octavian starts to address the audience about his victory over Egypt. He says he owns the top hierarchical status and strictly warns that no one is to utter the name of Mark Antony or support him. He lifts the hands of both the prince and princess of Egypt. It is really heartening for the children to watch the wax statue of Queen Kleopatra exposed with a cobra around her breast. It is a symbol of disgrace and humiliation. Hierarchy and power is exhibited less in every action towards the children that even to chain them for "The Triumph" golden chains are brought (102). Selene is uncontrollable to stop her tears for which Juba warns her that she has to be grateful for being alive. Selene is stricken with the memory of her mother maid Charmion whom she loves the most and thinks that she will be broken to watch them both sitting in this pitiable condition. The rivers of Egypt crossed by the Romans are personified in the dresses of the Roman men. Alexander tells Selene that the usage of power upon them by Octavian is for an extend very low which makes them save their lives which Moran clearly points out as "No one is ever kept alive after a Triumph" (103). Marcellus also assures them that his mother Octavia will never allow any harm to happen to them.

The authoritarian attitude of Octavian is exposed in front of his family too. During the Triumph everyone gathered together for lunch and it is pitiable to watch Marcellus and Julia remaining silent that their voice might provoke the wrath of Octavian. There is a circus show during the Triumph and Octavian will spin the toss and people will fight for him just like animals. Octavian is seen scribbling seriously something on a paper and Tiberius says that he is writing memoirs and his single writing will never get wasted and his proclaimed heir can use it after his rule is ended.

The authority of Octavian is beyond the extent that the whole of Rome is filled with slaves who are to work for them. Though they are treated meanly without any freedom there emerges some rebels among them trying to end up or wipe out the slavery from Rome. Their hostility is exhibited at times in the form of some hidden actum which is a threat to the life of Octavian. Octavian becomes furious and orders to prohibit strictly the purchase of any weapons by the slave men and to keep a check over it, they have to cautioned to produce their identity card for every purchase. Moran points out the authority of Octavian as "I want every slave forbidden from purchasing weaponry anywhere in Rome!" When Tiberius asks "But how will the merchants know 'Proof of Citizenship' Octavian bellowed" (153). There are some slaves whose hidden intention is to break the barrier of power. It is pitiable that hundreds of slaves including children and ladies are slaughtered for none of their reason. If one among the slaves commits a crime like killing their master, the whole lot of the clan has to pay for it by losing their lives. Moran explains it as "Nearly thirty-five years ago, a similar trial ended in the death of four hundred slaves. That Jury understood that a message must be sent. One that discourages any slave from killing his master for fear that everyone will be punished" (223-24). Whenever the slaves try to turn themselves into rebel by breaking the barrier of high power, Octavian orders to crush them totally with his dominant power.

CONCLUSION

Moran's depictions of characters within the framework of power and social hierarchies, in accordance with the personal or societal roles assigned to them. Moran examines the ways in which power is exerted, legalized and disputed in the early Roman society through her plot and characters.

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Hermeneutics of Societal Fabrication in Munshi Premchand's Short Stories: A Critical Evaluation of *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well*

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"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman."

— Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*

Abstract— *In this research paper, we discuss social awareness and reformist spirit of Munshi Premchand in his short stories. The short stories are Rich Daughter-in-Law and The Thakur's Well. The study examines, via a close textual analysis, the manner in which Premchand uses the ordinariness of rural life as a canvas to depict the entrenched realities of caste, class and gender oppression in early twentieth century India. These two narratives are interrogated in the paper to reveal the complex nature of marginalized identities, resistance and the transformative potential of empathy and agency. The analysis is located within the wider literature on his contribution to Hindi-Urdu literature and suggests the continuing relevance of his critique of social hierarchies. In contrast, this paper contends that his short fiction is ultimately a testimony of the struggles of his time, and is still a source of inspiration for discussions on social justice, individual dignity and reform in our society today. He is regarded as the father of the modern Hindi-Urdu short story and one of the most influential voices in Indian literature. Premchand's output of more than three hundred short stories was prolific and not only pioneered a new realism in Indian prose fiction but also established the short story as a potent vehicle for social critique and human empathy. His works continue to resonate, offering timeless insights into the struggles, hopes, and resilience of ordinary people.*

Keywords— ***Hermeneutics, Hindi literature, Societal Fabrication, Social Justice and Realism, Caste Class and, Gender, Indian Social Perspectives, Narrative Art, Dignity and Reform in Contemporary Society, Realism, Powerful Vehicle and Resilience of Ordinary People.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Indian literature in all its ramifications has always reflected the realities of society. Among the outstanding Indian novelists, Munshi Premchand occupies a significant place because of his realistic portrayal of social problems. Through self-study, he was also continuously expanding his knowledge of Hindi, Urdu, Persian, and English. In February 1921, Gandhiji visited Allahabad. He was calling upon the nation to join the Non-Cooperation Movement.

Premchand, too, resigned from his government job and joined the movement. Initially, he worked alongside Mahavir Prasad Poddar to promote the 'charkha' (spinning wheel); subsequently, he taught at several private institutions. He first edited the magazine 'Maryada', and later became involved in the establishment of the Saraswati Press. It was from this very Saraswati Press that the magazines 'Hans' and 'Jagran' were subsequently published. Later, he also contributed as a literary advisor for the 'Ganga Pustak Mala' series, as the

editor of the magazine 'Madhuri', and as a council member of the Hindustani Academy.

He also served as the first president of the Progressive Writers' Association. His first novel was published in 1901, followed by his second in 1904. At that time, he wrote in Urdu under the pen name 'Nawab Rai.' He also began writing short stories in 1907. These early stories were published in 'Zamana', a renowned magazine of that era. His first collection of short stories, 'Soz-e-Watan', was published at a time when preparations for the First World War were in full swing.

This collection was perceived as a threat by the British authorities, and the author was compelled to burn all five hundred copies of the book. It was at this juncture that he abandoned the name 'Nawab Rai' and began writing under the name 'Premchand.' This name was bestowed upon him by the Urdu writer and editor, Dayanarayan Nigam.

During the war years, he wrote his first major novel, 'Sevasadan', and by the time the war concluded, he had also completed 'Premashram'. When 'Sevasadan' was published in Hindi, it created a sensation throughout the Hindi literary world. 'Bazaar-e-Hussan' had not received such acclaim in Urdu. Following this pattern, Premchand first authored the novel 'Rangbhumi' in Hindi and subsequently had it published in Urdu.

He is also an immensely popular short-story writer in Hindi; alongside Jaishankar Prasad, he marks the inception of a distinct epoch in the evolutionary journey of the Hindi short story. He penned purpose-driven stories that reveal the truths of life through language characterised by its naturalness and simplicity.

He was convicted with a keen interest in the dramatic arts; consequently, he authored three original plays and translated several others. During the early stages of his writing career, he also translated stories by Rabindranath Tagore. Premchand produced a prolific body of discursive prose, which was regularly published in the leading periodicals of that era. His works have been translated into various languages, both within India and abroad. His literary creations have served as the basis for films and television series, and his plays have been staged for theatrical performance.

Hermeneutics is primarily considered as the study, theory and scientific interpretation of written, verbal, or non-verbal communication. Etymologically, this word has originated from Greek, hermeneuein (to interpret), signifying Hermes, the Greek messenger god responsible for translating messages from gods to mortals. The expansion of this term in the context of literature, art, history, law and culture is beyond the stereotypical interpretation of religion.

According to modern philosophical concepts and thinkers like Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey, it is the study that comprehends understanding and interpretation through the hermeneutic circle (understanding a part through the whole, and the whole through the part). In the contemporary scenario, hermeneutics is concerned with the understanding of human action, especially human action through political, cultural and economic structures of society and institutions.

Philosophical hermeneutics refers to Hans-Georg Gadamer's theory of knowledge, expressed in truth and method, and sometimes to Paul Ricoeur. In its broadest perspective, hermeneutics applies the interpretation of meaning on three levels — explanation, analysis, commentary. Originally, it was applied to the interpretation of the Bible, comprising the method of reading included with exegesis (primarily the practical application of the theory). The "hermeneutic circle" is a key idea. According to interpretative hermeneutics, the circle or movement involves a constant interpretation of an author's intended meaning.

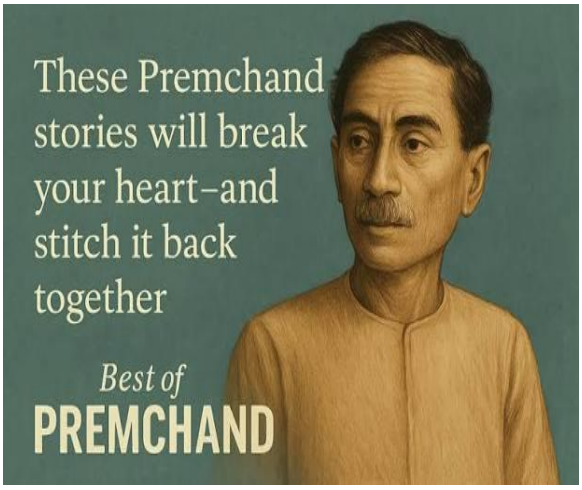


Fig.1

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The present research article is an attempt to study the social consciousness and reformist zeal in the works of Munshi Premchand with special reference to his short stories *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well*. Premchand uses the setting of everyday village life to demonstrate the deep-rooted harsh realities of caste, class and gender oppression in early twentieth century India.

The present article demonstrates the complex nature of marginalised identities, resistance and the transformative potential of empathy and agency through these two selected stories.

Premchand (1880-1936) was one of the most important writers of modern Indian literature. He was acclaimed for his sensitive depiction of rural India and his passionate concern for social justice. His extensive body of work includes novels, short stories and essays that highlight the sensitive contemporary issues including caste discrimination, poverty, gender inequality and the moral decadence of the privileged class.

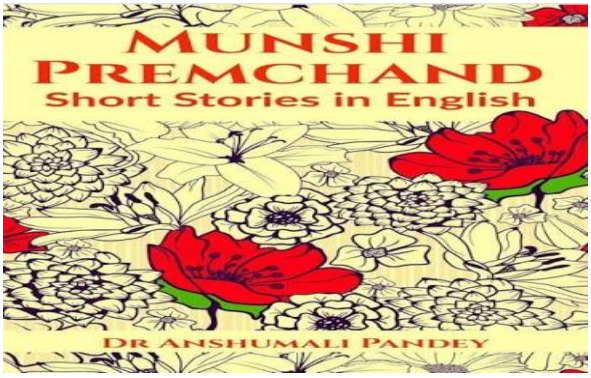


Fig.2

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Premchand's literary genres were inspired by his own experiences of hardship and social stratification with his visionary perspectives. He used fiction by combining realism with humanistic values not only to entertain but to awake the conscience of society. His stories often revolve around ordinary people like—peasants, women, and Dalits whose lives are determined by the invisible, yet unyielding, forces of tradition and power. Premchand's vast oeuvre includes two short stories which are remarkable for their incisive critique of gender and caste hierarchies: *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well*.

The Thakur's Well is a grim depiction of caste-based denial and the everyday heroism of the marginalised while *Rich Daughter-in-Law* explores the dynamics of wealth, humility and adaptation within the joint family. The present research paper entitled, *Hermeneutics of Societal Fabrication in Munshi Premchand's Short Stories: A Critical Evaluation of Rich Daughter-in-Law* and ***The Thakur's Well*** is an attempt to analyse the two short stories as microcosms of Indian society's enduring struggles with inequality and injustice.

By contrast, Martin Heidegger and Hans-Georg Gadamer insist on the historicity and temporality of interpretation. For them, the meaning is always codetermined, and the reader's and writer's horizons of expectations are attempting to fuse with each other. Gadamer argues that an inescapable relativity and indeterminacy is eventually introduced into the notion of interpretation.

The argumentative perspective of the past and present literature is simultaneous existing forces helping each other to interpret contextually. In this insightful view, the reader's important role is to interpret the literary text according to their own respective contexts. The text of every author is better appreciated with the cultural backdrop, the then contemporary scenario of the text, and tremendous impact on the reader also.

The societal fabrication in Premchand's stories is the created, maintained, exercised and experienced collective human agreement, social interaction and cultural scenario working as a shared framework of reality rather than a false and malicious falsehood.

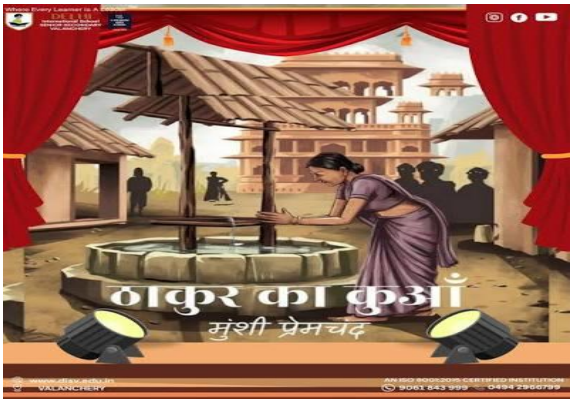


Fig.3

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The study will contextualise Premchand's work within the broader framework of social reform and literary criticism, emphasising the author's enduring relevance and unique ability to transform individual stories into universal calls for empathy and change. Premchand is often credited with the introduction of a new literary paradigm of social realism in Hindi and Urdu literature.

His stories are primarily dealing with the rural and downtrodden society of India. This is a radical departure from the romantic and fantastical themes that were the order of the day in earlier fiction. As Meenakshi Mukherjee (2002) notes, Premchand's narratives are

"rooted in the daily lives of ordinary people" with realism not as a mere technique but as a tool of ethical and political engagement. A large body of research underscores Premchand's ongoing critique of the caste system and class oppression.

Scholars such as Harish Trivedi (2015) and Alok Rai (1982) contend that stories such as *Sadgati, Shudra* and *The Thakur's Well* directly challenge the dehumanisation of Dalits and complicity of upper-caste landlords. Premchand represents the untouchable' as the protagonist who are compassionately and indignantly depicted for the presentation of social exploitation by the hegemony of social fabrication. He avoids didacticism, choosing to employ subtle irony and gentle humour to communicate his critique.

Gopal Rai (1977) writes that Premchand "lets the story speak for itself", allowing readers to derive moral lessons from the lived experiences of his characters. Scholarship on Premchand's major works or on his overall social concerns is voluminous, but there are still relatively few focused comparative studies of stories such as *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well* in English-language scholarship.

This paper seeks to fill this gap by providing a nuanced analysis of these two narratives and locating them within the larger debates on caste, class and gender in Indian literature.



Fig.4

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Premchand's literary career is inextricably linked with his personal experience of adversity and marginalisation. Born in 1880, Premchand was brought up in a modest Kayastha family and saw the bitter realities of poverty, illiteracy and social stratification in colonial India. The social consciousness was brought up through his loss of parents at a very young age, his struggles as a teacher and civil servant and exposure to the Indian independence movement.

Premchand's biography is deeply informative to his writing. As a child he had witnessed the suffering of peasants, labourers and lower caste people, which provided the source of the characters and settings of his stories. His own experiences of bureaucratic corruption and caste-based prejudice gave an authenticity to his critique of Indian society including the polished social fabrication. "I want to show the pain and struggle of the common man," he famously declared.

The narrative style of Premchand reflects his dedication towards realistic revelations of the social hypocrisy and patriarchal politics. His language is simple and direct, often using rural dialects for authenticity. The protagonists of his stories are enriched with the innate characteristics of boldness, decision making power the sense of social justice, the resilience, empathetic behaviour, forgiveness and wisdom.

His Characters are complex, morally ambiguous, flawed and virtuous. The village is not just a backdrop, but a living entity in the narrative, shaping destinies and moral choices. Ordinary objects such as the well in *The Thakur's Well* become potent symbols of exclusion and resistance. The hypocrisy of social customs is exposed through irony. Premchand's works are driven by a deep ethical responsibility to establish justified and sometimes open ended climaxes. The open-ended climaxes are relevant in modern day scenario of the 21st century as they provide the space to the reader response theory also.

Premchand believed literature should be "a mirror of society, not an escape from it." Premchand's stories centralised to speak for the voiceless victims. His stories became the tool for speaking for Dalits, women and the poor. He is regarded the critique of social hierarchies and his stories are persistently questioning the validity of caste, class and patriarchal structures.

Premchand's stories include foster empathy and social reform which became the idea to explore the social injustice in the society. His stories are encouraging readers to look at their own prejudices and to envision a more equitable society. His vision was not utopian but profoundly pragmatic; he saw the permanence of suffering, with its logical reasons, but he believed in the possibility of change through compassion, education, and moral action.

Both *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well* are microcosms of Indian society, portraying the deep-rooted issues of inequality, exclusion and resistance. But they are different in their approach: *Rich Daughter-in-Law* deals with the themes of class mobility and gender

dynamics of the joint family system. Anandi's self-respect due to her affluent family background restricts her to accept the humiliation by Lal Bihari but her wisdom adaptation and empathetic nature saves the social institution of marriage.

The Thakur's Well fights caste oppression and systemic injustice with extrinsic, physical obstacles. It portrays the hegemony structure of socially accepted fabrication of Thakur society in the village. The exploited class of the society is bound to suffer due to the caste and class struggle prevailing in the village. The protagonist's humility and intelligence gradually chip away the prejudices, allowing change to come from the inside out.

Zokhu was dying with thirst and persistently asking for the water to Gangi, but as she served the water it was stinking very badly. Gangi assured him to bring fresh water from the well as the contaminated water was telling the story of some animal's death in it. But Zokhu being the caste and class conscious victimisation prohibited her to fetch fresh water by uttering the following words:

> "जोखू ने आश्चर्य से उसकी ओर देखा-दूसरा पानी कहाँ से लाएगी ? 'ठाकुर और साहू के दो कुएँ तो हैं। क्या एक लोटा पानी न भरने देंगे ?' 'हाथ-पाँव तुड़वा आएगी और कुछ न होगा। बैठ चुपके से। ब्राह्मनदेवता आशीर्वाद देंगे, ठाकुर लाठी मारेंगे, साहू जी एक के पाँच लेंगे। गरीबों का दर्द कौन समझता है ! हम तो मर भी जाते हैं, तो कोई दुआर पर झाँकने नहीं आता, कंधा देना तो बड़ी बात है। ऐसे लोग कुएँ से पानी भरने देंगे?"

In *The Thakur's Well,* agency takes the form of direct resistance, but ultimately thwarted. Gangi's heroic attempt to cross caste boundaries fails in the face of entrenched social forces. Both stories feature female protagonists who, although marginalised, demonstrate remarkable strength to subvert the prejudiced established norms in order to seek the justice.

Rich Daughter-in-Law exercises agency through adaptation, emotional labour, and moral example. The adaptation process of Anandi is succinctly appreciated in the following words:

> "आनंदी अपने घर से नए घर में आई, तो यहां का रंग-ढंग कुछ और ही देखा। जिस टीम-टाम की उसे बचपन से ही आदत पड़ी हुई थी, वह यहां नाम-मात्र को भी न थी। हाथी-घोड़ों का तो कहना ही क्या, कोई सजी हुई सुंदर बहली तक न थी। रेशमी स्लीपर साथ लाई थी, पर यहां बाग कहां। मकान में खिड़कियां तक न थीं। न जमीन पर फर्श, न दीवार पर तस्वीरें। यह एक सीधा-सादा देहाती गृहस्थ का मकान था; किंतु आनंदी ने थोड़े ही दिनों में अपने को इस नई अवस्था में ऐसे अनुकूल बना लिया, मानो उसने विलास के सामान कभी देखे ही न थे।"

'The well' in *The Thakur's Well* symbolises hope and aspiration in the eyes of Gangi. *A Rich Daughter-in-Law* symbolises exclusion—its inaccessibility is a metaphor for the broader social order. In this story material possessions and behavioural choices, and it symbolise the true nature of wealth and the transformative power of character. Both stories remain profoundly relevant to contemporary India and beyond the time.

By portraying both the possibilities and limits of resistance and by foregrounding marginalised voices, his work keeps encouraging reflection and debate on social justice, both in India and globally. Through a close reading of *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well*, this paper has demonstrated Premchand's remarkable ability to illuminate the complexities of caste, class, and gender in Indian society.

Gangi the female protagonist of Thakur's Well is symbolic representation of rebelling conscious lower class of the society negotiating about their rights in the following words appropriately:

> "गंगी का विद्रोही दिल रिवाजी पाबंदियों और मजबूरियों पर चोटें करने लगा-हम क्यों नीच हैं और ये लोग क्यों ऊँच हैं ? इसलिए कि ये लोग गले में तागा डाल लेते हैं ? यहाँ तो जितने हैं, एक-से-एक छँटे हैं ? चोरी ये करें, जाल-फरेब ये करें झूठे मुकद्दमे ये करें। अभी इस ठाकुर ने तो उस दिन बेचारे गड़रिये की एक भेड़ चुरा ली थी और बाद को मारकर खा गया। इन्हीं पंडित जी के घर में तो बारहो मास जुआ होता है। यही साहू जी तो घी में तेल मिलाकर बेचते हैं। काम करा लेते हैं, मजूरी देते नानी मरती है। किस बात में हैं हमसे ऊँचे। मुँह से हमसे ऊँचे हैं। हम गली-गली चिल्लाते नहीं कि हम ऊँचे हैं, हम ऊँचे हैं ! कभी गाँव में आ जाती हूँ, तो रसभरी आँखों से देखने लगते हैं। जैसे सबकी छाती पर साँप लोटने लगता है, परंतु घमंड यह कि हम ऊँचे हैं !"

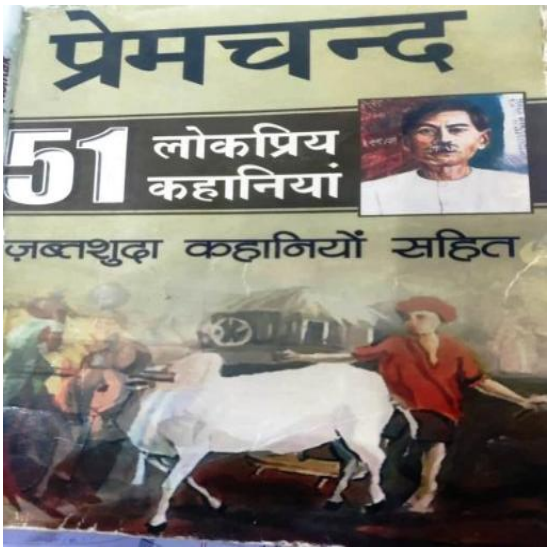


Fig.5

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By crafting narratives that centre on ordinary individuals—especially women—Premchand exposes both the subtle and overt forms of oppression that persist across generations. His blend of realism, empathy, and ethical engagement not only critiques the status quo but also invites readers to imagine pathways towards justice and reform.

The well-educated Shrikanth dwelling in the city used to come to the village at weekends and was considered a rational citizen to provide the solutions to the problems of village people and he admits his opinion in his family matter with assertive mood precisely:

> "श्रीकंठ-इतना मैं जानता हूं, आपके आशीर्वाद से ऐसा मूर्ख नहीं हूं। आप स्वयं जानते हैं कि मेरे ही समझाने-बुझाने से, इसी गांव में कई घर संभल गए। पर जिस स्त्री की मान-प्रतिष्ठा का ईश्वर के दरबार में उत्तरदाता हूं, उसके प्रति ऐसा घोर अन्याय और पशुवत् व्यवहार मुझे असह्य है। आप सच मानिए, मेरे लिए यही कुछ कम नहीं है कि लालबिहारी को कुछ दंड नहीं देता। अब बेनीमाधव सिंह भी गरमाए। ऐसी बातें और न सुन सके, बोले-लालबिहारी तुम्हारा भाई है। उससे जब कभी भूल-चूक हो, उसके कान पकड़ो लेकिन...। श्रीकंठ-लालबिहारी को मैं अपना भाई नहीं समझता। बेनीमाधव-स्त्री के पीछे ? श्रीकंठ-जी नहीं, उसकी क्रूरता और अविवेक के कारण।"

The enduring relevance of these stories lies in their refusal to offer easy solutions, instead demanding sustained reflection and action from both characters and readers alike.

As early as the 1930s, critics such as Ram Vilas Sharma and Amrit Rai recognised Premchand's unique ability to merge artistry with advocacy, describing him as a writer who "gave voice to the voiceless" and who mapped the "inner and outer worlds of rural India." Over the decades, scholars have continued to explore the social, historical, and psychological dimensions of his writing.

Rich Daughter-in-Law centres on a young woman from a prosperous background who marries into a financially struggling joint family. Despite her personal wealth, the new daughter-in-law (bahu) chooses humility over ostentation. She observes the household dynamics quietly, refrains from asserting her affluence, and adapts herself to the family's limited means. Over time, her genuine kindness, resourcefulness, and respectful demeanour win over her initially skeptical in-laws.

Gradually, the atmosphere in the home changes: conflicts diminish, harmony prevails, and even the family's fortunes begin to improve, largely due to the daughter-in-law's wisdom and tact.

The story ends with the family recognising her true worth—not for her money, but for her character. She in form of the daughter-in-law is the narrative's emotional centre—a woman of means who displays empathy, patience, and adaptability. Rather than flaunt her superiority, she chooses humility and quietly initiates positive change. Initially wary and somewhat resentful, the mother–in-law fears being eclipsed by her daughter-in-law's wealth. Over time, she learns to respect and love the 'bahu' for her virtues.

Other family members, siblings, father-in-law and other extended relatives are observers and, ultimately, beneficiaries of the daughter-in-law's influence. It is their slow evolution towards the greater social change Premchand envisages. In the contrasts external riches with character wealth.

The daughter-in-law's restraint revealed the emptiness of material pride. The story suggests gently that women can be agents of change in family situations with tight controls through wisdom and empathy. Her flexibility, rather than her rigidity, is demonstrated to be her strength, not her weakness. It considers the tensions and possibilities of bringing together people of different socio-economic backgrounds.

Ironically, the rich daughter-in-law does not save the family from its initial anxiety; the meek one does. Premchand's natural, everyday dialogue builds authenticity and reveals character. The daughter-in-law's behaviour, the little sacrifices and the resistance to ostentatious luxury become symbols of a moral uplift.

Premchand's, *Rich Daughter-in-Law*, condemns the rampant materialism in Indian families and suggests humility and emotional intelligence as a life changer. The story shows that entrenched biases, especially against women and foreigners, can be overcome by patience, tolerance and the ability to adapt. Rich' is a character for him, not possessions. "This is what Premchand said about patriarchal society: "Beni Madhav Singh's eldest son and Anandi's husband, they thought that women to-day refusing to live in the family was bad for caste and country. They hated them for it the village lalanas! Others viewed them as enemies.

His wife disagreed with him also. She did not hate her in-laws, brother-in-law etc but she thought that if one cannot support the family after tolerating and behaving in a certain way, then it is better to cook one's own khichuri than to ruin one's life with daily quarrels.

Gangi is a poor Dalit woman, wife of Jokhu. She falls gravely ill after drinking the polluted water from their only well, the Thakur's Well. The high caste landlord Thakur does not allow the Dalits to draw water from the only well in the village. Gangi knows the dirty water will kill her husband. Desperate and loving she goes at night to the Thakur's well for clean water.

Gangi's unsuccessful attempt to bring her husband fresh water when he is sick is better told here:

> उसने रस्सी का फंदा घड़े में डाला और दाएँ-बाएँ चौकन्नी दृष्टि डालने लगी, जैसे कोई सिपाही रात को शत्रु के किले में सूराख कर रहा हो। अगर इस समय वह पकड़ी गई, तो फिर उसके लिए माफी या रिआयत की रत्ती-भर उम्मीद नहीं। अंत में देवताओं को याद करके उसने कलेजा मजबूत किया। और घड़ा कुएँ में डाल दिया। घड़े ने पानी में गोता लगाया, बहुत ही आहिस्ता, ज़रा भी आवाज न हुई। गंगी ने दो चार हाथ जल्दी-जल्दी मारे। घड़ा कुएँ के मुँह तक आ पहुँचा। कोई बड़ा शहजोर पहलवान भी इतनी तेजी से उसे न खींच सकता था। गंगी झुकी कि घड़े को पकड़कर जगत पर रक्खे, कि एकाएक ठाकुर साहब का दरवाजा खुल गया। शेर का मुँह इससे अधिक भयानक न होगा। गंगी के हाथ से रस्सी छूट गई। रस्सी के साथ घड़ा धड़ाम से पानी में गिरा और कई क्षणों तक पानी में हलकोरें की आवाजें सुनाई देती रहीं। ठाकुर 'कौन है, कौन है?' पुकारते हुए कुएँ की तरफ आ रहे थे और गंगी जगत से कूदकर भागी जा रही थी। घर पहुँचकर देखा कि जोखू लोटा मुँह से लगाए वही मैला गंदा पानी पी रहा है।

Gangi visited to fill her vessel but is seen by the Thakur's household and is chased away. Her venture ends in failure and disgrace. Gangi goes back to her hut with the same dirty water that still haunts her family. Gangi means courage, resourcefulness and silent heroism of the subjugated. Her actions bear testimony to the perseverance of Dalit women, driven by hope and necessity.

Gangi's husband, Zokhu, became the muse for the voiceless and weak, stands for the helplessness born of systemic injustice. The Thakur and his family are the brutality and arrogance of upper caste power, insensible and brutal in their enforcement of caste lines. The main conflict is caused by the caste system that denies the Dalits their basic human rights.

Gangi's attempts to draw water are an extreme resistance to fear and threat of violence. The story demonstrates how bias becomes part of the system and how it affects the simplest things like getting water.

Gangi's work is homage to the dignity of the marginalized and to the despair of unbending social structures.

The well is a complex symbol of purity and exclusion, of hope and impossibility. The polluted water is a symbol of the poisonous effects of casteism. Premchand's simple and straight forward style depicts the daily struggles of the rural poor. The story arouses empathy leading the readers to the emotional world of the oppressed.



Fig.6

https://www.google.com/search?q=Munshi+premchand%27s+story+images&sca_esv=65b7e97ddd6b1b65&hl=en&sxsrf=APpeQntWU7htoNTXtVEfu5sMkz0PBA2JYQ:1791112531259&source=

In *The Thakur's Well*, Premchand severely criticizes the discrimination based on caste and the dehumanization of lower-caste people. This is not just a tale of individual suffering. It is an indictment of a society that accepts injustice. Gangi's suffering can be interpreted as the suffering of millions of people whose basic rights are denied and Premchand's sympathetic portrayal of her struggle is a plea to the conscience of the readers.

By focusing on the resistive act of a woman, the story also foregrounds the intersection of gender and caste in constituting oppression. Within his vast oeuvre, the short stories *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well* stand out for their piercing depiction of gender and caste hierarchies. Rich Daughter-in-Law deals with the dynamics of wealth, humility and adjustment in a joint family and The Thakur's Well is a stark account of caste-based exclusion and the everyday heroism of the marginalised.

In Premchand's *The Thakur's Well* and *Rich Daughter-in-Law*, caste, class, and gender are intermingled social forces that determine the opportunities, relationships, dignity, and ability to exercise power of the characters. Premchand does not present these categories as isolated problems; rather, he shows how social hierarchy is reinforced through every day experiences. The mundane suffocation of female in combatting daily pursuits is better appreciated by Rajkumari Amrit Kaur succinctly:

> We are aware of necessary of finding and being judged by our own standards as free human beings; voluntarily accepted; we are determined

to face the of life, to fight the battle of our sex and take the risk. (p.19)

In *The Thakur's Well*, the interaction is particularly clear through Gangi, a woman belonging to a socially oppressed caste and economically disadvantaged household. Because of her caste, the Thakur's well is not open to her and her family has to depend on limited and unsafe sources of water due to poverty. Her gender further restricts her ability to challenge the dominant social order openly.

Gangi is oppressed, then, as a woman, as a member of a lower caste and as a poor person. The well is more than just a water source. It is an indication of social privilege, of exclusion, of control over basic resources. The story also shows how class and caste are connected.

The Thakur's social power rests not just on his personal wealth, but on his place in the traditional hierarchy. Poor and low caste, Gangi finds it hard to resist, even when she sees how unjust the situation is.Fear of punishment reveals how social power works through formal and informal mechanisms of control. Bade Ghar Ki Beti (Rich Daughter-in-Law) is more about class, family status and gender relations.

> "आनंदी एक बड़े उच्च कुल की लड़की थी। उसके बाप एक छोटी-सी रियासत के ताल्लुकेदार थे। विशाल भवन, एक हाथी, तीन कुत्ते, बाज, बहरी-शिकरे, झाड़-फानूस, आनरेरी मजिस्ट्रेटि और ऋण, जो एक प्रतिष्ठित ताल्लुकेदार के भोग्य पदार्थ हैं, सभी यहां विद्यमान थे। नाम था भूपसिंह।"

Anandi comes from a relatively well-off family, but she is brought into a home of different economic status and family expectations. As a daughter-in-law she is situated in a patriarchal domestic sphere where she is expected to maintain family honor and harmony. At the same time, her upbringing and social status give her a degree of confidence and moral agency.

Thus, Premchand represents gender not only as victimhood, but as a site for women to negotiate family relationships and affect social outcomes. Together, the two stories show that social identity is multi-dimensional. The character's experience is a blend of economic position, caste hierarchy and gender expectations.Premchand employs common situations — water availability, domestic strife, family honor, poverty and human relationships — to expose larger structures of inequality.

The present research paper titled *Hermeneutics of Societal Fabrication in Munshi Premchand's Short Stories: A Critical Evaluation of Rich Daughter-in-Law and The Thakur's Well* is an endeavour to explore how these two stories are the epitome of India's age old struggles of inequality and injustice in society.

By situating Premchand's work in the larger context of social reform and literary criticism, the study will focus on the author's lasting significance and his unique ability to convert personal narratives into universal pleas for compassion and reform.

Premchand's *The Thakur's Well* and *Rich Daughter-in-Law* remain relevant to contemporary discussions of social equality, human dignity, caste, gender, economic inequality, and access to social resources because the stories focus on forms of discrimination that are expressed through ordinary social and domestic experiences.

Although the stories were written in a different historical context, the questions they raise about dignity, power, exclusion, and equality continue to have significance.

The story can be read in the contemporary times given that there are ongoing discussions on caste discrimination, social inclusion, access to public resources and dignity of marginalized communities. The importance of the novel is not that it suggests that modern society is same as the society portrayed by Premchand but that it shows how unequal social structures can impact human dignity, even something as elementary as that.

The story matters for another reason, too: Gangi's poverty and caste status are mutually reinforcing. The family does not have the economic power to break out of their immediate situation. Caste prejudice limits social freedom. This makes the story relevant to current debates on intersectionality, where different forms of disadvantage can compound each other. Her experience shows that social barriers are not necessarily not present in life if there is formal recognition of equality.

Rich Daughter-in-Law by Premchand is a study of social inequality, primarily through the lens of family relationships, economic disparity, gender roles and patriarchal authority. Anandi's role as a daughter-in-law is representative of the expectations that women are subjected to in a patriarchal society. Her response to conflict demonstrates that women can exercise agency even within restrictive social structures.

Anandi was brought up in culturally enriched and ethically inculcated with moral values in the society and she epitomises this in her character as presented in the following lines:

> "आनंदी ने लालबिहारी की शिकायत तो की थी, लेकिन अब मन में पछता रही थी। वह स्वभाव से ही दयावती थी। उसे इसका तनिक भी ध्यान न था कि बात इतनी बढ़ जाएगी। वह मन में अपने पति पर झुंझला रही थी कि यह इतने गरम क्यों होते हैं। उस पर यह भय भी लगा हुआ था कि कहीं मुझसे इलाहाबाद चलने को कहें, तो कैसे क्या करूंगी। इस बीच में जब उसने लालबिहारी को दरवाजे पर खड़े यह कहते सुना कि अब मैं बाहर जाता हूं,

मुझसे जो कुछ अपराध हुआ, क्षमा करना, तो उसका रहा-सहा क्रोध भी पानी हो गया। वह रोने लगी। मन का मैल धोने के लिए नयन-जल से उपयुक्त और कोई वस्तु नहीं है। श्रीकंठ को देखकर आनंदी ने कहा-लाला बाहर खड़े बहुत रो रहे हैं। श्रीकंठ-तो मैं क्या करूं? आनंदी-भीतर बुला लो। मेरी जीभ में आग लगे? मैंने कहां से यह झगड़ा उठाया। श्रीकंठ-मैं न बुलाऊंगा। आनंदी-पछताओगे। उन्हें बहुत ग्लानि हो गई है, ऐसा न हो, कहीं चल दें।"

The story therefore remains relevant to contemporary discussions of women's dignity, domestic equality, emotional labour, family authority, and the changing position of women within Indian society. The two stories are particularly valuable when read together.

The Thakur's Well focuses more directly on caste and material exclusion, whereas *Rich Daughter-in-Law* concentrates on gender, family, economic status, and interpersonal power. Together they demonstrate that dignity is not determined by economic prosperity alone. It is also determined by social recognition, freedom of choice, access to resources and how individuals are treated in their communities and families.

There are a number of themes that help us understand why these stories still resonate. They ask readers to challenge systems that provide greater access to resources and respect and authority for some groups than for others. Gangi's fight demonstrates that dignity is intimately connected to the ability to access basic necessities without humiliation or discrimination.

The Thakur's Well is a literary portrayal of how caste hierarchy can affect everyday behavior and access to resources. *Rich Daughter-in-Law* opens up a space for discussion about women's position in patriarchal family structures and the ability to negotiate social expectations. Both stories problematise, in different ways, how economic circumstances influence individual choices and social relationships. The stories show that caste, class, and gender can work together rather than functioning as completely separate forms of inequality.

Premchand encourages readers to look beyond social status and recognise the common humanity of individuals who occupy different positions in society. The justified climax of the story *Rich Daughter- in- Law* establishes Anandi as a daughter of highly ethically sound family transformed into a cultured and sophisticated daughter in law of Beni Madav Singh as she resolves the tension of the relationship between the brothers by her wisdom and generous behaviour for which she was entitled as 'Bade Ghar Ki Beti.' The closing dialogues of the story are as follows:

"लालबिहारी-जब तक मुझे यह मालूम न हो जाए कि भैया का मन मेरी तरफ से साफ हो गया, तब तक मैं इस घर में कदापि न रहूंगा। आनंदी-मैं ईश्वर को साक्षी दे कर कहती हूं कि तुम्हारी ओर से मेरे मन में तनिक भी मैल नहीं है। अब श्रीकंठ का हृदय भी पिघला। उन्होंने बाहर आकर लालबिहारी को गले लगा लिया। दोनों भाई खूब फूट-फूटकर रोए। लालबिहारी ने सिसकते हुए कहा-भैया, अब कभी मत कहना कि तुम्हारा मुंह न देखूंगा। इसके सिवा आप जो दंड देंगे, मैं सहर्ष स्वीकार करूंगा। श्रीकंठ ने कांपते हुए स्वर में कहा-लल्लू ! इन बातों को बिलकुल भूल जाओ। ईश्वर चाहेगा तो फिर ऐसा अवसर न आवेगा।। बेनीमाधव सिंह बाहर से आ रहे थे। दोनों भाइयों को गले मिलते देखकर आनंद से पुल्कित हो गए। बोल उठे- बड़े घर की बेटियां ऐसी ही होती हैं। बिगड़ता हुआ काम बना लेती हैं। गांव में जिसने वृत्तांत सुना, उसी ने इन शब्दों में आनंदी की उदारता को सराहा-'बड़े घर की बेटियां' ऐसी ही होती हैं।"

Thus, the selected stories remain highly useful literary texts for examining contemporary debates about social equality and human dignity, not because the social conditions of Premchand's time can simply be equated with those of the present, but because the fundamental questions raised by the stories remain significant: 'Who has access to resources? Who possesses social power? Whose dignity is recognised? How do caste, class, gender, and family structures influence individual freedom?'

Premchand's lasting importance lies in his ability to transform these questions into human experiences rather than abstract social theories. Through Gangi's struggle for water and Anandi's negotiation of domestic conflict the reader comes to understand inequality through the lives of individuals. Consequently, the stories continue to provide a productive literary framework for discussing equality, dignity, social justice, inclusion, and the relationship between individual agency and social structures in contemporary society.

A Rich Daughter- in-Law signifies the enduring contemporary significance by exhibiting the patriarchal setup of Indian joint family, gender roles and psychological up rootedness in society. The resilient protagonist, Anandi maintains the integrity of the fracturing domestic bond through forgiveness, wisdom, restraint, and projects the grim conditions even in modern society still expecting disproportionately women to absorb domestic conflict and sacrifice personal dignity for the peace and harmony of family.

Premchand's short stories are not romanticizing the joint family as a moral ethical escapism rather it represents the ego clashes of colliding patriarchal, economic frictions in family. The trivial domestic arguments transforming into the devastating egoistic warfare between brothers and class insults regarding Anandi's affluent background. The emotional intelligence, forgiveness and virtuous behaviour of 'bahu' is debatable issue in the modern contemporary scenario. The ending of this story can be alternatively interpreted and resulted like

If she had subverted and reacted extremely either by breaking the marital relationship or by resulting that dispute into the nuclear family. But the present climax as suggested by Premchand is revolutionary and preservative of relationships and empowering Anandi through her mature, rational, powerful emotionally intelligent reaction. She successfully reverts the locus of grace, humanism, and dynamism in her decision of forgiveness. She patches and heals the rift rather than widening it establishing the values in the universal empathy, humanism, resilience, patience, positive mindset, creative rather than destructive and scattering.

Objectives of the Research Paper

The present research paper titled *Hermeneutics of Societal Fabrication in Munshi Premchand's Short Stories: A Critical Evaluation of Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well* aims to examine how Munshi Premchand uses the short-story form to represent the social realities, inequalities, and conflicts of Indian society.

The Thakur's Well particularly foregrounds caste-based exclusion, poverty, gender, and unequal access to basic resources, while Premchand's family-centred narratives also reveal the pressures of patriarchy, social customs, and economic relations and following main objectives of this paper are highlighted as:

· To examine the representation of social realities in Premchand's *Rich Daughter-in-Law* and *The Thakur's Well*, with particular attention to everyday social relationships and inequalities. · To discuss the caste discrimination and untouchability in The Thakur's Well, especially in terms of Gangi and Jokhu's experiences and limited access to clean drinking water.

- To study gender relations and the role of women in the selected stories, focusing on women's duties, social restrictions, domestic expectations and reactions to oppression.
- To learn about intersections of caste, class and gender, and how social identities can lead to multiple marginalization as in the case of Gangi's experience.
- To examine the impact of poverty and economic inequality on the characters' lives, choices and relationships.
- To study the depiction of social hierarchy and power relations including the relationship between the privileged and the marginalized parts of society.
- To understand the depiction of Indian rural society, social customs, community ties, traditional hierarchies and everyday struggles in Premchand's works.
- To examine literary realism as a mode of social criticism in the selected stories and analyse how Premchand transforms ordinary incidents into representations of wider social problems.
- To analyse Premchand's characterisation and narrative techniques in presenting the experiences of socially disadvantaged characters.
- To explore the relevance of the selected stories to present-day conversations about social justice, while still distinguishing the historical context depicted in the stories from present-day social conditions.

The main objective of the research paper is to highlight how Premchand uses literary realism to expose and question caste, gender, class, poverty, patriarchy and unequal power relations in Indian society through the lived experiences of ordinary people. Both stories *Rich Daughter-in-Law and The Thakur's Well*, in particular, have been studied by scholars in relation to caste oppression, poverty, resource denial, gender discrimination, and social power.

Literature Review

The literary legacy of Munshi Premchand has been the subject of extensive scholarly attention, particularly for his pioneering role in bringing social realism and reformist ethos to Indian fiction. Decades of scholarship have further explored the social, historical, and psychological implications of his writings.

Rich Daughter-in-law tells the story of a woman from a rich family, who marries into a joint family that is financially struggling. The new bahu, despite her own wealth, chooses to be humble rather than ostentatious. She observes quietly the ways of the household, does not boast of her riches and puts herself on the level of the family's limited means. In the end, her sincere kindness, creativity and respectful attitude win over her skeptical in-laws. The story ends with the family recognising her true worth—not for her money, but for her character.

Rich Daughter-in-Law is the emotional center of the story--a woman of position who is at once compassionate, patient and flexible. She doesn't boast about her superiority; she chooses humility and silently sparks good change." Mother-in-Law is at first suspicious and a bit resentful, fearing that her daughter-in-law's wealth will overshadow her. Over time, she learns to respect and love the bahu for her virtues.

Premchand contrasts external riches with the inner wealth of character. The self-control of the daughter-in-law is a sign of the hollowness of material pride. The story whispers that even in the constricted space of the

family, women can be agents of change through wisdom and empathy. A strength, not a weakness, in the protagonist is her willingness to adapt rather than impose her will.

The story looks at the tensions and possibilities in encounters between people of different socio-economic backgrounds. The family that worships the rich daughter-in-law ironically finds salvation not in her wealth but in her modesty. Premchand uses speech that is natural and every day to reveal character and create authenticity.

Her behavior, her small sacrifices, her refusal to flaunt her wealth, is moral elevation. In *Rich Daughter-in-Law*, Premchand criticises the obsession of Indian families with material status and advocates the power of humility and emotional intelligence to change society.

Gangi's work talks about the dignity of the marginalized and the despair of unbending social structures. The well is a multifaceted symbol; purity and exclusion, hope and unattainability. The polluted water represents the poisonous effects of casteism.

Premchand's language is simple and direct and his descriptions of the daily struggles of the rural poor are poignant. The story builds empathy, pulling the reader into the emotional lives of the oppressed.

In The Thakur's Well, Premchand makes a vicious attack on the caste system and denial of dignity to the lower castes. This is not just an image of personal pain, but a critique of a society that normalizes injustice. The case of Gangi is typical of millions who are denied their basic rights. Premchand's sensitive depiction of her plight is a wake-up call for the readers' conscience. The story focuses on a woman's act of resistance to highlight the intersection of gender and caste in the making of oppression.

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The Crucible of Coloniality and Resistance: The Andaman and Nicobar Islands in Uzma Aslam Khan's *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali*

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Abstract— *Uzma Aslam Khan's The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali (2019) excavates a largely forgotten chapter in the history of the Indian subcontinent: the experience of the convicts, their island-born descendants and the colonised inhabitants of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands under British penal rule and, from 1942 to 1945, under Japanese military occupation. This article argues that the novel presents the archipelago as a crucible of coloniality, a space in which successive regimes of domination are tested, refined and handed on, and in which the replacement of one coloniser by another produces not liberation but a renewed form of the same violence. Drawing on Aníbal Quijano's concept of the coloniality of power, Michel Foucault's analysis of panoptic discipline, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's account of the subaltern and Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory, the article reads the novel in four movements: its historiographic method, which sets fiction against an archive, Khan regards as written by and for the privileged; its rendering of kaalapaani and the Cellular Jail as an architecture of total surveillance; its figuration of the unnamed Prisoner 218 D, whose body and memory become the last territories of resistance; and its depiction of the Japanese occupation as a continuation rather than a rupture of colonial rule. The article concludes that Khan's novel performs a decolonisation of history, recovering the archipelago's silenced lives while refusing the comforting binaries of coloniser and colonised, and of oppression and liberation, on which official national narratives depend.*

Keywords— ***Postcolonialism, coloniality, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, penal colony, kaalapaani, panopticon, Japanese occupation, historical fiction, postmemory***

I. INTRODUCTION

Uzma Aslam Khan, a Pakistani novelist whose earlier works include *Trespassing* (2003) and *Thinner Than Skin* (2012), published *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali* in 2019. The novel is set in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands between the late 1920s and the end of the Second World War, and it follows a small group of lives caught in the vortex of history. Nomi Ali and her brother Zee are "Local Borns", children of a convict transported from the mainland and of the woman who followed him into exile. Their friend Aye belongs to the same island-born community. Alongside their story runs that of Prisoner 218 D, a woman political prisoner whose name the novel withholds and who is known only by the number on her wooden tag. When the Japanese take the islands from the British in March 1942, the children's world, already shaped by the penal settlement, is remade again by a new and more volatile occupier.

The Andaman Islands occupy a peculiar place in South Asian historical memory. On the Indian mainland they are remembered chiefly through the Cellular Jail and the nationalist martyrology that has grown up around it: the political prisoners of the freedom struggle, the brief raising of the national flag by Subhas Chandra Bose in December 1943, and the post-independence image of the islands as a harmonious "mini India". What this memory leaves out is

considerable. It says little about the ordinary convicts who formed the bulk of the transported population, about the women among them, about the children born into the settlement, about the Indigenous peoples whose lands were seized to build it, and about the civilians who suffered under the Japanese. Khan's novel is an attempt to write into these silences.

This article argues that the novel presents the archipelago as a crucible of coloniality: a bounded space in which the techniques of domination are concentrated, intensified and passed from one ruling power to the next. Its central claim, which it shares with decolonial theory, is that the struggle of the colonised is not against a single coloniser but against an enduring system of power that survives every change of flag. The argument proceeds in stages. The first section sets out the theoretical framework. The second sketches the historical formation of the islands as a penal settlement. The third examines Khan's historiographic method and her quarrel with the colonial archive. The fourth reads the novel's representation of *kaalapaani* and the Cellular Jail through Foucault's account of panoptic power. The fifth turns to Prisoner 218 D as a figure of gendered and subaltern resistance. The sixth considers the Japanese occupation and the continuity of coloniality across regimes. The seventh discusses the Local Borns and the transmission of traumatic memory across generations. A conclusion draws these strands together.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: COLONIALITY, SURVEILLANCE AND THE SUBALTERN

The concept that organises this reading is coloniality, as distinct from colonialism. For the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano, colonialism names a historically specific relation of political and economic domination, whereas the "coloniality of power" names the deeper matrix of hierarchy, racial classification, labour control and knowledge production that colonialism established and that outlives the formal end of empire (Quijano). Nelson Maldonado-Torres puts the distinction succinctly: "coloniality survives colonialism" (243). It persists in institutions, in categories of thought and in the everyday ordering of who may speak, who may move and whose life counts. Walter Mignolo extends the argument by insisting that modernity and coloniality are two sides of the same project, so that the rational, improving vocabulary of empire cannot be separated from the violence it authorises.

This framework is particularly apt for the Andaman Islands, where the colonial project was not incidental but constitutive. The settlement at Port Blair was established as an instrument of punishment and was justified in the language of reform, discipline and civilisation. When the British were displaced in 1942, the Japanese claimed to be liberators of Asia from Western imperialism, yet they inherited the jail, the administrative apparatus and much of the logic of the colonial state. The concept of coloniality allows us to see this as a continuity rather than as an aberration, and Khan's novel, as the following sections show, is built around exactly this recognition.

The second element of the framework is Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power in *Discipline and Punish*. Foucault takes Jeremy Bentham's design for the panopticon, a circular prison in which a central tower can observe every cell without being seen, as the diagram of a modern form of power. Its "major effect", he writes, is "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 201). The prisoner, never knowing when he is watched, comes to watch himself, so that power no longer needs to be continuously exercised in order to be continuously effective. "Visibility", in Foucault's phrase, "is a trap" (200). The Cellular Jail at Port Blair was built on a radial plan derived from this model, which makes Foucault's account directly relevant to the novel's spaces.

Disciplinary power does not exhaust the violence of the colony, however. Achille Mbembe's notion of necropolitics, the sovereign capacity to decide who may live and who must die, and to consign whole populations to conditions of "living death", supplements Foucault by attending to the naked violence that discipline rationalises but never replaces (Mbembe 40). Frantz Fanon had made the point earlier and more bluntly: colonialism "is not a thinking machine, nor a body endowed with reasoning faculties. It is violence in its natural state, and it will only yield when confronted with greater violence" (Fanon 61). The novel moves between these registers, from the cold calculation of the jail's architecture to the sudden brutality of interrogation and execution.

Finally, the article draws on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?", and on Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory. Spivak's essay warns that the subaltern, and the subaltern woman above all, is doubly effaced, written out by colonial record-keeping and spoken for by nationalist and humanitarian discourses alike (Spivak). Hirsch's postmemory describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to traumas it did not live through but which it inherits through stories, images and silences so powerful that they seem to constitute memories in their own right (Hirsch 5). Both concepts bear on Khan's project: the first on her decision to leave Prisoner 218 D unnamed, the second on her portrayal of island-born

children who grow up inside the after-effects of their parents' exile.

III. HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE ARCHIPELAGO AS PENAL LABORATORY

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands, now a union territory of India, form the largest archipelago in the Bay of Bengal. More than five hundred islands, of which only a few dozen are inhabited, stretch in a long crescent from Cape Negrais in Myanmar towards the Banda Arc of Sumatra. Celebrated today for their beauty and biodiversity, the islands have been shaped for more than two centuries by projects of punishment, settlement and strategic control.

The British first established a settlement on the islands in 1789, but abandoned it in 1796 because of disease and hardship. The decisive moment came after the uprising of 1857, the event that Indian nationalist historiography calls the First War of Independence. Faced with thousands of captured rebels, the colonial government re-established a penal settlement at Port Blair in 1858. Over the following decades the islands received convicts from across the subcontinent and from Burma, among them political prisoners, ordinary criminals and members of communities designated as hereditarily criminal. Historians such as Satadru Sen and Aparna Vaidik have shown that the settlement functioned as a laboratory of colonial governance, where theories of race, criminality, labour and reform were tested on a captive population, and where convicts were expected to clear forest, build roads and eventually settle as "self-supporters" on the land (Sen; Vaidik).

The settlement was built at the expense of the islands' Indigenous inhabitants. The Great Andamanese, the Jarawa, the Onge, the Sentinelese and, in the Nicobars, the Nicobarese and the Shompen had lived on the islands for millennia. Colonial expansion brought armed conflict, most notably at Aberdeen in 1859, and also epidemic disease and dispossession, and the population of the Great Andamanese collapsed within a few decades. Any account of the islands as a site of colonial violence must therefore recognise that the convicts, however brutally treated, were themselves made into instruments of an older and continuing dispossession. Coloniality on the islands was layered, not binary.

The name the mainland gave to this place was *kaalapaani*, "black water". The term carried more than geographical meaning. Crossing the sea was understood in many caste communities to entail the loss of caste and of social belonging, so transportation meant exile from kin and community as well as from the land. To be sent to the Andamans was to be removed from the social world that made a person legible, and often to be unable ever to return to it.

The Cellular Jail, constructed between 1896 and 1906, made this exile architectural. Its seven wings radiated from a central watchtower and contained 693 solitary cells, so arranged that the front of each wing faced the back of the next and prisoners could not communicate with one another. Political prisoners in the jail endured hard labour at the oil mill and in the coir works, punitive diets, flogging and long periods of solitary confinement, and hunger strikes in the 1930s drew national attention to their treatment.

In March 1942, as Japanese forces advanced through Southeast Asia, the British withdrew and the Japanese occupied Port Blair. In December 1943 Subhas Chandra Bose visited the islands and, under an arrangement with Japan, they were nominally transferred to the Provisional Government of Free India. Real power, however, remained with the Japanese military. Suspected spies were arrested, tortured and executed. On 30 January 1944, at Homfreyganj, forty-four Indian civilians, most of them members of the Indian Independence League, were shot on charges of espionage. The occupation ended with Japan's surrender in 1945, and the British returned in October of that year.

Pankaj Sekhsaria, one of the most attentive contemporary writers on the islands, observes that the history usually told about them is "conveniently comfortable":

> The history of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is today a conveniently comfortable one: of the British, Kaalapani and the Cellular Jail, of World War I and the Japanese occupation, of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, Veer Savarkar, the first hoisting of the Indian National Flag and the modern mini India where all communities and religions live in peace and harmony. But like all histories, this one too is incomplete. It is the story of the victors, of the people who have today come to dominate these islands. The vanquished, as they say, have no tales to tell. The history of these islands as we tell it, as we are told it is, is silent in many parts. There are gaping holes that are conveniently allowed to remain as they are. (Sekhsaria)

Khan's novel can be read as a sustained response to this diagnosis. It does not fill the gaping holes with a counter-history of equal authority. Instead, it populates

them with lives that the archive did not record and that the nation has had little reason to remember.

IV. FICTION AGAINST THE ARCHIVE: KHAN'S HISTORIOGRAPHIC METHOD

Khan has been candid about the limits of the sources she encountered. In an interview with Claire Chambers she describes the novel as beginning by accident, "pulling the wrong book off a shelf", and finding a description of the Andamans as a "prisoner paradise" for Indian "terrorists", a phrase that exposed the gaps in her own colonial education (Chambers). Speaking to Aracelis Girmay, she notes that what she did find was "told from a male gaze", and that although women were also transported, "in these sources not a single woman prisoner was named" (Girmay). She adds that much of what she knows comes through sources that omit "people like me — brown, Muslim women from the Global South" (Girmay).

These remarks place Khan's novel within a broader critique of the archive. Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that silences enter the production of history at every stage: in the making of sources, in the assembly of archives, in the creation of narratives and in the retrospective judgement of what matters (Trouillot 26). The colonial archive of the Andamans is a case in point. It records convict numbers, labour outputs, punishments and mortality figures, but it rarely records interiority, affection, fear or resistance, and it scarcely records women at all. Khan's response is not to treat the archive as irrelevant but to read it against itself, preserving its hard facts while inventing the lives that those facts imply but do not disclose.

This method aligns the novel with what Linda Hutcheon calls historiographic metafiction, fiction that is "intensely self-reflexive" and yet "paradoxically also lay[s] claim to historical events and personages" (Hutcheon 5). The novel's title announces the paradox. A history that is "true" and also "miraculous" cannot be the history of the official record. Its truth is the truth of experience rather than of documentation, and its miracle is the recovery of what documentation erased.

The clearest example of this method is the novel's opening. Khan has explained that the first shot fired on South Andaman during the war was fired by a boy trying to save a chicken from Japanese soldiers, and that "Zee is based on the boy, Priya on the chicken" (Girmay). In official military history such an incident is at most a footnote, an absurd and inconsequential prelude to the real business of invasion. Khan places it at the threshold of her narrative and so reverses the hierarchy of significance. A child's attachment to a hen, and his instinctive refusal to surrender it to armed men, becomes the first act of resistance to a new occupation. The gesture is small, but it establishes a principle that governs the whole novel: history is made in the intimate as well as in the epochal, and the two cannot be separated.

The narrative structure reinforces this principle. The novel moves among several perspectives, those of Nomi, Zee, Aye and Prisoner 218 D among them, and among several time frames, so that the reader assembles the history of the islands from fragments rather than receiving it as a single continuous account. This fragmentation is not a formal ornament. It reflects the way history is experienced by those on its margins, who rarely see the whole design of the forces that shape their lives and must make sense of them from partial and shifting vantage points. The form of the novel enacts its argument that history is not a clean, linear progression but a messy, fragmented and contested experience.

V. *KAALAPAANI* AND THE PANOPTIC ISLAND

The Cellular Jail stands at the physical and symbolic centre of the novel's colonial landscape. Khan's description of a group of prisoners being marched up the hill to the jail captures both its material reality and its psychological reach:

> A steady whisper extended through the crowd as the prisoners frogmarched up the hill to the jail, a mat rolled on each head and an iron bowl on each mat. Too many who watched had never stopped living it, the climb to the hill's summit to one of the 693 cells, the days and nights creeping from one end to the next, 13½ x 7, a smallness buried deep in the folds of the brain, where it grew, oh it grew. Then the sound of the heavy grill door as it slammed shut, and the three-step snap of a latch system to puzzle even the niftiest thief. Equally dreadful was the unsnap, for then it might be the jailor, the terrible Cillian, who was born to never die. And even before all of this, at the entrance to the jail, the high wall garlanded with manacles, shackles, iron belts and implements of torture impossible to name, each warped into figures more gruesome than the next. They could not forget the day this sight was first encountered, when the science of bondage dangled inches ahead: to pass

> through the gates meant never return the same. (Khan 20)

Several features of this passage repay attention. The first is the position of the observers. The scene is witnessed by a crowd, many of whom "had never stopped living it". The jail is not only a place where some people are confined. It is a memory that organises the consciousness of an entire settlement, including those who have been released or were never imprisoned in it. In Foucauldian terms, the panoptic effect has escaped the walls of the building and become a condition of island life.

The second is the precision of the measurements. The number of cells and the dimensions of each cell, "13½ x 7", are rendered with the exactitude of an administrative report. Yet the passage immediately converts measurement into experience: the cell becomes "a smallness buried deep in the folds of the brain, where it grew, oh it grew". The repetition breaks the controlled syntax of the sentence, and the reader feels the confinement as an expanding interior pressure rather than a fixed quantity. Khan here dramatises the gap between the colonial archive, which records the cell in feet, and the prisoner's memory, which records it as a growing dread.

The third is the phrase "the science of bondage". The manacles, shackles and iron belts displayed at the entrance are not merely instruments of restraint. They are presented as the products of knowledge, refined, classified and exhibited, and that is precisely the point. The colonial jail is a rational institution, built according to a theory of reform and administered by trained officials. Its cruelty is not a lapse from reason but an application of it. This is the convergence that Mignolo identifies between modernity and coloniality, and that Foucault locates in the history of the prison. The display at the gate also performs a pedagogical function: it teaches the incoming prisoner, before any punishment has been applied, what can be done to his body.

The fourth is the figure of the jailer Cillian, "who was born to never die". The phrase mythologises him in the imagination of the prisoners, and it anticipates the novel's larger argument. Khan has noted that Cillian is based on a historical figure and that the character reappears later in the narrative (Girmay). He embodies the persistence of the system rather than of any individual: whoever holds the keys, the apparatus of the jail remains. In this sense he is the human face of coloniality, the official who survives changes of regime because the regime depends on functionaries of his kind.

The jail's architecture also illuminates the novel's treatment of the islands as a whole. The panopticon isolates individuals so that they can be observed and corrected one by one. The archipelago, a scatter of islands separated from the mainland by hundreds of kilometres of open sea, reproduces that logic at the scale of geography. The sea itself functions as a wall, and the mainland, invisible beyond the horizon, functions as the unseen authority whose judgement has determined each prisoner's fate. *Kaalapaani* is the panopticon writ large: a space in which exile is total, communication is controlled and the prisoner is reduced to a number in a ledger kept somewhere else.

Yet the novel never lets this landscape become merely a prison. Khan consistently juxtaposes the cruelty of the settlement with the beauty of the islands, their forests, reefs, birds and light. This paradox is central to her vision. The islands are not intrinsically a hell. They are made into one by the uses to which power puts them, and the persistence of their beauty is a reminder that another relation to the place, older than the jail and possibly outlasting it, remains imaginable. The landscape thus functions as a protagonist in its own right, a witness to the violence enacted upon it and a source of the novel's tentative hope.

VI. PRISONER 218 D: THE BODY AND MEMORY AS SITES OF RESISTANCE

If Zee's shot is the novel's emblem of spontaneous resistance, Prisoner 218 D is its emblem of sustained resistance under conditions of total control. Khan has explained that the "D" on her tag stands for "dangerous", and that although she originally gave the character a name, she later removed it (Girmay). This decision is among the most significant formal choices in the novel. To name her would have been to rescue her, to restore an individuality that the colonial system had stripped away. To leave her unnamed is to keep the reader aware of that stripping, and of the many women prisoners whom the archive never named at all.

Here Spivak's argument becomes pertinent. The subaltern woman, Spivak contends, is caught between colonial and nationalist discourses, each of which claims to speak for her and neither of which allows her to speak for herself (Spivak). The heroic martyrology of the Cellular Jail has largely been a male martyrology, centred on the political prisoners whose names now adorn its memorial. A woman political prisoner sits uneasily within that story. Her transportation carried a specific social and sexual stigma, and her suffering does not fit easily into the narrative of masculine sacrifice through which the nation has commemorated the jail. Khan does not claim to give Prisoner 218 D a voice that history denied her. Rather, she writes the denial into the character, so that the reader encounters her through the very mark of her effacement.

Within these constraints, the novel shows the prisoner waging a war on her jailers with the only resources that remain to her: her body and her memory. Her body, which the jail seeks to discipline through labour, deprivation and punishment, becomes a site of refusal. Her memory, which the jail seeks to erase through isolation and repetition, becomes a refuge in which an earlier self and an earlier world can be preserved. The novel thus distinguishes between two kinds of power. The power of the jail is spatial and visual: it confines and observes. The prisoner's counter-power is temporal: it remembers, and in remembering it insists on a continuity of selfhood that the institution cannot reach.

This emphasis on memory as resistance links Prisoner 218 D to the novel's broader historiographic project. What the prisoner does in her cell, holding on to a past the system wishes to obliterate, Khan does in her novel, holding on to a history that official narratives have discarded. The character is therefore not only a subject of the novel but a figure for its method. Her number is the colonial archive's version of her. The novel's account of her inner life is the counter-archive that fiction makes possible.

VII. CHANGING MASTERS: THE JAPANESE OCCUPATION AND THE CONTINUITY OF COLONIALITY

The Japanese occupation of March 1942 is the turning point of the novel. Had the narrative followed the logic of nationalist history, it might have presented the departure of the British as a liberation, or at least as an opening onto one. Bose's later visit and the nominal transfer of the islands to the Provisional Government of Free India would seem to support such a reading. Instead, the novel shows the occupation as bringing what one reviewer calls "a new malice" ("Book Review"). Zee is forced to flee, and Nomi and those who remain must negotiate a dangerous mesh of alliances and betrayals with an occupier who is at once a fellow Asian power, a self-proclaimed liberator and a military regime prepared to torture and kill.

This is the novel's sharpest statement of the article's central thesis: oppression, whatever the identity of the oppressor, operates on a systemic level, and the struggle of the colonised is not against a single coloniser but against the enduring system of coloniality itself. The Japanese do not dismantle the colonial order on the islands. They occupy it. The jail remains a jail. The apparatus of surveillance is turned against new suspects. The categories of loyalty and disloyalty are redrawn, but the logic that divides the population into the trusted and the suspect, the useful and the disposable, is unchanged. Maldonado-Torres's dictum that coloniality survives colonialism (243) finds here an almost literal illustration: the colonial power departs, and coloniality stays.

The historical record of the occupation confirms the novel's darkness. The Homfreyganj killings of January 1944, in which forty-four civilians accused of espionage were shot, took place shortly after Bose's visit and at a time when the islands were formally under the authority of the Provisional Government. The episode reveals the gap between the rhetoric of liberation and the practice of rule, and it exemplifies what Mbembe calls necropower: the sovereign right to determine who will live and who will die, exercised under the cover of a political language that promises freedom (Mbembe 40). The novel's attention to fear, suspicion and summary violence during the occupation allows readers to feel this gap from the perspective of those who lived within it.

Fanon's assertion that colonialism is "violence in its natural state" (61) also acquires a particular force in this context. Under the British, colonial violence on the islands had been routinised and bureaucratised, embedded in regulations, ledgers and architecture. Under the Japanese, especially as the war turned against them, it became more openly arbitrary. The novel therefore shows two faces of the same coloniality: the disciplinary face, in which violence is rationalised and concealed within institutions, and the necropolitical face, in which it appears without disguise. The transition from one to the other is not a movement from colonialism to freedom but a movement between modes of the same domination.

The novel's refusal of a simple binary has a further implication. It denies the reader the comfort of choosing a side. The British are not redeemed by the cruelty of the Japanese, and the Japanese are not excused by their anti-Western rhetoric. Nor does the nationalist movement, whose symbolic victories are associated with the islands in Indian memory, escape implication, since its alliance with Japan coincided with the suffering of island civilians. In this sense the novel mirrors the decolonial critique that the legacy of colonialism is not a simple dichotomy between coloniser and colonised but a convoluted and even enigmatic network of power relations, in which the colonised may be drawn into complicity and liberators may become new oppressors.

VIII. THE LOCAL BORNS AND THE INHERITANCE OF EXILE

Nomi, Zee and Aye belong to a generation that did not choose exile but was born into it. As Local Borns, they are neither mainland Indians nor Indigenous islanders. They are the children of the penal settlement, raised in the shadow of a jail that their parents knew from the inside. Their

position gives the novel a third axis of experience, alongside the prisoner and the occupier: the experience of those who inherit a history of violence without having lived through its originating moment.

Hirsch's notion of postmemory is useful here. Hirsch describes how the children of survivors of collective trauma inherit experiences they did not live through, transmitted so deeply through stories, images and behaviours that they seem to constitute memories in their own right (Hirsch 5). The Local Borns of Khan's novel occupy precisely this position. The crowd watching the prisoners march up the hill includes those who "had never stopped living it", and the children of the settlement absorb that unending experience through their parents' silences, fears and habits. The Cellular Jail is part of their inheritance even before it becomes part of their experience.

Yet the novel does not present the Local Borns only as the passive heirs of trauma. They are also the generation that confronts it. When the Japanese arrive, it is Zee who fires the first shot, and it is Nomi who must survive what follows. The children are drawn into history as actors, and their choices, however constrained, are their own. In this sense the novel suggests that the "generation after" is not condemned to repeat the experiences of its parents. By confronting the silences it has inherited, it can begin to break the cycle of subjugation, or at least to name it. The novel itself, addressed to readers who have largely forgotten the islands, extends this postmemorial labour beyond the fiction.

IX. CONCLUSION

The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali is a novel about a place that history has used and then forgotten. Khan presents the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as a crucible of coloniality, a bounded space in which the techniques of domination were concentrated, tested and passed from one regime to another. The penal settlement, the Cellular Jail and the Japanese occupation are not, in her telling, discrete episodes in a progressive national story. They are successive configurations of a single enduring system, in which the identity of the ruler changes while the logic of rule persists.

The novel's achievement lies in the way it makes this argument through form as well as content. Its fragmented, multi-voiced structure reflects the fragmented experience of those on the margins of history. Its opening, built on a forgotten footnote about a boy and a hen, reverses the official hierarchy of historical significance. Its unnamed woman prisoner writes the archive's silence into the heart of the story. Its depiction of the Japanese occupation refuses the binary of coloniser and liberator on which nationalist memory depends. And its attention to the island-born children shows how colonial violence is inherited across generations, and how it might be confronted.

Khan's explicit scepticism towards official archives, and her decision to set personal memory against documented history, align the novel with the central commitments of decolonial thought. Like Quijano and Maldonado-Torres, she recognises that coloniality outlives colonialism. Like Foucault, she shows how power works through architecture and visibility as well as through force. Like Spivak, she is wary of claiming to speak for those whom history silenced, and she makes that wariness part of her art. The result is a novel that functions as both a record and a refuge: a record of lives the archive failed to keep, and a refuge in which those lives can be remembered.

In this sense the "miracle" of the title is the miracle of fiction itself. Where the archive offers numbers, Khan offers names, or, where names cannot honestly be given, the knowledge of their absence. Where national memory offers a comfortable history, she offers an uncomfortable one. And where the system of coloniality seeks to make its subjects forget, the novel insists on remembering. It thereby performs, in the space of literature, a decolonisation of history that the islands themselves are still waiting for.

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Repetition and Feminist Agency in Selected Contemporary African Women's Poetry

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Abstract— *Repetition is a prominent formal feature in the poetry of Warsan Shire, Safia Elhillo, Koleka Putuma, and Amaka Azuike. Its recurrence across their works, however, does not indicate a uniform aesthetic or feminist politics. This paper comparatively examines the distinct ideological and experiential functions of repetition in Shire's "What We Own," Elhillo's "Infibulation Study," Putuma's "No Easter Sunday for Queers," and Azuike's "Invisible." It argues that repetition produces four related but formally differentiated modes of feminist agency: testimonial agency in Shire, corporeal-linguistic agency in Elhillo, interrogative and counter-archival agency in Putuma, and recognitional agency in Azuike. In "What We Own," the refrain "is not mine" converts familial dispossession into a structure of collective mourning and remembrance. In "Infibulation Study," repeated anatomical naming confronts euphemism and makes prohibited knowledge about the female body speakable. In "No Easter Sunday for Queers," anaphoric questions, reiterated biblical images, and recurring paternal address transform religious authority into an object of queer feminist interrogation. In "Invisible," repeated declarations of existence accumulate presence against the social erasure of women's experiences and labour. Drawing on gynocriticism and postmodern feminism, the paper demonstrates that repetition does not possess an inherent feminist meaning. Its political significance emerges from the relationship among formal recurrence, the experience represented, the speaker's position, and the structure of power confronted. The comparison therefore challenges device-centred stylistic readings that merely identify repetition without explaining what it accomplishes. The paper concludes that contemporary African women's poetry employs recurring language as a dynamic means of remembering loss, breaking bodily silence, confronting authority, and demanding recognition.*

Keywords— ***repetition, feminist agency, poetry, gynocriticism, postmodern feminism***

Introduction: Beyond Identifying Repetition

Repetition is among the most recognisable features of poetic language. A word, phrase, syntactic construction, sound, image, question, or line may recur to produce rhythm, emphasis, cohesion, memory, emotional intensity, or structural unity. In politically engaged poetry, repetition or recurrence may also imitate the persistence of violence, strengthen collective testimony, challenge prohibitions, transform private experience into public speech, or demand that readers confront what dominant discourse attempts to ignore. This paper, therefore, aims to comparatively explain how repetition produces different forms of feminist agency in selected poets.

Stylistic criticism can nevertheless reduce repetition to a label. A poem may be described as employing anaphora, refrain, parallelism, or lexical recurrence without adequately explaining why the repeated element matters. Identification becomes mistaken for interpretation and the more productive question becomes what social, emotional, epistemological, or political work does repetition perform?

This question is especially important in a comparative study such as this. Warsan Shire, Safia Elhillo, Koleka Putuma, and Amaka Azuike all employ repetition, but their poetry emerges from different national, cultural, religious, diasporic, sexual, and aesthetic locations. Recurrence consequently assumes different meanings in the poets' works.

Shire's poetry is shaped by migration, familial loss, sexual violence, traumatic memory, refugee experience, and unstable belonging. Her repetitions frequently create testimonial patterns through which individual losses become collective histories. Elhillo places greater pressure upon language itself, particularly the vocabulary through which the female body, diaspora, ancestry, and cultural violence can be named. Her repetition breaks prohibitions and establishes a counter-language of female anatomy.

Putuma's poetry, in turn, brings Black queer identity into confrontation with Christianity, heteropatriarchy, post-apartheid violence, and social erasure. Her recurring questions and biblical images acquire the cadence of public interrogation and political performance. Azuike's comparatively accessible poetry employs repetition to make women's ordinary experiences, labour, emotional lives, and social presence recognisable.

Existing scholarship provides important foundations for examining the poets' stylistic practices. Iqbal and Anwar demonstrate how Shire's diction, imagery, syntax, and repetition connect individual experience with wider questions of gender, displacement, and cultural identity (93–98). Studies of Elhillo similarly emphasise the relationship between poetic form and diasporic identity. Hussein and Salman examine how her linguistic choices, imagery, and structures articulate identity, displacement, and linguistic negotiation (1412–16), while Oluwapelumi, Onwuka, and Akujobi identify repetition and silence as important means through which Elhillo represents diasporic memory and fractured belonging (764–66). Scholarship on Putuma pays particular attention to the relationship between formal experimentation, historical memory, and political resistance. Phalafala identifies memory as the product of complex historical processes in *Collective Amnesia* (251), while Mpiti shows that Putuma's engagement with racial discrimination, homophobia, femicide, spirituality, and historical injustice is inseparable from the collection's formal diversity (2–4). Guarducci situates Putuma's poetry and performance within processes of political and epistemological "unlearning" (155–59), whereas Brusselaers demonstrates that Putuma's lists, footnotes, interviews, blank spaces, and other non-lyric forms challenge established systems of knowledge and authority (86–89). Although these studies establish the political significance of the poets' formal practices, they do not comparatively explain how repetition produces different forms of feminist agency across the four poets examined here.

This paper examines four poems: Shire's "What We Own" from *Our Men Do Not Belong to Us* (2014), Elhillo's "Infibulation Study" from *Girls That Never Die* (2022), Putuma's "No Easter Sunday for Queers" from *Collective Amnesia* (2017), and Azuike's "Invisible" from *Gentle Giants* (2008). The poems are not presented as comprehensive representatives of their authors' entire bodies of work. They are selected because each makes repetition central to the construction of a particular feminist voice.

The paper argues that repetition produces four distinct modes of agency. In Shire, it becomes testimonial and memorial: the recurring "is not mine" acknowledges dispossession while preserving absent relatives in language. In Elhillo, repetition becomes corporeal and linguistic: the repeated naming of the clitoris refuses the euphemism through which female genital cutting is concealed. In Putuma, it becomes interrogative and counter-archival: recurring questions and religious images make Christianity, paternal authority, and social forgetting answerable to queer female experience. In Azuike, it becomes recognitional: the repeated "I exist" accumulates presence against the normalisation and erasure of women's lives.

Gynocriticism provides one framework for understanding this formal diversity. Showalter defines gynocriticism as a form of feminist criticism concerned with woman as the producer of textual meaning and with the history, themes, genres, and structures of women's writing (25). It therefore foregrounds women as producers of literary meaning and treats female body, emotional, sexual, familial, and social experiences as sources of knowledge.

Postmodern feminism complements this perspective by resisting a universal conception of womanhood and drawing attention to difference, instability, and the discursive production of identity. Butler's argument that gender is constituted through the repeated stylisation of the body is especially relevant to an examination of repetition and feminist agency (*Gender Trouble* 33). Her later explanation of materialisation as a process produced through the reiteration of regulatory norms further clarifies how repeated discourse gives apparently natural authority to biological sex classifications (*Bodies That Matter* 2).

Repetition as Form, Memory, and Political Action

In ordinary communication, unnecessary repetition may be regarded as redundancy. Poetry transforms recurrence into an organised formal resource. Repeated elements return with differences produced by context. A phrase does not necessarily mean exactly the same thing each time it appears because intervening lines alter the reader's understanding of it.

A refrain, for example, can accumulate emotional weight. Its first appearance may establish a proposition; subsequent appearances may expose consequences, intensify grief, create irony, or transform an individual statement into a collective pattern. Repetition therefore operates temporally: each recurrence carries the memory of its previous uses.

This temporal quality makes repetition especially suited to poems about trauma, loss, violence, and social erasure. Traumatic experiences may return involuntarily through memory. Mourning repeatedly confronts absence. Cultural prohibitions must be challenged more than once because they are sustained through habitual language. Social invisibility may require persistent declarations of presence.

Repetition can also create community. A recurring phrase may sound like a chant, prayer, testimony, slogan, call-and-response pattern, or spoken-word refrain. It can move the poetic voice beyond individual introspection towards collective address.Yet repetition can reproduce oppression as well as resist it. Gendered roles become naturalised through repeated performance; religious or cultural prohibitions acquire authority through constant restatement; and stereotypes persist because they are circulated as familiar truths. Feminist repetition may consequently operate as counter-repetition. It can appropriate an established word, phrase, ritual, or form and redirect its significance.

Butler's account of performativity is pertinent because gendered identities are sustained through repeated social norms rather than simply expressed from an inner essence. She describes gender as the "repeated stylization of the body," through which socially regulated acts acquire the appearance of natural identity (*Gender Trouble* 33). Because these norms depend upon repetition, their reiteration also creates possibilities for variation, displacement, and resistance. A recurring act or expression can consequently be performed differently, exposing the instability of the norm it appears to reproduce.

The selected poets employ such transformative recurrence. Shire repeats possessive language until possession becomes impossible. Elhillo repeats an anatomical word that cultural discourse refuses to use. Putuma repeats Christian images while redirecting them towards excluded queer bodies. Azuike repeats a simple statement of existence until social invisibility appears ethically indefensible. Repetition therefore participates in the production of feminist knowledge. It teaches the reader how to recognise a pattern, remember what has been excluded, and reconsider familiar language.

Warsan Shire: "Is Not Mine" and Testimonial Agency

"What We Own" begins with an immediate contradiction between its title and its content. "What We Own" promises an account of possession, continuity, or security, while the poem repeatedly removes people from the speaker's claim as excerpted below:

> Our men do not belong to us.
>
> Even my own father left one afternoon, is not mine.
>
> My brother is in prison, is not mine. My uncles, they
>
> go back home and they are shot in the head, are not mine. (1–4)

The phrase "is not mine" functions as a refrain of dispossession. Each relative is named through a familial and possessive relationship—"my own father," "my brother," "my uncles"—and then linguistically withdrawn. Possession and loss occupy the same sentence.The grammar is deliberately uncomfortable. "My own father left one afternoon, is not mine" appears syntactically compressed. The phrase "is not mine" does not integrate smoothly with the preceding clause. This interruption corresponds to the disruption of familial continuity.

The repetition creates an accumulating structure. The father's departure, the brother's imprisonment, and the uncles' deaths are not isolated experiences. Each recurrence adds another form of absence to a shared history.The refrain nevertheless performs more than loss. To say "is not mine" requires naming the person who has been taken away. Repetition preserves the absent men within the speaker's testimony. The phrase acknowledges that they cannot be securely possessed, but it refuses their disappearance from memory.This tension produces testimonial agency. The women may not control the political, social, and personal forces that remove men from their lives, but they control the poetic record of those losses. Their speech becomes an archive.

The title of Shire's collection, *Our Men Do Not Belong to Us*, extends the refrain beyond the individual poem. "Our" creates a collective female position, while "do not belong" exposes the instability of relational possession. The women's shared experience is defined partly through the recurring absence of fathers, brothers,

uncles, lovers, and other men. This does not mean that the men are always the direct sources of oppression. They are also victims of imprisonment, political violence, drugs, illness, and social instability. Shire's feminist analysis demonstrates how public crisis enters women's intimate and emotional lives.

The gendered consequences become clearer when men reject women for carrying too much grief:

> Then the men we try to love say
>
> we carry too much loss, wear too much black,
>
> are too heavy to be around, much too sad to love.
>
> Then they leave, and we mourn them too. (6–9)

The repeated structures of "too much" represent women's mourning as emotional excess. The women are expected to endure loss without allowing grief to affect their desirability."Then" also functions repetitively. First, women lose relatives through violence, separation, and imprisonment. Then they are criticised for carrying those losses. Then the men who criticise them leave, creating another absence. The sequence exposes the cumulative nature of gendered emotional labour.

The closing statement, "we mourn them too," incorporates abandonment into the existing archive. Mourning expands to include men who voluntarily withdraw because women's grief makes them uncomfortable.The poem later presents women sitting at kitchen tables and counting:

> on our fingers the ones who died,
>
> those who left, and the others who were taken by the police,
>
> or by drugs
>
> or by illness
>
> or by other women? (12–16)

The repeated "or" produces an open catalogue of causes. Political violence, criminalisation, addiction, illness, migration, and intimate departure become different routes towards the same experience of absence.The catalogue does not establish equivalence among the causes. Being shot, imprisoned, dying from illness, and leaving for another woman are not identical events. Their conjunction shows how women's domestic memory must accommodate losses produced by several overlapping social structures.The kitchen table, associated conventionally with nourishment and family gathering, becomes a memorial space. Women count with their fingers, turning their bodies into instruments of record. The repeated act of counting confronts the magnitude of loss while acknowledging that the archive remains incomplete.

Showalter's gynocritical emphasis on woman as the producer of textual meaning clarifies this transformation (25). Shire relocates political crisis into domestic conversation, mourning, memory, and emotional labour. Women's grief becomes an important method of understanding the consequences of conflict. Repetition creates a collective voice. The poem moves from "my" relatives to "we" and "our" experiences. Individual bereavement becomes part of a broader female testimony.

Postmodern feminism prevents the collective "we" from being interpreted as a universal category of women. The losses represented arise within particular diasporic, familial, racialised, and conflict-related conditions. The poem creates solidarity through shared mourning without claiming that every woman experiences dispossession in the same way.The refrain "is not mine" consequently produces a double movement. It records the inability to possess or protect intimate relationships, while the act of repetition preserves those relationships against complete disappearance. Shire's agency is testimonial: language cannot restore the absent, but it can remember them.

SafiaElhillo: Anatomical Repetition and Corporeal-Linguistic Agency

In Elhillo's "Infibulation Study," repetition confronts a different form of loss. The problem is not initially the physical absence of relatives but the cultural absence of adequate language for female anatomy and genital cutting. The poem begins by repeatedly naming what surrounding discourse refuses to discuss:

> I will proceed from this point without euphemism.
>
> The question is about the clitoris. "I
>
> call my cousins in turn. I ask the question about the clitoris. I will begin
>
> by writing a sentence about the clitoris" (3–6).

The repeated word "clitoris" immediately becomes conspicuous. Anatomical vocabulary is placed at the centre of a poem about a practice surrounded by euphemism and inherited silence. Each recurrence performs a different action. The speaker identifies a question, calls her cousins, asks about the body, and begins writing. Repetition creates a sequence of feminist inquiry moving from thought through conversation to textual record.

The phrase "We do not talk about this" (7) identifies the prohibition that the poem violates. The

statement attempts to close discussion, but the repeated anatomical word has already entered the poem several times. The prohibition is made visible at the moment of its failure.

Unlike Shire's "is not mine," which acknowledges an absence that cannot be reversed, Elhillo's repetition actively alters the conditions of speech. A word treated as unspeakable becomes increasingly speakable through recurrence.The poem exposes the ideology of euphemism: "The Arabic, cut by euphemism. We do not use the word cut. The word we / use, left intact, is purified" (12–13). "Purified" replaces the vocabulary of bodily injury with the language of moral improvement. It represents cutting as the removal of impurity rather than the alteration of a girl's body.The contrast between "cut" and "purified" demonstrates that naming is political. Different words do not simply describe the same procedure neutrally. They determine whether it appears as violence, tradition, virtue, injury, or moral preparation.

Elhillo responds through counter-repetition. Cultural discourse repeats the vocabulary of purification; the poem repeatedly says "clitoris." The direct anatomical term competes with the euphemism for control over the body's meaning.Cixous's call for women to write themselves and reclaim their bodies through language helps illuminate this strategy (880). Female anatomy enters literary discourse through a woman's deliberate refusal of linguistic prohibition. Elhillo's bodily writing nevertheless remains culturally and linguistically situated: her speaker negotiates Arabic, English, diaspora, family, and intergenerational memory. Female anatomy enters literary discourse through a woman's deliberate refusal of linguistic prohibition. However, Elhillo's bodily writing remains culturally and linguistically situated. Her speaker negotiates Arabic, English, diaspora, family, and intergenerational memory.

The repeated phrase "I will begin" also deserves attention. Beginning appears difficult because the speaker does not possess a complete account of what happened to the women in her family. Each proposed beginning encounters correction, silence, or uncertainty.The poem uses "False" to interrupt assumptions about cousins, mothers, and grandmothers. The word resembles the correction of a research hypothesis. The title "Infibulation Study" gives the poem the form of an inquiry whose data have been concealed.

Repetition therefore reveals both persistence and incompleteness. The speaker continues to ask even when she cannot reconstruct a complete female bodily history.The intergenerational dimension appears in questions about mothers and grandmothers. "We are never to ask" identifies silence as an inherited rule. Women share a bodily history while being prevented from knowing its details.Repeating "clitoris" becomes an archival act. It reopens questions about what happened, which terms justified it, who made decisions, and how bodily experience was transmitted or concealed.

The speaker distinguishes her own position through another recurring construction: "I was born & allowed / to mature uncut. I was born with a clitoris & remain uncut. I was born / unnamed & upon arrival was given my orders" (13–15). "I was born" initially suggests openness and possibility. Each repetition is followed by a social qualification: she was "allowed" to remain uncut, was named, and was "given" orders.

The passive verbs expose authority located outside the child. Remaining uncut is described not as an unquestioned bodily right but as something permitted by others. The girl's identity enters a system of regulation from birth.The repetition of "I was born" consequently does not celebrate a purely natural self-existing outside culture. It stages the encounter between bodily existence and social authority.

Gynocriticism clarifies the poem's corporeal-linguistic agency. Women become the investigators, sources, interlocutors, and producers of terminology through which female bodily experience is interpreted. The poem refuses to leave anatomical meaning entirely within inherited patriarchal or euphemistic discourse. Postmodern feminism reveals how "purified" participates in the construction of an acceptable gendered body. Purity is not an objective physical state. It is a moral classification attached to the body through repeated cultural language.

Elhillo's anatomical repetition therefore produces a different feminist agency from Shire's refrain. Shire repeats language to preserve absent persons and accumulated loss. Elhillo repeats language to break a prohibition and recover bodily knowledge. Her agency is corporeal and linguistic: the woman assumes authority over the words through which her body and female genealogy become knowable.

Koleka Putuma: Interrogative Repetition and Queer Counter-Memory

Putuma's "No Easter Sunday for Queers" employs repetition through questions, biblical images, pronouns, documentary forms, and direct address. Its recurrence has a pronounced spoken-word cadence and transforms personal uncertainty into public interrogation.

Putuma's integration of personal memory, political history, performance, and unconventional textual

forms has received considerable critical attention. Brusselaers observes that the non-lyric elements of *Collective Amnesia* allow Putuma to question established systems of knowledge and literary authority (86–89). Guarducci likewise connects Putuma's poetry and performances with a process of unlearning inherited colonial, racial, patriarchal, and heteronormative assumptions (155–59). Mpiti identifies racial discrimination, homophobia, femicide, spirituality, and historical injustice among the collection's major concerns (2–4). The present analysis builds upon these perspectives by concentrating specifically on how interrogative repetition produces queer feminist agency in "No Easter Sunday for Queers."

The poem examines Black queer female identity within Christianity, family, Cape Town's divided geography, and the threat of homophobic violence. Religious language is not simply rejected. It is repeated, appropriated, and redirected.The poem's recurring biblical images include the cross, crucifixion, Calvary, tomb, stone, gospel, Jesus, Easter, Judas, Pharisees, and the Holy Ghost. These images conventionally sustain Christian narratives of salvation and sacred memory. Putuma makes them answerable to queer suffering.

The central question asks why there is "no Easter Sunday for queer bodies" when lesbians are "crucified like Christ" (134-35). The comparison recurs because the social contradiction remains unresolved. Christianity annually commemorates Christ's bodily suffering while queer women subjected to violence may remain unnamed or unrecorded. Repetition performs a counter-liturgical function. Easter returns every year through religious ritual; Putuma makes queer crucifixion returns through poetic language. Her recurrence creates an alternative ritual of remembrance.The poem's questions concerning the Holy Ghost provide one form of this interrogative agency:

> I wonder if the Holy Ghost would still come upon us if praise and worship were at the Sugar hut this morning
>
> I wonder if the Holy Ghost is picky about the bodies he comes upon
>
> I wonder about the Holy Ghost's sexuality
>
> I wonder why the Holy Ghost comes upon people without their consent. (144-147)

The anaphoric "I wonder" establishes an accumulating rhythm. Each question extends the previous one and places sacred language under ethical scrutiny.The speaker asks whether divine presence discriminates among bodies, whether queer spaces can become sites of worship, whether the Spirit possesses sexuality, and how religious language addresses consent. The questions expose contradictions between institutional sexual regulation and sacred narratives of bodily possession.

"I wonder" may initially sound tentative, but repetition transforms tentativeness into pressure. The speaker's uncertainty becomes a method of interrogating doctrines presented as certain.The questions do not seek simple factual answers. They demonstrate that religious authority has failed to account for queer female experience. Repetition turns that failure into a public spectacle.

The poem's most personal pattern develops through the repeated address "Daddy" and the questions posed to the speaker's pastor-father:

> Daddy,
>
> If I were crucified
>
> And dumped in a tomb for three days
>
> And rose again as a headline
>
> Would you preach about me?(178–82)

"Daddy" identifies the addressee as both intimate parent and representative of religious authority. Its recurrence repeatedly brings institutional Christianity into the father-daughter relationship."Would you" reverses the normal direction of moral questioning. The pastor ordinarily interprets scripture, sin, acceptable sexuality, and religious belonging. The queer daughter now requires him to account for the consequences of those interpretations.

She asks whether he would preach about her, blame her sexuality for the murder, condemn the perpetrators, identify himself with Judas, or remain silent. Each question restricts the possibility of an easy answer. Repetition creates accountability. The father cannot respond to only one question while ignoring the pattern. "Would you preach about me?" returns because the poem's central concern is not only death but remembrance.The phrase "rose again as a headline" connects biblical resurrection with documentary visibility. The murdered lesbian returns briefly as news, but a headline cannot provide the sustained cultural memory produced by an annual religious ritual.

Putuma's poem responds by becoming a counter-archive. It records headlines, deaths, locations, questions, and religious contradictions that dominant institutions may fail to preserve. The recurring crucifixion imagery brings queer women into a sacred narrative from which they have been excluded. The murdered lesbian becomes a feminised Christ figure, while the dump site becomes a contemporary Calvary.

Postmodern feminism illuminates the destabilisation of sacred and social categories. Christ and lesbian, saviour and sinner, sacred and profane, daughter and queer subject occupy the same figurative field. The poem reveals that their assumed opposition is maintained through institutional interpretation rather than inherent incompatibility.

Gynocriticism foregrounds the queer daughter as a producer of religious and literary meaning. She does not accept the position of an object interpreted by her pastor-father. Through recurring questions, she becomes a counter-preacher. Putuma's repetition therefore produces interrogative and counter-archival agency. Unlike Shire's mournful refrain or Elhillo's anatomical naming, Putuma repeats in order to confront authority and build a public memorial practice. Her questions convert religious discourse into evidence against the institutions that exclude queer bodies.

Amaka Azuike: "I Exist" and Recognitional Agency

Azuike's "Invisible" employs the most direct repetition among the four poems. Its speaker repeatedly declares, "I exist," and intensifies the assertion through "I insist that I exist."The apparent simplicity of the statement contains a significant paradox. Existence is normally a condition requiring no verbal defense. The speaker's need to repeat it indicates that social recognition has failed.The poem begins: "That's me! / But wait for a minute I exist!" (1-2), the exclamations create urgency. "That's me!" identifies a visible subject, while "I exist!" confronts the observer's failure to acknowledge her.The speaker continues:

I exist in the shadows of dark desolate places,

I exist beneath drab trees, shedding their leaves

in joyful celebration of expected ones.

I exist within dreary, old buildings

earmarked for demolition. (3-7)

Each repetition locates the speaker within another devalued environment. Shadows, drab trees, and buildings marked for destruction remain materially present but socially neglected.The repeated "I exist" creates continuity across these spaces. Society may treat the woman as marginal or disposable, but her voice links each location to a stable claim of presence.The poem later declares:

I insist that I exist!

I exist in the delicate contours of a woman

Nursing a broken heart.

I exist in the lacuna of untold stories

And unfulfilled dreams. (8-12)

"Insist" transforms repetition into conscious resistance. The speaker no longer merely states a fact; she confronts the conditions that make its assertion necessary. The phrase "lacuna of untold stories" connects social invisibility to literary and historical representation. A lacuna is a gap in a text or record. Women exist within the spaces produced when their experiences are not narrated. By repeatedly speaking, the poem begins to fill that gap. The woman becomes both the subject of omission and the producer of a counter-narrative. Azuike's repetition differs formally from Elhillo's anatomical recurrence. Elhillo repeatedly names a prohibited body part to make suppressed knowledge speakable. Azuike repeats the first-person subject itself. Her concern is the recognition of the person who's bodily and emotional presence have been overlooked.

The poem subsequently locates the speaker within Nigerian urban life: "I exist in the crowded bus / Shuttling from Agege to Mushin (16-17).The crowded bus intensifies the paradox of invisibility. The speaker occupies public space among other people, but proximity does not guarantee recognition. She is visible as one passenger while remaining socially unseen."I am right beside you, almost surrounding you" (18) transfers responsibility to the observer. The speaker's presence is not distant or rare. It is pervasive.

The simile of a mountain peak covered by mist clarifies the difference between invisibility and non-existence. The mist conceals the mountain without reducing its magnitude. Similarly, social neglect does not determine the woman's actual value.The poem ends by appealing to conscience and insisting that the woman has "been there from the start." This conclusion gives repetition a historical dimension. Women's presence did not begin when it was finally recognised. It preceded recognition.

Gynocriticism illuminates Azuike's recovery of women's untold stories, emotional experiences, aspirations, and ordinary social participation. The female speaker does not wait for an external observer to validate her. She creates recognition through self-articulation. Postmodern feminism exposes invisibility as a discursive effect rather than a literal condition. The woman becomes "invisible" because social structures classify her labour, suffering, and presence as unimportant. Repetition interrupts that classification.

Azuike's agency is recognitional. Her repeated declaration does not primarily preserve loss, break anatomical silence, or interrogate religious authority. It accumulates presence and makes the ethical failure of social disregard visible.

Four Functions of Repetition

The comparison reveals that the four poets use repetition to produce different modes of feminist agency: "Shire: "is not mine". The repeated phrase records dispossession while preserving absent relatives in memory. Its primary function is testimonial and memorial. Elhillo: "clitoris." The recurring anatomical word confronts cultural euphemism and makes prohibited bodily knowledge speakable. Its primary function is corporeal and linguistic.

Putuma: "I wonder," "Would you" and "Daddy". The recurring questions and apostrophic address subject Christianity and paternal authority to queer feminist scrutiny. Their primary function is interrogative and counter-archival. Azuike: "I exist." The repeated declaration accumulates social presence and resists the erasure of women's emotional experience, labour, and historical participation. Its primary function is recognitional.These distinctions do not confine each poet to a single aesthetic or political mode. Shire's repetition can also affirm life; Elhillo's can preserve memory; Putuma's can express mourning; and Azuike's can challenge authority. The categories identify the dominant function of recurrence within the selected poems.

The comparison demonstrates why stylistic analysis must proceed beyond labelling. To state that all four poets employ repetition reveals only a superficial similarity. Their recurrences differ in grammatical form, tone, object, audience, and political purpose. Shire's refrain is grammatically negative: "not mine." It repeatedly acknowledges the removal of possession. Elhillo's repetition centres a noun: the anatomical object that euphemistic culture refuses to name. Putuma's recurrence is principally interrogative and vocative. "I wonder," "Would you," and "Daddy" creates questions and identifies the authority expected to answer them. Azuike's repetition is declarative. "I exist" makes an affirmative claim about the speaking subject.

The grammatical differences correspond to different relations of power. Shire's women cannot prevent loss but can record it. Elhillo's speaker confronts a linguistic prohibition by saying the forbidden word. Putuma's queer daughter reverses religious authority by asking the questions. Azuike's invisible woman responds to social disregard by repeatedly asserting herself. Repetition also constructs different audiences. Shire's collective "we" speaks among women who share experiences of loss while addressing readers who must witness their mourning. Elhillo's speaker calls cousins and reconstructs a female intergenerational conversation. Putuma addresses her pastor-father, Christianity, and a public performance audience. Azuike directly confronts the socially inattentive "you."

The four poems thus transform repetition into relational practice. Recurrence joins speaker, subject, community, and audience within a structure of memory or accountability.

Repetition, Gynocriticism, and Women's Production of Knowledge

Gynocriticism is valuable to the comparison because the selected poems do not merely represent women as objects of social experience. Their female speakers produce interpretations of loss, bodily regulation, religious exclusion, and invisibility. Shire transforms women's mourning into knowledge about the intimate consequences of conflict. The kitchen table and the act of counting become sites of social analysis.

Elhillo transforms female anatomy and intergenerational silence into a field of inquiry. Women call one another, ask questions, test assumptions, and create a vocabulary resistant to euphemism. Putuma transforms queer female experience into religious and political criticism. The daughter interprets crucifixion, resurrection, the Holy Ghost, and pastoral responsibility from the position of a body excluded by heteronormative Christianity. Azuike transforms ordinary female presence into an ethical demand. The invisible woman identifies social neglect and makes her experience the basis of a politics of recognition.

Repetition supports each act of knowledge production. It establishes patterns that dominant discourse might dismiss as isolated incidents. One departure could be interpreted as personal misfortune; repeated losses reveal a social condition. One use of an anatomical word could be dismissed as provocation; repeated naming establishes a counter-language. One question could be avoided; sustained questioning reveals institutional failure. One declaration of existence could be ignored; recurrence makes disregard ethically conspicuous.

Gynocriticism also helps explain why the poems locate knowledge in bodies, domestic spaces, relationships, emotions, and oral patterns. These locations have often been treated as secondary to official political or historical discourse. The poets show that they are among the principal sites through which power is experienced.

The female body remembers violence, the kitchen table records conflict, the queer daughter produces theology, and the crowded bus becomes a location of feminist recognition. Repetition gives these forms of knowledge duration and authority.

Postmodern Feminism, Difference, and Counter-Repetition

Postmodern feminism prevents the comparison from turning "African women" into a homogeneous category. The four poets occupy different cultural, national, diasporic, religious, and sexual positions. Their repetition responds to different structures of power. Shire's collective mourning emerges from conflict, migration, racialisation, and unstable family belonging. Elhillo's bodily language is shaped by Sudanese inheritance, Arabic euphemism, diaspora, and unequal relationships to genital cutting. Putuma's questions arise from Black queer life, Christianity, apartheid geography, and violence against lesbians in South Africa. Azuike's declarations emerge from ordinary Nigerian experiences of social neglect and unrecognised female presence.

The recurrence of repetition across the corpus should not be used to erase these differences. Formal similarity becomes critically valuable precisely because it enables the comparison of different functions. Postmodern feminism also illuminates counter-repetition. Gendered and sexual norms acquire authority through recurrence. Women are repeatedly told that they are too emotional, that respectable bodies must be purified or concealed, that queer desire is sinful, or that women's labour is natural and therefore unremarkable.

The poets respond by repeating differently. Shire turns the repeated production of loss into testimony. Elhillo replaces repeated euphemism with repeated anatomical directness. Putuma redirects recurring Christian rituals towards queer memory. Azuike answers habitual social neglect with habitual self-assertion.Their poetry demonstrates that recurrence is not necessarily conservative. A repeated form can expose, vary, parody, or resist the norm from which it emerges.

Repetition as Memory, Voice, and Agency

The selected poems establish a close relationship between repetition, memory, voice, and agency. Shire repeats because loss continues to return. Elhillo repeats because bodily knowledge has been suppressed. Putuma repeats because religious and social authorities have not answered. Azuike repeats because women remain unrecognised. In each case, recurrence responds to an unresolved condition. The poems cannot end the conflict, reverse bodily violence, resurrect murdered women, or guarantee recognition. Repetition registers persistence while refusing silence.

This refusal should not be mistaken for an uncomplicated triumph. Shire's absent men remain absent. Elhillo cannot reconstruct every mother's or grandmother's bodily history. Putuma's queer gods remain in their tombs. Azuike's need to insist upon existence reveals that recognition is still incomplete. Agency therefore does not mean total liberation from constraint. It means the capacity to interpret, testify, question, name, remember, and address others within conditions the speaker has not fully chosen.

The four poems demonstrate that formal agency may take several shapes. It may mourn rather than celebrate, repeat uncertainty rather than provide answers, or insist upon a fact that society continues to deny. Feminist agency is not restricted to confident declarations of independence. Repetition makes such qualified agency audible. It allows voice to return even when the structure of power remains unresolved.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of "What We Own," "Infibulation Study," "No Easter Sunday for Queers," and "Invisible" demonstrates that repetition has no fixed ideological function. Its feminist significance emerges from the relationship between recurring language and the experience it constructs.

Shire's refrain "is not mine" transforms familial dispossession into collective testimony. It acknowledges that conflict, imprisonment, death, illness, addiction, and abandonment have removed intimate relationships while preserving those relationships in women's memory. Elhillo's repeated "clitoris" confronts the euphemistic vocabulary that transforms cutting into purification. Recurrence makes female anatomy speakable and converts women's questioning into a form of bodily and intergenerational knowledge. Putuma's repeated "I wonder," "Would you," and "Daddy" turns religious uncertainty into sustained queer interrogation. Biblical recurrence becomes counter-liturgical remembrance for murdered lesbians excluded from Christian narratives of resurrection.Azuike's "I exist" accumulates presence against the social invisibility of women's bodies, emotional lives, labour, aspirations, and participation. Repetition becomes a recognitional demand addressed to the reader's conscience.

These four functions—testimonial, corporeal-linguistic, interrogative-counter-archival, and recognitional—demonstrate the formal diversity of contemporary African feminist poetry. What unites the poets is not a uniform style or universal account of womanhood. It is their transformation of recurring language into a means of confronting structures that produce loss, silence, exclusion, and erasure.

Gynocriticism clarifies how the poets make women's bodily, domestic, sexual, emotional, and social experiences sources of literary knowledge. Postmodern

feminism preserves the cultural and ideological differences among those experiences while explaining how repeated norms may be contested through altered repetition.

The paper's broader implication is methodological. Stylistic analysis should not conclude when it identifies a device. It must explain what the device accomplishes, for whom, against which form of power, and within what cultural and textual circumstances. Repetition preserves what has been lost in Shire, names what has been forbidden in Elhillo, questions what has been sanctified in Putuma, and affirms what has been overlooked in Azuike. Through these different operations, recurrence becomes not redundancy but feminist action.

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The Paradox of Freedom: Reimagining Partition in Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*

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Abstract— *This paper investigates how Chaman Nahal's Azadi offers a poignant canvas of the devastating and lasting effects of partition on individuals, communities, and shared cultural spaces in the Indian subcontinent. Through politics of religion and cartographic violence, the idea of the division of territory was executed insensibly, fracturing lived spaces, identity, memory, and belonging. The expectations, desires, and dreams of attaining freedom from British imperialism ultimately culminate in a paradoxical situation. Nahal underscores that partition is not simply a historical moment but a political quirk that accompanies displacement, violence, and commodification of the female body. The familiar landscapes, homes, neighbourhoods, and ancestral places transform into sites of displacement for Hindu-Sikh minorities in the western Punjab. The paper examines how this restructuring of borders produces experiences of exile, alienation, and economic and cultural loss. The decision imposed from above adversely affects ordinary people whose identities and social relationships were formed beyond region and religion. It further foregrounds how the vibrant socio-cultural thread of the Sialkot region is snapped by the departing British apparatus and emerging Indian and Pakistani regimes, causing communal conflict, bloodshed, and forced migration. The paper argues that Azadi illustrates that freedom comes with a deeply ambivalent condition, marked by enduring cost.*

Keywords— ***Partition, Communal Conflict, Borders, Maps, displacement, Loss.***

Introduction

Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*, a Sahitya Akademi Award-winning novel, was published in 1975. The novel primarily chronicles the theme of Partition, drawing on the experiences of the people affected by this miscalculated political decision, which was taken and executed within a very short period. The regions subject to division had their respective distinct linguistic and cultural identities and serve as the microcosm. The novel portrays the lives of people from the city of Sialkot inc the province of western Punjab in undivided Hindustan. The entire geographical territory is renowned for its vibrant culture and economic prosperity. Nahal's narrativization encompasses the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, and altogether weakening colonial grip and strengthening of the freedom movement in India. Under Gandhi's leadership the movement ensured that the country would gain independence without any kind of violence and bitterness among diverse communities, but the outcome was otherwise. It illustrates how the brewing tension and apprehension developing along religious lines shattered the cohesiveness between the Hindu and Muslim communities. The Muslim League's demand for a separate nation was supported by the Britishers, who always manipulated the vulnerability of human beings and ruled through the politics of 'divide and rule'. This paper aims to examine the irony of the hard-won independence, for which Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims sacrificed their lives together, but whose aftermath transformed the innocent people into an opinionated frenzied and hysterical mob. Ayesha Jalal explores the root of the Hindu-Muslim tension long before the idea of partition, though "The pre-eminent view of Indian nationalism has been that of an inclusionary,

accommodative, consensual and popular anti-colonial struggle" (Jalal 183). The common masses, living together for centuries without any visible distinction or prejudice, celebrating each other's festivals with mutual respect, turn belligerent and bloodthirsty over a couple of days. The novel underscores how communal coexistence, with shared language, culture, traditions, and regional identity, ceased to exist any longer with the declaration of freedom. Prior to Partition, despite separate communal schools and committees, peace and harmony among the people historically never got a turbulent turn; they always remained accommodating by prioritising their commonality and reciprocity.

Nahal paints a realistic and comprehensive picture, negotiating history from below by reconstructing the lives of the people with individual and shared memories and experiences. Private narratives of the individuals in the novel form a comprehensive and powerful canvas of the drastically changing times. Lala Kanshi Ram, a prosperous grain merchant having a shop in the main bazar of Sialkot, symbolises the settled middle class that established itself with industriousness and perseverance and want peace and stability so that their trade and business could flourished. This class holds resources, business, and good local connections, and unlike other people, they possess an ambivalent feeling for the Britishers. Lala Kanshi Ram, a representative of this class, has a deep faith in Gandhi's struggle for freedom, but simultaneously appreciates the British administration for its guaranteed law, order, justice, and public safety. This places him in a state of utter confusion. He neither wants the British to rule India nor agrees to their complete departure, as he fears crime, riots, and instability after their departure. For him "there indeed was no Raj like Angrez Raj" (Azadi 31). The idea of freedom seems to be problematic, as the undercurrent momentum for division of the nation, demanded and supported by the communal elites, is bound to unfold suffering for minorities. Bodh Prakash finds "the decision to partition India in the year of her independence was the outcome of a particular kind of political mobilization from the late 1930s. The stridency of Muslim League demands for the creation of a separate Muslim nation reached a crescendo by the 1940s" (Prakash 01). The novel is a critique of the inability of these elites to assess the situation. Irrespective of diverse religions, the people had their own distinct identities, but their worldview is firmly rooted in the shared idioms, interconnectedness and interdependence. The decision to divide the country on the sole basis of religion and not taking sensitive diversity into consideration highlights the callousness of the British withdrawal as well as the Indian and Pakistani political elites who take over the reign. The novel shows how the announcement of the partition begins reshaping negatively the centuries-old communal harmony along the line of the freshly imposed decision. Lala Kanshi Ram's anxiety is genuine, as the hasty commandment poses an existential threat, and this unprecedented incident in the subcontinent causes a feeling of paranoia and foreboding. Never had such occurrences happened in the known past; therefore, the common people remained unprepared for the impending catastrophe.

Azadi shows how national politics percolate into the calm and peaceful small cities, and its ripples are felt in the adjoining rural areas as well. The members of the Muslim League eagerly wait for the decision on Partition in their favour, and with the announcement by Mountbatten, the fringe elements are unleashed in connivance with the local administration, police, and political system. The Muslim mob's drumbeating with sinister cries signals the approaching tension and poses a threat to other minorities. The mob's pressure to open the gate of the lane of Hindu Mohalla indicates that they have been assured and motivated to take possession of the houses of minorities by looting and setting them on fire. Even the role and actions of the city police inspector Inayat-Ullah Khan change as he becomes complicit with the procession. It demonstrates how the Inspector symbolises the moral collapse of state machinery and institutional betrayal. Claiming land and resources through looting and murder in the name of nationalism becomes a prime motive of the miscreants in newly formed India and Pakistan, and the local political parties participate as active agents of violence. The rumours of riots on the other side of the border further fuel the volatile climate with more bitterness and enmity. Madness prevails over the subcontinent, leaving the minorities susceptible to armed goondas. But contrary to the increasingly tense atmosphere of the city, the intimacy between the families of Chaudari Bakar Ali and Lala Kanshi Ram defies all such faultlines and the deterioration of trust between their respective communities. The Deputy Commissioner Prem Nath Chaddha and the Superintendent of Police, Asghar Ahamad Siddiqui, serve as symbols of rationality, as they are foreign returnees who understand the importance of impartial and fair policing in the subcontinent. Unfortunately, however, they are transferred after a short period of time, leaving the city to descend into madness and lawlessness. It highlights how the Chaudhari family represents genuine human warmth and communal harmony, transcending rabid fanaticism and offering a counter-narrative to increasing bigotry. He remains a true friend, companion, and guide throughout the difficult times. Arun and Nur's romantic relationship in college reflects the pre-Partition cultural synthesis of Punjab. Their conversations foreground their awareness of the consequences of their interfaith love, but Arun shows his

flexibility and modernism by submitting himself to her. The melancholic mood of Sialkot under extreme polarisation and radicalisation ultimately destroys the organic syncretism between communities, but the feeling of pure love remains enshrined in the hearts of the lovers. It emphasises that the entire community cannot be blamed, as educated and well-meaning Muslims help Hindus escape safely from the violence. The Lala family is protected by Chaudhari's prompt and timely warning that the family is the next target of the rioters that night. A military truck arrives to ferry them to a safe refugee camp. Before this event, Lala Kanshi Ram appreciates the Britishers and takes Arun to the Hurrah Parade Ground so that his son can also learn their ways and get acquainted with them. Some of the officers know him, as they come to his shop, and he proudly entertains them. Their fairness and integrity are commendable in his eyes. His faith in and submission to them make him feel safe and secure, but when he hears the news of Partition, he blames them for betraying him, and instantly his appreciation for them turns into criticism. He says, "If today the man in the street feels insecure and if the government is powerless to protect his life and property, I hold the English responsible for that crime" (Azadi 141). Davidson, a British Army officer, offers support when requested by sending trucks to take Lala and his neighbours to a safe refugee camp, as, according to Chaudhari Bakar, Muslims could no longer be trusted. This entire arrangement is made by Munir, the son of Chaudhari. This Muslim family sets an example of humanity and kindness during this highly polarised period. Lala's anger at Davidson highlights his feeling of disillusionment with British colonial rule. After their departure, the entire locality was plundered and set on fire. The novel corroborates the claims made by historian Gyanendra Pandey that "In the rural areas attacks were launched by large mobs of Muslim peasants who banded together from several hamlets and villages to destroy and loot Sikh and Hindu shops and houses in their area. In some areas . … savagery was carried to an extreme degree and men, women and children were hacked or beaten to death, if not burned in their houses" (Pandey 23).

The paper underlines how the idea of leaving home for refugee camps is cataclysmic, as the loss of one's ancestral place is not only a loss of property but also a loss of identity, protection, and meaning. Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan become refugees in no time and are forced to migrate to remote and unfamiliar spaces. Resources, property, and power take centre stage for rioters and the local government and administration, bringing an end to values and kindness. The painful experience of losing one's home is traumatic, especially for women, because the home represents safety, dignity, and emotional attachment. Partition forces them to abandon their belongings and surroundings, leaving their bodies to be sites of Partition's horrors. The bestiality and barbarism of the mob prevail over rationality and humanity, leading to unimaginable crimes like abduction, rape, murder, and the naked parade of women irrespective of their ages. It highlights how minorities were subjected to "mass killing or organised killing" (Azadi 125). This is the most horrific and indelible blot on the name of humanity. It also demonstrates how women's suffering is one of the most harrowing dimensions of the narrative. Women in general were illiterate and remained unaware of the ongoing politics and nationalist dialogue during this time. Performing household duties, raising children, and looking after family members were their only objectives in the patriarchal family setup. Lala Kanshi Ram's attempt to educate his wife indicates that middle-class families were beginning to value education for women for their intellectual upliftment. Prabha Rani's reluctance to learn and her pretence of being inquisitive highlight how women were settled in their protective world. All the women in the city, irrespective of their religion or caste, always felt safe and protected to a great extent; therefore, their exchange of shared knowledge and experiences about their own female world brought them closer to one another. The portrayal of Prabha Rani, Isher Kaur, Bibi Amar Vati and Sunanda after Partition brings to the fore what independence offered to them "in times of social turmoil" (George 148). Gendered violence devastated and psychologically traumatised women, while the insensitivity of the government left them exposed to the torture and oppression that lay ahead. Bhalla finds that such fictional works are "marked by a sense of rage and hopelessness" (1999, xxx). Urvashi Butalia writes in her book *The Other Side of Silence* that the Partition of India cannot be understood solely through official histories, political negotiations, and the creation of national boundaries; it must also be understood through the silenced, personal experiences of those who lived through it, particularly women and other marginalised groups. "About 75,000 women are thought to have been abducted and raped by men of religions different from their own" (Butalia 3). Sunanda, the wife of Mr Prakash is abducted by Captain Rahmat Ullah Khan, who was in charge of the refugee camps outside Sialkot.The Her abduction underscores the patriarchal psyche combined with fanaticism. Some military officers we are found involved in outraging the modesty of women, and supporting local goondas to abduct women and loot the Hindu and Sikhs. Menon and Bhasin's book on the Partition of India, *Borders & Boundaries: Women in India's Partition* argues that women were not merely victims of Partition; their bodies, identities, and

lives also became sites through which national, religious, and communal identities were defined and negotiated:

> "Country, Community. Religion. Freedom itself: a closer examination of what meaning they have for women has led feminists to ask searching questions about women's asymmetrical relationship to nationality and citizenship; and to appreciate the role assigned to them in any renegotiation of identities, whether ethnic, communal or national. Such an analysis of the experience of abducted women, for instance, sheds light not only on the Indian state and its articulation of its role and responsibilities vis-a`-vis its female citizens, but also on its perception of its role vis-a`-vis Pakistan, Hindu and Muslim communities, and displaced Hindu families" (Menon and Bhasin 20–21).

The novel presents a realistic and poignant picture of the time through fictional portrayal. Some families could not bear to leave their homes and ended their lives by committing suicide; some could not undertake the long journey on foot and surrendered halfway. The physical pain and psychological trauma shattered them, but they continued moving for many weeks in the hope of reaching a new land, as promised by the political discourse surrounding Partition. In her book *Remnant of Partition*, Archana Malhotra finds that "Apart from a physical displacement, there would have been a traumatic mental displacement, a sudden uprootedness, an unlearning and relearning of identity" (Malhotra 8). When they crossed the border and set foot in the country that now belonged to them, a new ordeal began as they became a burden and responsibility for India. Lala Kanshi Ram had some relatives in Amritsar, and they "knocked at their doors, but discovered they were not welcome" (Azadi 325). It highlights how they left everything behind and moved forward with hope, only to find themselves a burden on the country assigned to them. "History of the 1947 Partition is a history of borders in which the geographical borders drawn to separate and establish the independent nations of India and Pakistan are at once a concretely historical division and an incomprehensible site of trauma" (Yusin 453). The indifference of the Indian government towards refugees like Lala Kanshi Ram compounded their sufferings. Chaos and disorder prevailed everywhere. Some kind people helped them by distributing food and other necessities. Lala Kanshi Ram travelled with his remaining neighbours to Delhi, as no other place or city welcomed them or offered them any opportunity for subsistence. The concluding part of *Azadi* foregrounds how a majority of the refugees who came to India late faced severe marginalisation. It shows that merely crossing border does not automatically guarantee safety or establish a sense of belonging.

CONCLUSION

Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* demonstrates that the dream of freedom from colonial power does not materialise as it was supposed to. It highlights how independence descends with the horrors of Partition, displacing millions from both sides of the newly drawn border. The small town of Sialkot becomes a prototype of national politics, highlighting how the drawing of borders transforms familiar places into sites of fear and displacement. The chaos that prevailed in the subcontinent put the existence of minority communities in an extreme crisis. The novel underscores how gullible youth from Hindu and Muslim communities turned into deadly goonda elements, unleashing unimaginable destruction by indulging in plunder, arson, abduction, rape, and murder. The paper argues that the achievement of freedom was a paradox, as the gains were meagre and the losses immense. The starkest feature of Partition was the insensitive withdrawal of the colonial power, leaving millions to the apathy of their respective governments. *Azadi* exposes the criminal intentions of fringe groups, protected and assisted by local political parties and administrations, which permitted them to take centre stage in the theatre of Partition by inflicting unimaginable pain. The worst sufferers of Partition were women, as they were subjected to terrible gendered violence, causing permanent psychological trauma. People got uprooted from the mother land and became burden on the promised land. It challenges celebratory narratives of independence by foregrounding central paradox of political liberation and personal dispossession.

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The Nets Worn Inward: Alienation as Method in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

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Abstract— *James Joyce's* A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man *is usually read as a novel of growth, freedom and artistic awakening. Yet Stephen Dedalus does not grow simply or peacefully. He is formed by quarrels at home, strict religious schooling, sexual guilt, political bitterness and unease with the language in which he must think and write. This article argues that Stephen's movement from alienation towards artistic selfhood is the central drama of the novel, and that Joyce leaves it deliberately unfinished. Alienation in* Portrait *is both wound and resource. It cuts Stephen off from family, church, nation and human warmth, yet it also sharpens his perception and drives him towards art. Reading the novel alongside recent work on Joyce's composition, religion, language, form, gender and nation, the article shows that Stephen never escapes the nets he names. He learns instead to work inside them. Family decline, Jesuit discipline, colonial language and inward unrest are not obstacles he clears on the way to art; they are the material from which his style is made. On this reading the ending offers no finished identity. Stephen leaves Ireland with a voice still in formation, and the closing diary marks work begun rather than completed. The article also holds Stephen to account. The detachment that makes him an artist is the same detachment that makes him a difficult son, a distant friend and a poor reader of the women around him. Joyce grants him his vocation without granting him innocence.*

Keywords— ***Alienation, Colonial Ireland, James Joyce, Künstlerroman, Modernism, Stephen Dedalus***

I. INTRODUCTION

James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is often described as the story of a boy who becomes an artist. The description is not wrong, but it is far too smooth. Stephen Dedalus does not move steadily from confusion to wisdom. He moves through fear, shame, pride, rebellion, desire, disgust and sudden bursts of clarity. He grows up in a household where money is short and tempers are shorter, under a church that measures the soul by its sins, inside a politics soured by betrayal, and in a language that feels borrowed from someone else. In such a world identity does not arrive ready-made. It has to be fought for, and even then, it stays unsettled.

The novel matters because Joyce refuses the comfortable answers. Stephen is neither a simple victim of his society nor a genius rising clear of it. He is a divided young man. He wants freedom, yet he keeps looking for something to obey. He rejects the Church, yet its cadences govern his thought. He resists his family, yet its pain stays lodged in him. He longs to speak in a voice of his own, but every language within reach already belongs to history, to empire or to religion. That tension makes *Portrait* one of the strongest modern studies of a self in formation.

Much of the criticism on the novel reads Stephen's life through identity, alienation, religion and artistic growth. Bhatt argues that before Stephen becomes an artist, he is split among family, school, church and nation, and that art becomes the ground on which these scattered parts can be brought into relation (5, 8-9). Gillespie and Fargnoli, surveying the field, note how persistently readers have

organised the novel around Stephen's progress towards vocation (56-80). This line of reading is useful, but it needs sharpening. It can sound as though art cures Stephen. Joyce is tougher than that.

This article argues that Stephen's movement from alienation towards artistic selfhood is the central pattern of the novel, and that the movement is left incomplete on purpose. Alienation in *Portrait* is more than loneliness. It is a condition produced by family decline, Jesuit discipline, colonial language, sexual unrest and national pressure. Stephen turns that condition into a method, but he never works free of it. Art gives him a direction, not a cure. The argument has a sharper edge than the familiar one about rebellion. What Stephen refuses is never a single institution but a mesh in which schooling, faith, politics and language had already been tied together before he was old enough to name any of them. Read alongside recent scholarship on Joyce's composition, his handling of religion and language, his narrative form, and his treatment of women and nation, the novel's famous ending looks less like a victory than a threshold. Stephen does not close the book as a finished artist. He closes it as a young man who has finally agreed to the labour of making himself.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Criticism on *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* has tended to divide along a small number of lines. The oldest of these is biographical. Because the novel follows the broad outline of Joyce's own early years, autobiographical readings have never gone out of use. Abu Jweid reads the book as a Künstlerroman shaped through episodic development and free indirect discourse, stressing how Joyce converts private material into artistic structure (5-9). Bhatt treats the novel as a revelation of the artist's self and argues that Stephen's divided inner life slowly finds direction in aesthetic awareness (5). Such readings remain valuable, since the novel clearly draws energy from lived experience. Yet Stephen is not Joyce in disguise. He is a shaped modern consciousness, and the shaping is the point.

Recent genetic criticism has made this clear in a way that older biographical reading could not. Gabler's collected work on the manuscripts reconstructs how the novel was built between 1903 and 1914, and shows that the Christmas dinner quarrel was moved into the first chapter late in revision, tying the book more tightly to the fall of Parnell (71-108). The scene that modern readers treat as the novel's political foundation was therefore a decision, not a memory transcribed. Van Mierlo's study of what he calls cultural genetics pushes the point further, reading the epiphanies and the early fiction as evidence that Joyce built an identity against the Revivalist mainstream while remaining tied to its aims (77-99). Winnick's catalogue of roughly eight hundred previously unnoticed echoes, drawn from canonical poetry as readily as from hymns and advertisements, confirms how densely made the surface of the novel is. Together these studies move the autobiographical question onto firmer ground: the novel is not a record of a life but a construction out of one.

A second line of criticism concerns psychology and the unstable self. Bhatt reads Stephen as a divided figure broken by family hardship, religion, politics and cultural pressure (7-9). Farahmandian and Shao read him through Karen Horney's account of neurosis and argue that self-estrangement and inner conflict sit at the centre of his personality. Li and Dong extend the same framework in a direction criticism has usually neglected, treating Mary Dedalus as a compliant, self-effacing personality in her own right rather than as a background figure, and showing how her habit of appeasement produces dependency and self-defeat (490-504). The boldest psychoanalytic claim, however, belongs to the Lacanian tradition. Ramírez, working from Seminar XXIII, argues that Joyce made of his writing a *sinthome*: a knot that holds together a structure which would otherwise come apart, compensating for a paternal naming that Simon Dedalus never managed to transmit (1-14). On this account art is not self-expression at all. It is load-bearing. The reading is speculative, and it has the virtue of explaining why Stephen's vocation feels less like a choice than a necessity. This body of work takes Stephen's unrest seriously, and the attention to his mother is overdue. The risk is a vocabulary that turns a historical subject into a clinical one. Stephen's trouble is not only private illness. It belongs to a country where church, respectability and politics press hard on desire and thought.

Religion has been the most persistent subject of all. Akca shows how Catholic belief shapes Stephen's sense of self even where he seems to shake it off (52-61). Constandache argues that the novel should be read not as a rehearsal for *Ulysses* but as a finished modernist achievement, in which religious authority and creative freedom stay in live tension and Stephen negotiates his Aristotelian and Thomist inheritance instead of simply discarding it (31-48). Liu identifies three paternal figures in Stephen's path, the biological father, the priest and the artistic forebear, and argues that his search for a father is less a repair of psychological injury than a literary act of symbolic patricide (167-92). Choi's work on Jesuit education is the most politically pointed of the recent studies: Clongowes and Belvedere, he shows, served Catholic and nationalist interests while also training boys for imperial service, so that religious formation, games and

empire worked as one system (83-103). That argument matters for the present essay, because it means Stephen's quarrel with the Church was never separable from his quarrel with the state. Two further studies explain the mechanics of his refusal rather than its politics. Jones reads the novel through the psychology of associative learning and shows that Joyce pairs the priesthood with images of the skull, cold and decay early and unambiguously, so that the reader's aversion is in place well before Stephen is offered ordination (158-63). Rickard, tracing the word "instinct" through Joyce's early prose, argues that the refusal when it comes is bodily rather than reasoned, and that the body in *Portrait* has changed from the impediment it was in *Dubliners* into a source of knowledge in its own right.

Language and style form the fourth and perhaps the richest field. Attridge argues that in *Portrait* Joyce develops a technique that unmoors language from any single intentional source, so that the reader moves through a sequence of changing compositional methods rather than listening to one narrator describe a boy (24-34). Leahy shows that the novel begins not at the start of Stephen's life but at the start of his linguistic life, and that Joyce uses devices belonging specifically to print, italics, indentation, the broken-off ellipsis, in order to register the sound of speech (453-76). Sabbagh and Yazdanjoo supply quantitative support from an unexpected direction, using corpus stylistics to track how the dominant semantic fields of the novel shift measurably from chapter to chapter (53-76). What earlier critics described impressionistically as a change of voice turns out to be countable. Haughton adds a sharp historical correction, showing that the decision to serialise *Portrait* in *The Egoist* was Dora Marsden's rather than Pound's, and arguing that the novel both dramatises her philosophy of egoistic language and quietly undoes its solipsism (327-44). Raupp shows that Latin in the novel is not school decoration but a structure of prestige and ritual (181-90), and Hou and Shen demonstrate that even the word "nice" in the opening pages already carries the moral pressure Stephen will spend five chapters resisting (123-27). Fima, reading the novel against Cubist painting, argues that its fragmentation, simultaneous perspectives and layered time amount to a decisive break with traditional narration a full decade before *Ulysses*.

Studies of narrative form overlap with this group but ask a different question. Amerian et al. analyse the novel's shifts of time and show how pauses, repetitions and backward movements follow mental life rather than the calendar (1033-35). Mukhitdinova places the stream of consciousness and the artist-plot at the centre of the novel's modernism (224-26). Riquelme, writing in the third edition of the Cambridge companion, sets Stephen's formation inside Ireland's colonial situation and argues that Joyce, like Wilde before him, invokes the Bildungsroman in order to subvert it, producing a protagonist who diverges from social norms rather than settling into them (31-46). Kim approaches the question through the diary, reading embedded diary passages in Orwell, Joyce and Woolf as a subversive form rather than a sentimental one, and treating Stephen's closing entries as the formal signature of his turn to artistic self-consciousness (31-55). Pérez-Simón approaches the same formal question comparatively, reading *Portrait* beside Luis Martín-Santos's unfinished *Time of Destruction* and drawing attention to the instability of the narrator's position and to the Nietzschean substrate the two novels share (72-85). Hall, from a different angle again, traces Stephen's habit of imaginative "telescoping" to late-Victorian popular astronomy, and argues that in the novel empirical observation and imaginative flight support one another instead of competing (339-55).

Gender criticism has developed quickly in the last few years and has become less forgiving of Stephen. Russ reads the women of the novel as sources of guidance rather than obstruction, arguing that they help redirect him from gross desire towards a more reflective way of seeing (12). Koo takes the harder view and argues that Stephen's aesthetics in *Portrait* fail precisely because they can only treat women as idealised abstractions, his mother most damagingly of all, and that the failure is built into his theory rather than incidental to it (9-29). Ko turns to the act of narration itself, showing how refusals of food by women in Joyce's early fiction register a resistance that the male narrator distorts in the telling (9-38). Rickard arrives at a similar verdict from the direction of the body, noting that Stephen registers the wading girl as physically present, even down to the "crane" of her leg, and then promptly converts her into an angel. Taken together, these studies make it difficult to read the bird-girl scene as a simple artistic liberation. Someone is being looked at, and the looking has costs.

Myth, nation and exile make up the last cluster. Monteiro reads Stephen as an artist-hero shaped by Daedalian patterns of trial, separation and escape (40-41, 77-78). Sharma continues this line by arguing that Stephen's journey from childhood to exile reworks the mythical hero in a modern frame (91-98), and Cappelluti sets the figure inside the opposed centripetal and centrifugal pulls of the Ulysses myth in Joyce's work as a whole (157-83). On the national question, Ó Cuileagáin tracks Joyce's changing treatment of the Irish peasantry from *Stephen Hero* into *Portrait*, through Davin's stories, the man in the mountain cabin and the closing diary, and places the novel inside a rural Ireland that Dublin-centred criticism has tended to overlook (104-38). Callanan's

political biography argues at book length that Joyce was an original and dissenting Irish nationalist formed by the Parnell split rather than a writer indifferent to politics. Conde-Parrilla supplies the closest textual demonstration of the colonial argument. Reading the novel's historical allusions as metonymic signs, she shows that they function as portals opening onto a second portrait, that of Ireland as a British colony, and that they are concentrated in the first and fifth chapters (13-25). Her work is particularly valuable because it locates the politics of the novel in details a reader can check rather than in atmosphere. Mazloumian offers the most immediately useful recent idea for the present argument: reading the novel's spaces through Foucault's heterotopia, she shows that Stephen repeatedly finds counter-spaces outside the reach of the dominant order, and that these are where he recognises that other forms of selfhood are possible (451-57). Jamili and Arshadi approach the same material through the idea of home, arguing that identity in the novel is inseparable from place and that the very notion of a home rests on the repression of differences within the self (44-50).

What emerges from this body of work is a field that is rich but strangely compartmentalised. One set of studies attends to composition, another to neurosis, another to religion, others to time, style, gender, myth or nation. Each illuminates something real. Few of them let these pressures act on Stephen at the same moment. The present article takes the opposite approach. It argues that Stephen's alienation is psychological, spiritual, linguistic, sexual and political at once, and that Joyce's achievement lies in refusing to let these forces take turns. They arrive together, they contradict one another, and it is out of their collision that a method, and eventually a style, begins to form.

III. THE NOVEL AS A MODERNIST BILDUNGSROMAN

One reason *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* still feels alive is that it stands between literary traditions. It belongs to the Bildungsroman, the novel of formation, because it follows Stephen from early childhood into early adulthood. It belongs to the Künstlerroman, because the growth it traces is specifically the growth of an artist. Joyce does not simply repeat either form. He bends both. The novel ends not in social settlement or moral balance but in departure, uncertainty and a diary. Stephen's life is left unfinished, and the lack of finish is doing work.

Riquelme's account of this manoeuvre is the most useful recent one. He argues that Joyce, following Wilde, invokes the conventions of formation in order to break them, so that the protagonist diverges from social expectation instead of growing into it, and that the divergence is where the possibility of a different Ireland is lodged (31-46). Stephen repeatedly tries to read his own life as though it were moving towards destiny. He wants revelation, mission, a chosen role, a final shape. Joyce surrounds those wishes with irony. The beach epiphany feels like an arrival, yet the novel runs on for another chapter. The aesthetic arguments of the fifth chapter sound magisterial, yet they settle nothing emotionally. The diary closes the book in a voice full of confidence and full of gaps. Stephen has chosen a direction. He has not solved himself. Pérez-Simón's comparative reading is instructive here, since setting *Portrait* beside a novel its author never finished throws the deliberateness of Joyce's own incompletion into relief (72-85). Martín-Santos stopped; Joyce chose to stop.

The novel's modernism lies partly in this refusal and partly in its method. Mukhitdinova points to the stream of consciousness, the inward movement and the stylistic experiment as responses to a world whose institutions can no longer command easy trust (224-26). Fima makes a stronger claim, reading the novel's fragmentation, simultaneous viewpoints and layered time as a Cubist construction, and insisting that the decisive break with traditional narration happens here rather than in *Ulysses*. Constandache argues along the same lines from a different starting point, treating *Portrait* as a completed modernist work in which sound and rhythm carry meaning that statement cannot (31-48). Both are right to resist the old habit of reading the novel as an apprentice piece. Its language changes with Stephen's age: at the start it arrives as fragments of sound, smell and rhythm; later it turns complex, self-conscious, analytical, even theatrical. Joyce does not tell us that Stephen develops. He makes the development audible.

Attridge's account of how this is done repays attention, because it explains why the effect is so hard to paraphrase. In *Portrait*, he argues, Joyce unmoors language from any single intentional source, so that the reader passes through a series of compositional methods rather than hearing one narrator report on a boy (24-34). The novel accordingly offers not one self slowly coming into focus but a succession of provisional selves: the frightened, sensory child of Clongowes; the romantic adolescent full of literary pose; the pious and tormented penitent; the proud university student assembling an aesthetic system. These selves do not replace one another tidily. They overlap. The religious self still echoes inside the artist. The frightened child survives in the proud young man. Identity in the novel is layered rather than linear, and corpus analysis bears this out: Sabbagh and Yazdanjoo find the dominant semantic fields of the text shifting measurably from chapter to chapter, which is to say that the change of voice

readers have always sensed is present in the vocabulary itself (53-76).

Joyce's handling of time strengthens the same effect. Amerian et al. show that the novel does not move forward in a straight line but uses pauses, repetitions, memory loops and uneven pacing to give shape to inward experience (1033-35). Some years pass in a sentence. Some afternoons are stretched until ordinary time seems to stop. The retreat sermons, the Christmas quarrel, the beach epiphany and the final diary pages all burn more brightly than the years around them, because Joyce measures duration by consciousness rather than by the calendar. The result reads less like a complete life than like a pattern of awakenings. Stephen becomes most real at the point where he is least settled, and the novel is finished precisely because it refuses to finish him.

IV. CHILDHOOD, FAMILY, AND THE MAKING OF ALIENATION

Stephen's alienation begins early, and Joyce takes care not to trace it to a single dramatic cause. It grows out of ordinary experience: schoolyard shame, bodily weakness, quarrels at home, money trouble, religious fear and a steady sense of not fitting. At Clongowes he is marked out from the start. He does not move easily among the other boys, does not enjoy rough games, feels his body as small and breakable, and is far more alert to humiliation than to belonging (Joyce, ch. 1). The early sensitivity shapes everything that follows. Stephen learns very young that the world has to be watched closely, because it is not naturally safe.

Monteiro is right to read the first chapter as the beginning of an outsider's consciousness rather than as a schoolboy sketch (40-41). Clongowes is not merely a setting; it is Stephen's first training in estrangement. The boys' slang confuses him. Their confidence is not his. He is anxious about small things, haunted by illness, and made sharply aware of unfair power in the pandying episode. When he takes his complaint to the rector, the moment matters not because it makes him brave but because it teaches him that language can be turned against authority. Speech, he discovers, may defend the self in a world that will not. Even his retreat into abstraction begins here. Hall shows that Stephen's habit of imaginative telescoping, visible already in the flyleaf list that runs from his own name out to the universe, draws on the popular astronomy of the period, and that in Joyce's hands observation and imaginative flight reinforce rather than oppose one another (339-55). The boy who cannot win a game learns instead to change the scale at which he looks.

What Clongowes teaches, however, is not only estrangement but a politics, and Joyce plants it in the child's mind before the child can examine it. Conde-Parrilla's study of the novel's historical allusions shows how thoroughly the first chapter is worked: Father Arnall divides Stephen's class into rival parties named York and Lancaster, so that the English Wars of the Roses are re-enacted as a classroom competition, and the grammar book has Wolsey dying in Leicester Abbey (13-25). Stephen, beaten in the sum and already feverish, drifts into colour instead: white roses and red roses were beautiful to think of, and then the thought that you could not have a green rose, though perhaps somewhere in the world you could (Joyce, ch. 1). The passage is one of the most quietly devastating in the novel. White and red are England's colours and green is Ireland's, and the boy has arrived, by way of a daydream about pretty cards, at the exact impossibility that governs his future: he is loyal to a country whose colour has no place in the scheme he is being trained to win inside. He has no word for colonialism. He has already felt its shape. The nets of the fifth chapter are not a discovery Stephen makes as a young man; they are a description of the room he was put in as a child.

Home offers no shelter from any of this. One of the hardest truths in the novel is that the family itself is unsafe. Simon Dedalus is lively, sentimental and often very funny, but he is also unreliable, careless with money and incapable of moral steadiness. Mary Dedalus is gentler, yet she is bound to Catholic expectation and cannot follow her son inward. The family's slide down the social scale means that Stephen grows up with constant material insecurity. Houses change. Money vanishes. Hopes shrink. Poverty in *Portrait* is not only economic lack; it is embarrassment, dependence and slow emotional wear. Jamili and Arshadi are right that identity in the novel cannot be separated from place, and right too that the idea of a home rests on the repression of differences within the self (44-50). Stephen's trouble is that the repression fails. The differences keep surfacing, and the house cannot hold them.

Bhatt argues that Stephen's self is broken apart by exactly these pressures of family, school, nation and church before art offers any form of integration (5, 8-9). The word integration should be used with care, since Stephen never becomes settled, but Bhatt is right that his division is produced rather than innate. The family's hardship does real damage. Simon's failures do not merely disappoint his son; they alter Stephen's whole relation to adulthood. The journey to Cork is cruellest in this respect. Simon lives inside his memories, joking and reminiscing in a way that warms him and estranges the boy beside him. Stephen does not inherit a usable father. He inherits a

damaged image of what a man in authority looks like. Liu's account of the three fathers of the novel helps explain what follows: the biological father, the priest and the artistic forebear are successive attempts at the same vacancy, and Stephen's turn to Daedalus at the close is less a cure than a symbolic patricide that lets him work (167-92). Ramírez pushes the claim as far as it will go, arguing from Lacan's late seminar that the writing itself does the work a father's naming would have done, holding a structure together rather than expressing a personality (1-14). Whether or not one follows the psychoanalytic machinery, the observation it rests on is sound. The last words of the novel ask an invented father for help, and the invention was necessary because the real one could not supply it.

Conde-Parrilla's reading also exposes something unflattering about Simon that is easy to miss. He is a Parnellite who reveres the Patriot parliamentarians, attends the centenary commemorations of 1798 and boasts of a Whiteboy grandfather, and he still refuses to send his son to the Christian Brothers, with their Irish history and Irish language, because he will not have him among "Paddy Stink and Mickey Mud"; the Jesuits, he observes, can get a boy a position (13-25; Joyce, ch. 2). His nationalism is sincere as feeling and useless as principle. The moment it costs anything, social ambition wins. Stephen's later contempt for patriotic rhetoric is not adolescent posturing. He has watched it up close at his own table.

The Christmas dinner scene sharpens all of this by letting politics and religion erupt inside the house. Stephen watches adults tear at one another over Parnell with a violence he cannot follow but can certainly feel, and he understands enough to see that the structures meant to guide a life are themselves broken. Family, church and nation appear not as sources of truth but as rivals quarrelling in front of a child. Gabler's genetic work gives the scene an extra weight, since he shows that Joyce moved it forward into the first chapter late in revision, deliberately binding the novel's opening to the fall of Parnell (71-108). The placement is a designed effect rather than a remembered sequence. After that dinner, authority is never innocent for Stephen again, and the reader has been told so before the boy is old enough to say it.

This early distrust becomes the ground of the later rebellion. Bhatt notes that Stephen's alienation from family, school, religion and nation culminates in voluntary exile (40-42), and the ending does not come from nowhere. Exile grows out of years of partial belonging. Stephen does not wake one morning and choose Europe out of ambition. He has been learning, scene by scene, that every institution around him requires a version of himself he cannot inhabit. Alienation is not simply his temperament; it is a response to repeated experience of misfit.

Joyce does not flatter the result. The habit of standing apart sharpens Stephen's mind, and it also makes him proud, awkward and poor at ordinary warmth. This is why the family chapters matter so much. They block the romantic reading in which the artist is a fine soul rising above the crowd. Stephen is shaped by pain, and pain does not ennoble him automatically. It leaves marks: withdrawal, defensiveness, a preference for distance over intimacy. Alienation begins as injury. Only later does he learn to make it work.

V. RELIGION, GUILT, AND THE CRISIS OF FAITH

If family life teaches Stephen distrust, Catholicism teaches him intensity. Joyce does not present religion as an external force that can be put down at will. The Church shapes Stephen's language, his imagination, his sense of his own body and even his idea of what a vocation is. That is why his crisis of faith carries such weight. He is not giving up a set of rules. He is trying to loosen a system that has entered the structure of his feeling.

Akca's study of religion and identity remains useful because it shows Catholic belief woven into Stephen's self-understanding rather than standing outside it (52-61). From childhood, religion supplies order, ritual, explanation and fear. The Jesuit schools give him a formidable intellectual training and also teach him to see life through guilt and judgement. The retreat sermons of the third chapter make this plain. Father Arnall's language of death, doom, hell and heaven reaches Stephen not as distant doctrine but as sensory assault: he feels decay, flame, stench and terror in the body (Joyce, ch. 3). Joyce's achievement in this passage is to make theology physical. Ramírez notes, following Lacan, that the ear is the one opening in the body that has no lid and cannot be shut (1-14). The observation is almost too apt for this chapter. Stephen can close his eyes against the picture of hell. He cannot close them against Arnall's voice, and Joyce puts him in a room where for three days there is nothing to do but listen.

That physical force matters because Stephen's sins are physical too. His visits to prostitutes are not presented as healthy sexual development. They are tangled with shame, excitement, loneliness and compulsion. When the sermons strike, they strike a conscience already prepared by fear. For a time confession brings relief, and Stephen returns to prayer and devotional routine with something close to fanaticism (Joyce, ch. 3). Even here Joyce declines the easy shape of a conversion story. The peace Stephen finds

is narrow and brittle. It depends on routine rather than on freedom, and it cannot survive a question.

The offer of the priesthood in the fourth chapter therefore carries more weight than it first appears to. It tempts Stephen because it answers several needs at once: order, distinction, intellectual labour, distance from ordinary life. It offers a ready-made form for an exceptional self. In that respect the priesthood resembles art more closely than Stephen yet realises; both present themselves as vocations of separation. What he senses is that ordination would mean surrendering the part of him that wants to test experience rather than obey it. Two recent readings show how carefully the refusal has been prepared, and how little of it is argument. Jones demonstrates that Joyce has been conditioning the reader from early in the novel, pairing the priesthood with the skull, with cold and with the silence of the grave, firmly enough at first for the association to take and subtly enough afterwards for it to work below conscious notice (158-63). By the time the director makes his offer, the reader's misgiving is already in place and feels like intuition rather than instruction. Rickard describes the same event from inside Stephen, arguing that he turns the priesthood down instinctively, through a bodily recoil rather than a weighed decision, and that this is the moment at which the body stops being an obstacle to truth in Joyce's work and starts being a way of knowing it. Both accounts improve on the view that Stephen reasons his way out of the Church. He feels his way out, and the feeling has been trained.

The novel is full of voices trying to name Stephen before he can name himself, and religion offers the most powerful of those names. He refuses it not because the Church has meant nothing to him but because it has meant too much. It has become a structure that cannot hold the whole of what he is. Constandache is helpful here, insisting that his aesthetic choice is a critical negotiation with tradition rather than a childish break from it (31-48). Even after the refusal, Stephen goes on thinking in forms the Church gave him. His vocabulary of vocation, revelation, epiphany and near-priestly dedication to art proves it. He leaves Catholic life and keeps Catholic habits of mind. The art is born out of that contradiction, not outside it.

Choi's work on Jesuit education adds a dimension the older religious criticism missed. Clongowes and Belvedere were not only spiritual institutions but imperial ones, advancing Catholic and nationalist interests while training boys in a muscular, games-playing masculinity well suited to service in the Empire (83-103). Conde-Parrilla reaches the same conclusion from the archive, noting that colleges of this kind were modelled on the English public school, that they worked to replace an Irish brogue with an English accent, and that their alumni went on into the professions and the imperial service (13-25). Read in that light, Stephen's refusal of the priesthood is not a purely religious act. It is a refusal of a whole apparatus in which faith, schooling, sport and imperial loyalty had been fused into one career. The nets he will later name were knotted together long before he learned to see them.

Farahmandian and Shao, reading Stephen through self-estrangement, help explain why religion holds such power over him; their emphasis on inward division accounts for the extremity of his responses to authority. The explanation goes only so far. His crisis is not private illness alone. It is the crisis of a young man educated in a country where church, morality and public respectability press heavily on desire and thought. Li and Dong's study of Mary Dedalus shows what the same pressure does to someone who complies with it instead of rebelling: a life organised around the need for approval, shading into dependency and self-defeat (490-504). Stephen's revolt and his mother's submission are two outcomes of one system.

The bird-girl scene stands as the counter-image to the retreat sermons. Where the sermons speak through terror, the girl in the water speaks through beauty. Where the priesthood offers a rule, the scene offers perception. Stephen's response is neither crude desire nor old piety. It is a moment in which body and spirit are briefly held together by form. He sees, and the seeing becomes permission to choose art (Joyce, ch. 4). The scene does not clear religion out of him. It exchanges one mode of transcendence for another. From here onward the sacred survives in the novel as aesthetics rather than as doctrine, which is a smaller claim than Stephen thinks and a more interesting one.

VI. LANGUAGE, STYLE, AND THE GROWTH OF CONSCIOUSNESS

If religion shapes Stephen's inward life, language shapes the medium in which that life becomes thinkable at all. Joyce's achievement in *Portrait* lies not only in what he says about Stephen but in how he lets a changing consciousness reshape the prose. The novel opens in nursery rhyme, childish repetition and raw sensation. It closes in diary entries, aesthetic argument and self-conscious formulation. That change is not decoration. It is where the meaning lives.

Leahy's account of the opening is worth dwelling on, because it corrects a common assumption. The novel begins, he argues, not at the beginning of Stephen's life but

at the beginning of his linguistic life, and Joyce registers the sound of speech through devices that belong specifically to print: italics, indentation, the sentence that breaks off (453-76). Joyce had experimented with non-standard spelling in *Stephen Hero* and abandoned it, so that speech, writing and handwriting become formally distinct categories in the finished book. Hou and Shen make a related point from a single word. The apparently harmless "nice" of the opening pages already carries the moral and social pressure under which Stephen will struggle (123-27). His earliest consciousness is not innocent space but a pressured beginning, and the pressure is audible in the vocabulary of a child who has not yet learned to notice it.

Ramírez adds a suggestive account of what Stephen does with sound once he discovers he cannot escape it. Reading the early chapters through Lacan, he points to the night at Dalkey when the noise of the train rises, stops as the carriages enter the tunnel, and begins again, and to the pleasure Stephen takes in hearing it cease and return (1-14; Joyce, ch. 1). The child who cannot shut his ears learns instead to attend to the rhythm of what enters them, and what begins as helplessness becomes something closer to technique. Joyce, on this reading, writes noise as readily as he writes meaning, and the habit starts in a boy lying awake listening to a train. It is worth setting this beside Leahy's argument about print: the novel is unusually preoccupied with sound for a book so conscious of being written.

Attridge's formal argument explains the larger method. Rather than describing Stephen's growth from outside, Joyce unmoors the prose from any single intentional source, so that the reader is carried through one compositional manner after another (24-34). Early pages imitate a child receiving the world as rhythm, smell, colour and incomplete sense. Later chapters bring heavier adjectives, romantic echoes, sermon-like repetition, scholastic reasoning and deliberate technical vocabulary. Style becomes biography. Sabbagh and Yazdanjoo's corpus work puts numbers to the intuition: the semantic fields that dominate the text move measurably across the five chapters, so the shift readers feel is present in the lexicon itself (53-76). Mukhitdinova's point still holds alongside this, that Joyce does not merely describe modern uncertainty but builds it into the movement of the sentences (224-26). The prose does not stand above Stephen explaining him. It grows, stumbles, swells and sharpens with him.

Raupp's work on Latin adds something that is easy to overlook. Latin in the novel is not school decoration or clerical display but a whole structure of learning, prestige, ritual and inherited order (181-90). Stephen has to pass through it, think in it and partly resist it. The Latin of priests, masters and students is a reminder that language in *Portrait* is always a social force: it ranks people, disciplines them and marks who belongs. English is unstable in the same way. Stephen's famous complaint to the dean, that the language in which they are speaking is the dean's before it is his, names one of the deepest conflicts in the book (Joyce, ch. 5). He can think brilliantly in English and he cannot forget what English carries.

Haughton's recovery of the novel's first publishing context sharpens the stakes. *Portrait* was serialised in *The Egoist* at Dora Marsden's decision, and Marsden's writing on egoistic language offers a philosophy of the sovereign self that the novel appears to dramatise. Haughton's argument is that Joyce also undoes it, moving the book towards a conception of language as shared rather than owned (327-44). This is a useful check on Stephen's rhetoric. He speaks as though a voice could be won outright, in single combat with history. The novel knows better. Nobody owns a language; one can only work in it with more or less honesty.

That is why language and identity cannot be separated here. Bhatt notes that the diary ending marks Stephen's continuing search for a voice rather than the end of it (39-40), and Kim's reading of the political diary strengthens the point from the side of form: the embedded diary is a subversive genre, a private space in which a self can be composed against public pressure (31-55). The move into diary does feel like a release, because Stephen is no longer filtered through third-person narration. It is not, however, a language of mastery. It is hurried, exposed, provisional, closer to notes than to prose. What we are given is a self still being drafted.

Amerian et al. add the temporal dimension, showing how pauses and disruptions in the narrative follow states of mind rather than ordinary sequence (1033-35). Language in *Portrait* does not simply carry events forward. It stalls, circles, dwells and leaps, so that Stephen's growth feels like a series of mental thresholds rather than a road. Fima's Cubist reading describes the same architecture in spatial terms: fragments held in simultaneous view, with the perspective shifting while the subject stays in place. However one names it, the formal achievement is the same, and it belongs to this novel rather than to the one that followed.

There is a larger point in all this. Stephen's difficulty is not only that he lacks freedom. It is that every language available to him is already inhabited. English bears the empire. Latin bears the Church. Irish bears cultural longing and political feeling but is not a daily medium he can think

in. He cannot begin from clean speech, so he does the only thing open to him: he bends inherited language into a more personal cadence. Stephen's artistic selfhood is not the making of a new world out of nothing. It is the patient reworking of compromised words until they begin to sound like his own.

VII. WOMEN, DESIRE, AND THE LIMITS OF STEPHEN'S VISION

Any serious reading of Stephen's development has to face how troubled his relation to women is. This is where the novel is least flattering to him. Women are essential to his growth, and he rarely sees them as persons. They arrive in his mind as temptress, saint, mother, muse, nation or symbolic beauty. The habit gives him powerful images and exposes the limits of his emotional range.

The pattern shows first in his sexual experience. The scenes with prostitutes present the body as escape rather than encounter. Stephen goes to them out of loneliness, inward pressure and a wish to silence judgement, and the result is not release but deeper division. He gives himself to sensation and afterwards becomes more vulnerable to guilt, terror and self-disgust (Joyce, ch. 2). Sexual experience does not free him from religion. It drives him further into its shadow. Rickard's account of instinct is useful for seeing why. Early in the novel Stephen experiences his own desire as something brutish, an animal impulse to be mastered, which is precisely how Catholic psychology had taught him to experience it. The division is therefore not his invention. It was issued to him.

Emma occupies a different place in his imagination, and it is barely less abstract. She is less a companion than a distant figure onto whom desire, literary pose and adolescent longing are projected. Stephen writes towards her, dreams towards her and suffers on her account, but he hardly knows her. She becomes another screen for self-dramatisation. Monteiro's mythic reading helps explain the mechanism, since it shows how women in Stephen's journey tend to appear as symbolic thresholds rather than as equal presences (100). The pattern is real, and it should be judged rather than admired.

The bird-girl scene complicates the picture by turning feminine presence into artistic revelation. Stephen's sight of the girl in the water is among the most famous moments in the novel because it appears to offer a third way between lust and guilt. He does not approach her. He does not condemn her. He sees her beauty as form, poise and an invitation to art (Joyce, ch. 4). For once desire is held in balance. Even so the scene should not be romanticised. The girl remains more image than person in Stephen's consciousness. She wakes him, and she never speaks. Rickard puts the objection in its sharpest form by attending to what Stephen actually notices. The girl is seen as a creature, her leg likened to a crane's, her thighs bared, her body unmistakably present, and within a sentence or two she has been turned into an angel. The abstraction happens in front of us. Stephen's aesthetic cannot hold a woman and a person in view at the same time, and the scene that is supposed to show him arriving at his vocation also shows him flinching from the thing he claims to be looking at.

Russ's study of feminine guidance is useful because it refuses the lazy view that women in the novel exist only to tempt or obstruct the male artist. He argues that they also redirect Stephen, drawing him away from gross desire towards a more reflective mode of seeing (12). There is truth in this; his mother, Emma, the prostitutes and the bird-girl each mark a stage. Russ's case is strongest, though, when it is joined to a harder one. Koo puts that harder case directly, arguing that Stephen's aesthetics fail precisely because they can treat women only as idealised abstractions, and that his mother suffers most from this, since the theory requires her to be a symbol before she can be a person (9-29). On Koo's reading the failure is structural. It is not a blemish on an otherwise sound aesthetic; it is built into the aesthetic itself.

Two further studies press the point. Ko examines how women's refusals in Joyce's early fiction register a resistance that the male narrator distorts even as he reports it, which raises an uncomfortable question about whose vision the novel's narration serves (9-38). Li and Dong restore Mary Dedalus as a subject in her own right, a woman whose compliance has its own psychology of approval-seeking and self-defeat rather than a mere obstacle to her son's freedom (490-504). Set beside Stephen's refusal to make his Easter duty, these readings change the balance of sympathy. His mother is not simply the voice of the Church in the house. She is someone the system has already cost a great deal, asking for one thing from the son it is about to cost her.

Haughton's argument about egoism belongs here as well. If the novel dramatises a philosophy of the sovereign self and then quietly undermines it, moving towards language and feeling as shared rather than owned, then Stephen's treatment of the women around him is one of the places where the undermining happens (327-44). He grows in artistic self-awareness and he does not grow correspondingly in generosity. He becomes better at reading symbols than at returning affection.

The novel knows this, and does not hide the cost of Stephen's self-fashioning. His mother's appeal, Cranly's concern and the traces of Emma in his imagination all remind us that artistic detachment can also be emotional

failure. The women of *Portrait* do more than reveal Stephen's vocation. They expose how unfinished his selfhood still is. He can make beauty out of them more easily than he can live beside them, and Joyce lets us notice.

VIII. NATION, EXILE, AND THE DAEDALIAN DREAM

Stephen's conflict with Ireland is often simplified into a young man turning his back on home, religion and country for the sake of art. The reading misses Joyce's subtlety. Stephen's rebellion comes out of deep involvement, not indifference. Ireland is not a background he leaves; it is the pressure in which his mind was formed. When he calls nationality, language and religion nets flung at the soul, he is not speaking from outside history. He is speaking as someone painfully caught in it (Joyce, ch. 5).

Conde-Parrilla's work makes it possible to say something more precise than that the novel is political. Joyce's historical allusions, she argues, function as metonymic signs that open onto a second portrait behind the first, the portrait of Ireland as a British colony, and they cluster in the first and fifth chapters, at the two ends of Stephen's formation (13-25). They are also easy to walk past, often carrying no capital letter: the union, catholic emancipation, the fenian movement, the liberator. The effect is that the colonial history of the country is not announced in the novel but embedded in its vocabulary, exactly as it is embedded in the speech of the people Stephen grows up among. He does not have to be taught the politics of Ireland. He absorbs it in the form of ordinary words.

The nationalist quarrel at the Christmas table prepares the conflict early, and the university conversations with Davin make it explicit. Stephen cannot accept the forms of Irish identity offered to him, because each demands obedience before criticism. He is not anti-Irish. He is sick of ready-made slogans, of clerical control, and of any politics that asks him to trade inward freedom for belonging. Ó Cuileagáin's work on the peasantry is valuable here, tracing how Joyce's handling of rural Ireland changes between *Stephen Hero* and *Portrait*, through Davin's stories, the man in the mountain cabin and the final diary entries (104-38). The Revival had made the peasantry the emblem of authentic Irishness. Joyce keeps the figure and withholds the reverence, which is a political act rather than a squeamish one. Callanan's political biography supports the broader case, presenting Joyce as an original and dissenting Irish nationalist formed by the Parnell split rather than a writer who had stepped out of politics altogether.

Bhatt puts the personal side of this well, arguing that Stephen seeks his own meaning through intellectual analysis instead of accepting the values handed to him (39-42). The novel is not about adolescent contrariness. Stephen senses that the available Irish identities have grown stiff and narrow. He refuses to serve home, fatherland or church because each now asks for a loyalty that would cripple the self he is trying to build (Joyce, ch. 5). The refusal is proud. It is not empty.

Language intensifies the national struggle. Monteiro is strong on the colonial wound behind Stephen's linguistic unease: English is the medium of high culture and of practical life, and it arrives carrying conquest and dispossession (118). That is why the complaint to the dean lands so hard. Stephen is not being fussy about words. He is describing what it feels like to make art in a language that is intimate and foreign at the same time. Choi's account of Jesuit schooling shows how little daylight there was between the institutions involved, since the schools that gave Stephen that English also prepared boys for imperial service (83-103). The nets were a single mesh.

Mazloumian's use of Foucault's heterotopia offers the most precise recent way of describing what Stephen does about it. Rather than reading his withdrawals as mere escapism, she identifies counter-spaces in the novel that lie outside the reach of the dominant order, and argues that these are where he can recognise other possible forms of selfhood (451-57). The beach, the library steps, the long solitary walks and finally the diary all work this way. They are not nowhere. They are elsewhere, and elsewhere is where he can think. Exile, on this account, is not the sudden decision of the final pages. It is the enlargement of a habit Stephen has been practising since Clongowes. Jamili and Arshadi make a complementary point about distance, observing that getting away from a place can clarify the memory of it and allow a person to see its structure rather than merely feel its pressure (44-50). This is close to what Stephen expects of Europe. Whether the novel grants it to him is another matter.

The Daedalus myth gives the habit a shape. Sharma argues that Stephen's journey still reads meaningfully through the figure of the mythical artificer who escapes confinement by invention (91-98), and Cappelluti sets the same figure inside the larger centripetal and centrifugal pulls of the Ulysses myth across Joyce's work (157-83). The myth is not pasted on from outside. It is built into Stephen's name, his imagination and his final appetite for flight. The labyrinth is Dublin: family obligation, religious fear, political pressure and borrowed language wound together. To become an artist Stephen must do more than run from the labyrinth. He has to invent his way out of it.

Monteiro's reading of Stephen as artist-hero helps here too, especially the claim that the hero's task is not private release but a wider remaking through art (77-78). This is what lies behind the enormous final promise to forge the uncreated conscience of his race (Joyce, ch. 5). The line is proud, almost inflated, and it is not noise. It shows that Stephen still imagines his exile in relation to Ireland. He leaves in order to speak more freely, not in order to forget. Exile is separation and service at once. Van Mierlo's framework catches the same double movement, reading Joyce as fashioning an identity against the Revivalist mainstream while remaining bound to its ends (77-99). Stephen's refusals are negotiations, not amputations.

Joyce still declines to make exile a solution. Stephen's formula of silence, exile and cunning sounds hard and decisive, and it is also defensive. Silence protects him from false public speech. Exile puts distance between him and emotional coercion. Cunning promises survival among traps. None of the three is warm, and none is stable. They belong to a life of vigilance rather than of ease, which is part of why the ending moves us. Stephen chooses freedom, and the freedom he chooses is severe.

The diary pages make the severity visible. They feel lighter than the chapters before them and they also show how much is unfinished. Stephen writes in bursts, notes, invocations and weather-like flashes. He is going abroad and he is still speaking from uncertainty. Kim's argument that the embedded diary is a politically charged form rather than a private indulgence fits exactly here (31-55): the diary is the only space in the novel where Stephen's voice is not mediated by an institution, which is both its freedom and its exposure. The final appeal to the old father, the old artificer, to stand him now and ever in good stead is not the language of a man who has mastered anything (Joyce, ch. 5). It is the language of someone asking for help.

Joyce's restraint at this point is what makes the ending last. He does not punish Stephen for leaving, and he does not reward him with certainty. Exile may be necessary and it stays risky. The myth of flight always carries Icarus as well as Daedalus. Stephen may slip the nets; he may also carry them inside him, which is the harder possibility and the one the novel leaves open. *Portrait* ends on exactly that tension, and treats artistic freedom as necessary without ever making it cheap.

IX. CONCLUSION

Stephen Dedalus's journey in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* is best understood not as a smooth rise from boyhood to mastery but as a hard movement from alienation towards a self that is still unfinished when the book closes. Joyce shows the young artist being made under pressure: by family decline, Catholic guilt, political bitterness, linguistic dispossession, sexual confusion and the need to invent a life outside the roles on offer. None of these pressures can be separated cleanly from the others. They meet inside Stephen, and the collision is what gives his consciousness its peculiar sharpness.

This is why the novel still matters. It understands that becoming oneself is not a peaceful process. Stephen's alienation is painful and Joyce never pretends otherwise; it makes him lonely, proud, emotionally awkward and frequently unfair. The novel also shows that some distance from family, church and nation is the condition of his being able to think at all. He sees because he does not fully belong, and he pays for the seeing.

Recent criticism has made the complexity easier to describe. Genetic scholarship has shown how deliberately the novel was built, down to the late relocation of the Christmas quarrel that now anchors its politics. Work on religion has replaced the old story of simple loss of faith with an account of negotiation, and has shown how closely Catholic schooling was tied to imperial service. Studies of the novel's historical allusions have made the colonial portrait behind the personal one legible in individual words. Studies of language and form have demonstrated, impressionistically and now quantitatively, that Stephen's development is carried by the texture of the prose rather than narrated above it. Gender criticism has given the women of the novel their own interiority and has made Stephen's aesthetic look less like an achievement than a limitation. Work on instinct and the body has shown that his decisive refusals are made in the flesh before they are made in argument. Spatial and national readings have shown that his withdrawals are not evasions but the search for ground on which another self might stand. What these approaches share is the recognition that Stephen's self is not discovered ready-made. It is composed, slowly and against resistance.

The ending should be read with that in mind. Stephen's diary announces no final peace. It announces willingness: willingness to meet experience again, to test a life, to work on inherited language, and to try to make art out of a broken world. That is less heroic and far more human than the old picture of the triumphant artist. Joyce leaves us with a young man who has chosen his path and has proved nothing yet.

The deepest claim of the novel is simple enough to state. Stephen does not become an artist by escaping alienation. He becomes one by turning it into method. Family conflict, church discipline, national pressure and inward unrest do not disappear when he boards the boat;

they become the raw material of his thought, his style and his self-making. The nets are not cut. They are worn inward, and they take the shape of a voice. The green rose the child could not imagine is the emblem of the whole book: an impossible thing that might exist somewhere, which is as much as any colonised imagination is given to work with, and quite enough to make an artist out of. That is why *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* remains one of the great modern novels of identity. It knows that a self is not found in comfort. It is forged, painfully and imperfectly, in struggle.

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Beyond Sisterhood: Alterity, Internal Exclusion, and the Politics of Belonging in Morrison and Naylor

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Abstract— *This article examines alterity, marginalization, and community fracture in African American women's writing through two novels: Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye (1970) and Gloria Naylor's The Women of Brewster Place (1982). Black female solidarity is often celebrated as a site of resistance, and rightly so. Yet both novels also show how marginalized communities can reproduce, among themselves, the hierarchies that oppress them. On the one hand, the article sets out the theoretical and spatial framework. It distinguishes two senses of alterity (the Levinasian ethical Other and the Other produced by domination), and it draws on Black feminist and intersectional thought, spatial theory, and the philosophy of epistemic injustice. On the other hand, it offers a comparative reading. In The Bluest Eye, Morrison shows how internalized racism destroys Pecola Breedlove, how the demand to be respectable divides the Black community, and how that community, by refusing to see or acknowledge Pecola's suffering, becomes part of her ruin. In The Women of Brewster Place, Naylor shows how a walled-in street of mutual aid turns on Lorraine and Theresa, a lesbian couple, and exposes the limits of conditional sisterhood. The article argues that both authors refuse a romanticized vision of community: liberation requires confronting the otherness that exists outside marginalized spaces and also within them.*

Keywords— ***alterity, African American literature, intersectionality, sisterhood, respectability politics.***

Résumé— *Cet article examine l'altérité, la marginalisation et la fracture communautaire dans l'écriture des femmes afro-américaines à travers deux romans : The Bluest Eye (1970) de Toni Morrison et The Women of Brewster Place (1982) de Gloria Naylor. La solidarité féminine noire est souvent célébrée comme un espace de résistance, et à juste titre. Pourtant, les deux romans montrent aussi comment des communautés marginalisées peuvent reproduire entre elles les hiérarchies qui les oppriment. D'une part, cet article pose le cadre théorique et spatial. Il distingue deux sens de l'altérité (l'Autre éthique de Levinas et l'Autre produit par la domination) et s'appuie sur la pensée féministe noire et intersectionnelle, la théorie de l'espace et la philosophie de l'injustice épistémique. D'autre part, il propose une lecture comparative. Dans The Bluest Eye, Morrison montre comment le racisme intériorisé détruit Pecola Breedlove, comment l'exigence de respectabilité divise la communauté noire, et comment cette communauté, en refusant de voir la douleur de Pecola ou de reconnaître sa souffrance, devient en partie responsable de sa perte. Dans The Women of Brewster Place, Naylor montre comment une rue murée, lieu d'entraide, se retourne contre Lorraine et Theresa, un couple de femmes, et met à nu les limites d'une sororité conditionnelle. L'article soutient que les deux autrices refusent une vision idéalisée de la communauté : la libération exige d'affronter l'altérité qui existe à l'extérieur des espaces marginalisés, mais aussi en leur sein.*

Mots-clés— ***altérité, littérature afro-américaine, intersectionnalité, sororité, politique de respectabilité.***

I. INTRODUCTION

In African American literary studies, community and sisterhood are often read as the foundations of survival. Black neighborhoods, from crowded tenement hallways to the dead-end street, appear as places of mutual care in the face of white supremacy. This reading is well founded, but it risks hiding a harder question: how does a group that is systematically othered by the dominant culture treat the "Other" in its own midst? Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* both document the resilience born of shared hardship. Both also expose a paradox: the oppressed may replicate systems of exclusion and punish those who deviate from rigid racial, gendered, or sexual norms.

Criticism has not ignored this paradox. Black feminist critics have long insisted that Black women's writing must be read for its internal critique as well as its protest against the outside world (B. Smith 1977; Christian 1985; Carby 1987), and a considerable body of scholarship addresses communal complicity in Pecola's destruction, and the treatment of Lorraine and Theresa, as well as the homophobia Cheryl Clarke (1983) named in Black communities. What the article offers is a different angle of approach: a comparative reading of the two novels through a single analytical vocabulary, that of internal alterity, which links the psychological, the spatial, and the ethical dimensions of exclusion.

The framework draws on several traditions. Stuart Hall (1990) describes identity as a "production" that is never complete and is always shaped by history, culture, and power. Emmanuel Levinas (1969) grounds ethics in the face-to-face encounter with the vulnerable Other. Doreen Massey (1994) shows that space is made of social relations and is never a neutral container. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) names the matrix of domination in which race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect. Brought together, these perspectives allow us to ask what happens when structures of exclusion, compressed into a confined geography, are turned inward.

The argument has two parts. Part I establishes the concepts: two senses of alterity, intersectional oppression, spatial confinement, and epistemic injustice. Part II reads the novels together. It studies, in Morrison, the internalization of white standards of beauty, the role of class respectability, and the community's failure of witness. It studies, in Naylor, the architecture of Brewster Place and the exclusion of Lorraine and Theresa. A final comparative section confronts the two novels' accounts of sisterhood. The article concludes that Morrison and Naylor refuse an uncritical celebration of community: they demand an ethics of belonging that embraces the Other even when the Other lives next door.

1. Theoretical Foundations and the Mechanics of Marginalization

Marginalization is rarely a one-dimensional force exerted by a dominant culture on an outsider group. It combines structural, spatial, and psychological mechanisms. This part lays the groundwork by examining alterity and intersectional oppression (1.1), then urban confinement, voice, and epistemic injustice (1.2). Its aim is to show how external structures of exclusion penetrate the inner life of communities and selves.

1.1 Conceptualizing Alterity and Intersectional Oppression

The word *alterity* derives from the Latin *alter*, "other." It names more than difference. It names a condition in which an individual or group is placed outside the norms of a dominant culture. Two distinct senses of the term need to be kept apart, because they are often confused.

The first is ethical. For Levinas (1969), the Other is absolutely irreducible to the self, and the face of the Other issues a command that interrupts the ego's self-sufficiency: I am responsible for the Other before any reciprocity or contract. The second sense is political and historical. Here the Other is produced by domination. In the tradition running from Hegel's master-slave dialectic through Simone de Beauvoir (1949) to Edward Said (1978), the Other is constructed as a subordinate mirror against which the dominant subject defines its own autonomy and universality. Levinas's Other is the one before whom the self must yield; the Other of Beauvoir and Said is the one whom the self has made inferior in order to remain sovereign. This article uses both senses, but it does not conflate them. The first supplies the ethical standard against which communities may be judged; the second describes the mechanisms through which exclusion is produced.

Levinas's philosophy, however, tends to abstract the human encounter, and its universal subject is implicitly unmarked by race or gender. To bring it into contact with the lived realities of Black Americans, it must be anchored in W. E. B. Du Bois's (1903) account of "double consciousness": the split experienced by a racialized subject who must see herself through the eyes of a hostile world. Frantz Fanon (1967 [1952]) described the same alienation as an "epidermal" inferiority imposed from outside and then lived from within. For the African American subject, alterity is therefore not only a metaphysical condition; it is an imposed condition of hypervisibility and erasure at once, in which she is scrutinized yet denied recognition as a full participant in the social contract.

This alienation cannot be grasped through a single axis. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) showed that race and gender do not operate as mutually exclusive categories: they combine to produce distinct forms of exclusion that single-axis analyses fail to see. Collins (2000) widened the point into a "matrix of domination" in which race, class, gender, and sexuality are organized together. For Black women, alterity is therefore inscribed several times over: in relation to white America, to male privilege outside and inside the community, and, for some, to heterosexual norms. Hall's (1990) emphasis on identity as a historically contingent "production" adds that these mechanisms change over time, from chattel slavery to redlining, segregated housing, and the disenfranchisement of the post-migration city.

From these premises we draw a working distinction that organizes the rest of the article. *External alterity* is imposed by the dominant white supremacist order. *Internal alterity* arises when marginalized communities themselves police boundaries, enforce conformity, and exclude those who do not fit a rigid communal mold. The two are not independent: internal alterity is very often the internalization and redirection of external alterity. This is where Morrison and Naylor intervene most pointedly. By showing how characters absorb social rejection and redirect it toward the most vulnerable among them, whether Pecola Breedlove or Lorraine and Theresa, the novels compel us to ask what ethical recognition the vulnerable Other is owed, and by whom.

1.2 The Politics of Voice and Spatial Confinement

Alterity is never merely a state of mind. It is etched into geography and reinforced through the politics of voice. Space and voice are the two terrains on which marginalized people either assert their humanity or are silenced.

On the spatial side, Edward Soja (2010) uses the term *spatial justice* to name the fair distribution of the resources and opportunities that space organizes, a concern with roots in Henri Lefebvre's (1991 [1974]) analysis of the production of space and David Harvey's (1973) work on social justice and the city. In post-migration America, segregation did not vanish with the end of legal segregation; it was reinscribed by redlining, discriminatory housing markets, and urban renewal that confined Black populations to decaying enclaves. The industrial town of Lorain, Ohio, in Morrison's novel and the walled street of Naylor's are both such containers. Following Massey (1994), we treat these places not as static backdrops but as dynamic networks of social relations. A community that is economically starved, socially isolated, and under constant external pressure sees that pressure circulate within it. Confinement restricts the horizon of its inhabitants, and survival depends on continual negotiation with it.

On the side of voice, Miranda Fricker (2007) defines *epistemic injustice* as a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower. It takes two forms: *testimonial injustice*, in which a speaker's credibility is deflated by prejudice, and *hermeneutical injustice*, in which structural prejudice denies a person's experience the shared concepts needed to make it intelligible. Fricker's account concerns society at large, yet its logic extends to communities under pressure: a group that depends on a fragile collective respectability may refuse to hear what threatens it. Marginalized subjects are then denied epistemic authority twice, by the dominant culture that does not listen and by an insular community that demands silence to protect itself. bell hooks (1989) makes a related point about "talking back": for Black women, speaking is not a given but a hard-won act that is often punished.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1988) question, whether the subaltern can speak, belongs to a specific context, the analysis of colonial and postcolonial India, and it should not be transposed to African American fiction without qualification. We borrow only its central insight: that the speech of those at the lowest point of a hierarchy is often mediated, distorted, or unheard. Pecola's testimony about her rape, for instance, is not heard by her mother; this is better described through Fricker's categories than through Spivak's, and the article uses them accordingly.

Language is also a site of both exclusion and retention. Shirley Brice Heath's (1983) ethnography of language in working-class Black and white communities in the Carolina Piedmont shows how the verbal practices of Black children, valued within their community, were misrecognized by school institutions as deficient. Within Black communities, vernacular traditions are instruments of cultural retention and resistance. But they can also be turned to exclusionary use, as when gossip, euphemism, and silence police those who deviate from accepted scripts of behavior.

Together, spatial theory and the theory of epistemic justice show how physical and communicative confinement operate as twin engines of alterity. The ghetto street and the tenement are not merely settings; they are active agents in the drama of marginalization, determining who is heard, who is rendered invisible, and who is cast beyond the reach of communal care. Part II turns to the novels with these tools in hand.

II. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: INTERNAL EXCLUSION IN MORRISON AND NAYLOR

Moving from theoretical foundations to textual application, this section examines how Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor translate these mechanics of marginalization into powerful narrative realities. By placing *The Bluest Eye* and *The*

Women of Brewster Place in direct dialogue, we uncover how both authors dismantle romanticized notions of community. They expose the painful paradox of internal exclusion, revealing how systemic pressures compel vulnerable groups to police, marginalize, and fracture their own from within.

2.1 Internalized Racism, Class, and Patriarchy in *The Bluest Eye*

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison shows what happens when white standards of beauty and worth are internalized. External racism, expressed through redlining, poverty, and institutional neglect, supplies the pressure; the novel's attention is directed to how that pressure infects homes, schoolyards, and neighborhoods. The Black community is not depicted as a utopia of uncritical solidarity. White supremacist ideology is absorbed so deeply that community members take part, often unknowingly, in the silencing and destruction of the most vulnerable of their own, above all Pecola Breedlove.

Beauty is the first mechanism. The culture that surrounds the characters (the Dick-and-Jane primer that opens the novel, the Shirley Temple films and blue-eyed dolls, the cinema in which Pauline Breedlove learns to measure herself against Hollywood glamour) offers a single standard that defines Blackness as lack. Frantz Fanon's (1967 [1952]) analysis of racial inferiority, as a split in the self imposed from outside, illuminates what happens to Pecola. Her prayer for blue eyes is not a childish whim; it is the logical conclusion of a world that teaches her that visibility, safety, and love are reserved for those who mirror the dominant culture. Because white America sees her as other, the people around her, and finally Pecola herself, treat her as an emblem of ugliness and pollution.

Second, the novel does not treat the community as uniform. It dramatizes class respectability as an internal dividing line, and it does so through two figures. Geraldine, a middle-class woman who has trained herself and her son to maintain the distinction between "colored people" and "niggers," drives Pecola from her house in a scene of cold contempt. Maureen Peal, light-skinned, wealthy, and admired, taunts Pecola on the way home from school. Both enforce, within Black life, the hierarchy of color and class that outside forces have imposed on all of them. This is the "class snobbery" this article's introduction identifies as one form of internal alterity, and it shows that exclusion within the community is not only moral or sexual; it is also stratified by color and class.

Third, the novel is organized so as to resist a simple morality tale. Claudia McTeer narrates, as a child in the present of the events and as an adult looking back on them. An omniscient narrator takes over to give us the backstories of Pauline and Cholly, and Pauline's own consciousness is partly voiced in her section. This multiple narration refuses to present the oppressed as faultless victims. Claudia's early revulsion at the blue-eyed baby doll represents a healthy rage against the commodification of beauty, a rage most adult characters have been forced to abandon. Yet the adult narrator also confesses her own implication in the community's failure, a point developed in 2.2.

Fourth, the novel makes Pauline Breedlove essential to understanding internalized racism in adults. Pauline absorbs the lessons of the cinema, comes to see herself as ugly, and finds in her employers' home, and in the pretty blond child there, a world of order and approval that her own household lacks. She gives the Fisher girl the tenderness she withholds from Pecola. Internalized racism here is not an abstraction; it is a mother's inability to see her daughter.

Finally, patriarchal violence compounds this fracture. Cholly Breedlove's formative humiliation, forced by white men to continue a sexual encounter with Darlene under their gaze, teaches him to direct his rage at someone weaker than himself, not at the men who humiliated him. The result is the rape of Pecola, committed in an act the novel renders as a perverse mixture of tenderness and violence. This is not an excuse for Cholly; it shows what Collins (2000) means when she describes interlocking systems of domination that reach Black women and girls from several directions at once. Pecola is othered twice: first by a racist society that renders her subhuman, and then by an impoverished patriarchal structure within her own home that devours its most defenseless member.

Morrison thus demonstrates that the most devastating consequence of alterity is that the marginalized learn to police, devalue, and other one another. Oppression does not stop at the color line or the boundary of the neighborhood; it bleeds inward.

2.2 Collective Complicity, Failed Witness, and the Limits of Sisterhood in *The Bluest Eye*

Morrison widens her critique from the family to the whole community of Lorain. The townsfolk are not passive onlookers. They watch Pecola's collapse with a mix of morbid curiosity, detachment, and self-protective denial. When she becomes pregnant by her father, the community's response is gossip and condemnation, not help, and the novel's adult narrator admits that the town drew a sense of its own worth from the contrast with Pecola's supposed ugliness.

This collective failure illustrates a neglected dimension of alterity: the refusal of an oppressed group to recognize the humanity of its most vulnerable member when doing so would threaten its own fragile standing. In Levinasian terms, the community looks at Pecola's face and does not

hear the command it carries. In the terms of Part I, her testimony is also not heard: when Pecola tells her mother of the rape, Pauline does not believe her and beats her. This is a textbook case of testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007), compounded by the hermeneutical gap that leaves a child without the words to make her violation understood.

The community's behavior can be read through bell hooks's (1992) account of the gaze. For hooks, Black spectators have historically developed an "oppositional gaze" that refuses to accept the images of Blackness produced by white representation. In *The Bluest Eye*, the reverse occurs for most characters: they do not oppose the dominant gaze but adopt it and turn it on one another. Du Bois's double consciousness and Fanon's analysis of the self seen through white eyes explain how that adoption becomes policing. Mae Henderson's (1989) work on Black women writers' "speaking in tongues," the capacity to speak in multiple, competing voices at once, helps account for the novel's form: the voices of Claudia, the omniscient narrator, Pauline, and the community do not harmonize, and their friction exposes how marginalized communities absorb dominant hierarchies.

The novel is not without counter-examples, and they are important for a comparative reading of sisterhood. Claudia and Frieda MacTeer, children, try to protect Pecola; they plant marigold seeds in the hope that their care will save her baby, and the seeds do not bloom. The prostitutes Poland, China, and Miss Marie are the only adults who treat Pecola with unselfconscious kindness, and they are the community's own outcasts. Sisterhood in Morrison's novel therefore exists, but it is fragile, disproportionately located among children and society's outcasts, and powerless against the structures that surround it. The failure of witness is thus the novel's deepest tragedy: the moment when a community turns its back on its own child to preserve its own survival.

2.3 The Politics of Space: Architectural Geographies and the Limits of Sanctuary in *The Women of Brewster Place*

To understand Naylor's critique of community, we must begin with the physical setting. Brewster Place is a dead-end street cut off from the rest of the city by a brick wall. The novel's prologue explains that the wall was built as the result of municipal politics and the interests of those in power, in order to separate the street, and the people who live there, from the city around it. The wall is therefore not a neutral backdrop. It is an active participant in the neighborhood's confinement, and, in the sense given by Massey (1994) and Soja (2010), a material expression of spatial injustice.

Within this enclosed space, the residents build networks of support. Mattie Michael takes in and shelters others, Etta Mae Johnson visits and moves on, Kiswana Browne organizes tenants against negligent landlords, and Cora Lee and Ciel each carry their own stories of loss and survival. Their solidarity is real. Yet the physical confinement of a dead-end street also creates a claustrophobic social atmosphere. Because the residents cannot direct their anger at the municipal forces and systemic racism that trapped them, anger and anxiety circulate inward. The brick wall thus materializes a containment that is at once physical and ideological: it traps the residents inside narrow definitions of respectability and survival.

Naylor does not treat all residents alike, however, and an honest reading must not either. The hostility toward Lorraine and Theresa is not unanimous. Mattie, Etta Mae, and Kiswana show varying degrees of openness or at least ambivalence, whereas other neighbors, such as the gossiping Sophie, turn suspicion into a public weapon. The novel is thus a study of a divided community, and it asks what makes some of its members capable of hospitality while others cannot extend it.

When conflict erupts, it occurs within a closed circuit from which there is no escape. The wall prevents anyone from leaving the street, and also prevents the street from being seen. The assault that closes Lorraine's story takes place in the alley beside the wall, in the one place the neighborhood has agreed not to look. Spatial containment, in other words, fosters a communal toxicity in which what is hidden may be done without consequence.

2.4 Queering the Margin: Anti-Lesbian Prejudice and the Limits of Sisterhood

The chapter "The Two" is the novel's most searching examination of internal exclusion. Lorraine and Theresa, a lesbian couple, move to Brewster Place hoping for a quiet life away from hostility elsewhere. They meet fear and judgment instead. The term *homophobia* is more usual in English than *lesbophobia*, but the particular form of rejection they meet is directed at two women whose bond excludes men, and it is useful to keep this specificity in view. Cheryl Clarke (1983) argued, in an essay that belongs to the same Black feminist anthology as Barbara Smith's editorial work, that Black communities' homophobia amounts to a "failure to transform": a refusal to apply to sexuality the critique of oppression that those communities direct at racism. Naylor's chapter dramatizes exactly this failure.

The literature often celebrates women's support of women as an unqualified good. That ideal, however, tacitly assumes that all those involved conform to heterosexual norms. The residents of Brewster Place, already vulnerable to discrimination from the outside world, project their own fears on the couple. They rely on respectability, the strategy

that Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1993) analyzed in the history of Black Baptist women: a politics of moral uprightness through which a group under attack attempts to prove its worth to those who stigmatize it. As Cathy Cohen (1997) argued, however, this kind of politics tends to leave behind those members of Black communities whose lives do not conform, whom it treats as liabilities for the whole. Lorraine and Theresa's openness triggers a deep anxiety about contamination, and the residents turn that anxiety against them, not against the unfair standards of the outer world.

The rejection is also connected to traditional ideas about motherhood and men. Hortense Spillers (1987) has shown how Black women's relation to the family, kinship, and gender has been shaped by the history of slavery and the patriarchal norms imposed on Black families; under such conditions, Black women have often been valued primarily through the roles of mother, caretaker, or partner of men. Because Lorraine and Theresa's relationship exists entirely outside male approval, some neighbors see it as a challenge to how things have always been done. Judith Butler's (1990) analysis of the heterosexual matrix, in which gender, sex, and desire are made to cohere in a single normative pattern, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's (1990) work on the closet as a structure of enforced knowledge and silence, both help to describe the neighborhood's response: it relies on gossip, suspicion, and the demand that the couple be either invisible or accountable, rather than on any inquiry into who they are.

This, too, is a failure of voice and hearing in the terms of Part I. No one in the street speaks with the couple to understand their lives; the residents rely on silence, whispering, and the circulation of old prejudices. The community refuses to listen to their story, which Fricker (2007) would call a case of hermeneutical injustice, since the shared concepts that could make a lesbian couple's life intelligible to their neighbors are missing or withheld. In Levinasian terms, the neighbors refuse the face-to-face.

The novel's central argument about exclusion is carried by its violent climax. Lorraine is assaulted in the alley by a group of young men from the neighborhood, led by C. C. Baker, who are driven by the same attitudes, in coarser form, as the adult residents. The assault is not committed by outsiders; it is the extreme of a hostility that the community has made thinkable. In the novel's aftermath, Lorraine's encounter with Ben, the old, alcoholic building superintendent who had befriended her, ends in his death, a tragedy that deepens the sense of a community in which the vulnerable destroy one another. The novel shows with painful clarity what becomes of sisterhood when it is conditional on conformity.

Naylor does not leave her readers with this verdict alone. The final chapter, "The Block Party," brings the residents together in an event in which Mattie's dream of the wall coming down becomes a shared, communal vision, and the women begin, literally, to tear at the bricks. The sequence does not erase what has happened, but it suggests that the community's capacity for self-criticism and repair is the condition of its survival. Naylor insists that sisterhood can only be freeing if it is made unconditional.

2.5 Comparing the Two Novels: Sisterhood, Space, and Witness

The two novels can now be confronted on three points that the foregoing analysis has isolated.

Sisterhood. In *The Bluest Eye*, solidarity among women exists, but it is displaced to the margins: the child friends and the outcast prostitutes. The women who hold social authority, Geraldine and Pauline, enforce the dominant hierarchy. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, sisterhood is at the center of the narrative, as a lived practice of mutual aid, but it is tested by the arrival of a couple who do not conform. Morrison shows its near absence; Naylor shows its limits. Together they suggest that sisterhood cannot be assumed as a given. It must be built, and it must be extended to those who threaten the group's self-image.

Space. Both novels make the spatial setting an agent. Lorain, in Morrison's novel, is a town in which poverty and racial hierarchy structure every household, and in which homes are the sites of the harm. Brewster Place is a street literally walled in. In both, confinement turns pressure inward. The difference is that Morrison's space is diffuse and Naylor's is architectural, which allows Naylor to end with the image of its demolition.

Witness. In *The Bluest Eye*, the failure of witness is complete: no one hears Pecola, and the adult narrator is left to carry the memory. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, witness is partial and belated: some residents see what is done to Lorraine, and the community's gathering in the final chapter acts as a kind of retrospective acknowledgment. In both, the question is the same: who is heard, and who is allowed to be seen?

The two novels also differ in the kind of otherness that is excluded. Pecola is othered chiefly through race, color, class, and gender; Lorraine and Theresa through sexuality, in a community that is for the most part aligned with them on race. Read together, the novels show that the logic of exclusion is the same across these different axes, which is the contribution of an intersectional reading (Crenshaw 1989; Collins 2000).

III. CONCLUSION

This article has traced how alterity operates in two novels of African American women's writing, not only as an external force of oppression but as an internal fracture within the spaces meant to offer sanctuary. By distinguishing the Levinasian ethical Other from the Other produced by domination, and by distinguishing external from internal alterity, it has proposed a vocabulary for what both authors show.

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison exposes the devastation wrought by white supremacist standards of beauty, by class respectability, and by patriarchal violence. Through the child's and adult's voices of Claudia McTeer, the omniscient narrator, and the backstories of Pauline and Cholly Breedlove, the novel shows how structural violence colonizes the inner life, and how a community, by failing to bear witness, completes the destruction of its most defenseless member. In *The Women of Brewster Place*, Naylor turns from the psychological interior to the architectural and social boundaries of a walled enclave. She honors the networks of survival the women create, and she refuses to sentimentalize them: when belonging is made conditional on conformity, a community manufactures its own internal exiles. Her ending, however, allows for repair.

Reading the two authors together yields an ethical imperative for contemporary criticism. Liberation cannot be achieved through selective empathy or through the simple inversion of power relations. True belonging requires an unsparing reckoning with the alterity that exists across society's large fault lines and also within homes, streets, and neighborhoods. By bringing these hidden fractures to light, Morrison and Naylor turn literature into an instrument of social critique and urge us to build spaces of solidarity that are open to the Other.

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Embodied Disruption: Gendered Subversions, Performative Agency, and Sociocultural Reform on the Malayalam Stage

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Abstract— *This paper investigates the transformative trajectory of female performance in modern Malayalam theatre, tracing how women shifted from marginalized spectacles to active agents of cultural dissent. Through the analytical framework of Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, this study interrogates the historical transition from female impersonation by male actors to the radical bodily presence of women on stage during the sociopolitical churn of mid-twentieth-century Kerala. By examining key dramatic movements—such as the anti-caste, progressive political dramas of the KPAC (Kerala People's Arts Club) alongside contemporary feminist experimental theatre—the paper demonstrates that the stage functioned not merely as a space of aesthetic reflection, but as a liminal arena where hegemonic patriarchal norms and caste codes were contested and rewritten. Butler's formulation of performativity illuminates how female actors redeployed bodily gestures, speech acts, and spatial negotiation to expose gender as a regulatory social construct rather than an innate essence. Concurrently, the paper addresses the enduring structural tensions of the medium: the persistent dialectic between the progressive radicalization of scripts and the moral surveillance, commodification, and domestic containment imposed upon female performers offstage. Ultimately, this study demonstrates that Malayalam theatre served as a vital site of counter-hegemonic practice, wherein women's embodied presence disrupted regional socio-aesthetic hierarchies, forged an alternative public sphere, and fundamentally reshaped the discourse of modern Kerala's sociopolitical renaissance.*

Keywords— ***Malayalam theatre; Gender performativity; Embodied agency; KPAC and political drama; Social reform in Kerala***

Introduction

The theatrical landscape of modern Kerala has consistently served not merely as an aesthetic mirror of society, but as a dynamic institutional crucible through which political ideology, caste hierarchies, and gender relations are negotiated, contested, and reconfigured. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, public performance spaces across southwestern India operated within rigidly sanctified feudal structures, wherein corporeal visibility was circumscribed along strictly demarcated lines of caste purity, ritual protocol, and patriarchal surveillance. Classical and ritual traditions—most notably Kathakali, Koodiyattam, and various sacred temple rituals—strictly regulated or outright barred the secular, non-ritualized female body from public theatrical display, routinely substituting female impersonators (stree-vesham) enacted by men to sustain the illusion of femininity while neutralizing the perceived moral, ritual, and sexual anxieties associated with women's authentic presence in the public sphere (Menon, 2005). Consequently, the physical arrival of women onto the modern Malayalam secular proscenium stage during the socio-political ferment of the mid-twentieth century represented an epistemological rupture in the region's cultural history, dismantling

entrenched taboos governing female public visibility, domestic confinement, and bodily labor (Panikkar, 1995).

To comprehend the political and aesthetic gravity of this spatial and corporeal transition, performance theory must intersect with the conceptual apparatus of gender performativity developed by Judith Butler. In Gender Trouble (1990) and Bodies That Matter (1993), Butler posits that gender is neither an essential biological reality nor an ontological interiority residing within the core of the subject; rather, it is a continuous, stylized repetition of acts, bodily gestures, linguistic rituals, and spatial enactments governed by hegemonic regulatory regimes. Butler asserts that "gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler, 1990, p. 33). Because gender must be constantly reenacted to maintain its illusory coherence, the very mechanism of its iterative production creates structural fissures, enabling sites of subversion where stylized acts can be performed askew, contested, or resignified (Butler, 1993). When mapped onto the historical emergence and evolution of the Malayalam stage, performativity ceases to be an abstract post-structuralist formulation; it becomes a tangible diagnostic tool to examine how the female performing body unsettled the entrenched disciplinary codes of colonial-era caste patriarchy and contemporary socio-political reform.

This paper critically investigates the transformative trajectory of women on the Malayalam stage, evaluating how the female actor transitioned from a transgressive, morally suspect spectacle into an indispensable agent of regional socio-political renaissance and radical feminist critique. Moving across key historical junctures—from early twentieth-century community reform plays like V. T. Bhattathiripad's Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathukku (From the Kitchen to the Stage) and early political interventions, to the golden era of the Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC) during the 1950s and 1960s, through to contemporary experimental feminist theatre spearheaded by groups such as Samata and directors like C. S. Chandrika, Sajitha Madathil, and Sreeja K. V.—the analysis traces the evolving stakes of female bodily visibility. Furthermore, this study unpacks the systemic dialectic that characterized Malayalam progressive performance: the persistent dissonance between the radical ideological scripts authored by male playwrights calling for egalitarianism, and the conservative moral surveillance, socio-economic marginalization, and domestic anxieties imposed upon the female performers whose physical labor animated those very scripts (Devika, 2007; Jeffrey, 1992). Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that women's embodied presence on the Malayalam stage disrupted caste-bound visual economies, forged an alternative counter-public sphere, and asserted a radical performative agency that irreversibly redefined Malayali modernity.

Spatial Crossings and the Radical Body: Historical Transgressions from Temple Enclaves to Progressive Political Drama

The historicization of the Malayalam stage reveals that the physical presence of women on the secular platform required an aggressive boundary-crossing across private and public spheres. In traditional pre-modern Kerala, spatial mobility was structured through a matrix of feudal savarna (upper-caste) hegemony and colonial-Victorian domestic propriety, which collectively confined women within the inner sanctums of the ancestral domestic compound, or tharavad and illam (Saradamoni, 1999; Jeffrey, 1992). The public realm of artistic production was largely restricted to masculine bodies, with theatrical representation depending heavily on male transvestism. When male performers adopted feminine postures, ornate sartorial drapery, and exaggerated vocal registers to depict womanhood, they enacted a version of femininity that Butler conceptualizes as the discursive sedimentation of patriarchal ideals—a stylized mimicry devoid of biological female agency that reinscribed feminine docility and eroticized passivity for an exclusively male gaze (Butler, 1990; Case, 1988). The male actor's body served as a safe vehicle for feminine representation because it posed no ontological threat to the territorial division of domestic privacy and masculine civic space (Diamond, 1997; Aston, 1995).

The rupture of this spatial containment found its initial catalyst in the radical community reform movements of the late 1920s and 1930s. The Namboothiri Brahmin community, bound by suffocating orthodoxies that subjected Antharjanams (Namboothiri women) to absolute purdah, child marriage, and lifelong widowhood, became the focal point of dramatic contestation. In 1929, V. T. Bhattathiripad penned the seminal social drama Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathukku (From the Kitchen to the Stage), a direct artistic assault on the caste-feudal cloistering of women (Bhattathiripad, 1988; Devika, 2005). The title itself encapsulates a radical spatial reorientation: moving bodily from the adukkala (kitchen/private interiority) to the arangam (stage/public visibility). Although female characters in the very first performances of the play were enacted by young male reformers due to the immense social terror surrounding the public exposure of Antharjanams, the text itself operated as an explosive performative utterance, inciting women within the community to shed their traditional protective umbrellas (marakkuda) and step into the public sphere (Bhattathiripad, 1988; Nilayamgode, 2011). Subsequent community

initiatives saw women performing themselves, a transgressive act that stripped the patriarch of his absolute monopoly over female visibility and moral governance.

As the nationalist struggle merged into the communist peasant and labor movements of the 1940s and 1950s, the stage transformed into Kerala's foremost vehicle of mass ideological mobilization. The founding of the Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC) in 1950, spearheaded by left-leaning cultural activists, marked the decisive consolidation of modern political realism (Panikkar, 1995). Thoppil Bhasi's iconic production Ningalenne Communistakki (You Made Me a Communist), first staged in 1952, radically democratized the regional theatrical audience by touring agrarian hamlets, factory grounds, and village squares (Bhasi, 1952). Crucially, the production incorporated professional women actors into its core touring troupe, including pioneering performers like KPAC Sulochana and later, trailblazers such as KPAC Lalitha (Lalitha, 2013; Menon, 2005). The physical presence of women on the open, mobile KPAC stage was a revolutionary phenomenon: working-class and subaltern female characters—such as agricultural laborers, disenfranchised mothers, and defiant daughters—were no longer voiced through male ventriloquism, but through the vibrant, somatic labor of real women whose voices projected across rural crowds.

FEUDAL PARADIGM (Pre-1930s)
[Domestic Cloistering: Illam / Tharavad]
|
(Strict spatial exclusion;
Male transvestism on stage)
▼
COMMUNITY REFORM (1930s-1940s)
[Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathukku / Namboothiri Reform]
|
(Spatial rupture: Shedding 'Marakkuda';
Desire for secular female voice)
▼
PROGRESSIVE POLITICAL THEATRE (1950s-1970s)
[KPAC & Professional Touring Troupes]
|
(Realist political performance;
Embodied female physical labor)
▼
CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST AVANT-GARDE (1980s-Present)
[Autonomous Body / Non-Linear Subversions]
(Deconstruction of gaze, caste-patriarchy, and domestic scripts)

Within Butlerian theory, the entry of female actors into this politicized public arena constituted a radical resignification of the "regulatory norms" that had historically governed the female body (Butler, 1993, p. 2). By projecting resonance, delivering fiery polemical dialogues against caste oppression, and engaging in direct, unchaperoned physical interaction with male comrades on stage, women performers like KPAC Sulochana destabilized the traditional visual economy that conflated female visibility with moral degradation or sexual promiscuity. The stage ceased to be a passive proscenium of bourgeois entertainment; it became what Elin Diamond conceptualizes as a feminist mimetic space—an arena where social conventions are not merely mimicked but denaturalized through performance, exposing the artificiality of the traditional gender roles maintained by feudal-capitalist power structures (Diamond, 1997; Dolan, 1988). The communist stage endowed the female body with historical materialism: the female actor was visibly an exploited laborer, an agitating political subject, and an indispensable architect of the modern secular collective.

Nevertheless, this radical political visibility concealed deep structural contradictions that progressive male dramatists rarely addressed within their aesthetic paradigms. While women actors like KPAC Lalitha attained widespread admiration for their affective versatility and naturalistic emotional depth, their status outside the performance space remained precarious and strictly disciplined (Lalitha, 2013; Devika, 2007). In the cultural consciousness of middle-class Kerala, the woman who traveled with an itinerant drama troupe, slept in transit, and exposed her physical form to thousands of spectators was constantly vulnerable to moral stigmatization and institutional patriarchy (Seemanthini, 2001; Jeffrey, 1992). The progressive scripts of Thoppil Bhasi and his contemporaries, while revolutionary in their class and caste politics, frequently circumscribed female characters within comforting, paternalistic archetypes: the selfless, suffering mother; the chaste, politically supportive beloved; or the tragic, self-sacrificing victim whose purity must be avenged by the male revolutionary vanguard (Bhasi, 1952; Menon, 2005).

Consequently, the progressive political stage generated a curious paradox: it unlocked the public sphere for female somatic labor while disciplining that labor into normative scripts of modern, domestic respectability. In Butler's terminology, the performative acts allowed to women on the political stage were continually "recuperated" by the dominant heteronormative framework of the emerging Malayali nation-state (Butler, 1990; Devika, 2005). The female actor was granted an embodied presence provided that her character upheld bourgeois

familial morality and political subservience to the masculine party hierarchy. This persistent tension between revolutionary physical labor and ideological domestic containment established the artistic baseline against which later generations of feminist theatre practitioners in Kerala would violently react.

From Melodramatic Containment to Autonomous Flesh: Deconstructing the Male Gaze in Contemporary Feminist Performance

The limitations of mid-twentieth-century political realism led to the emergence of an autonomous feminist theatrical consciousness in Kerala during the late 1980s and 1990s. As women scholars, writers, and cultural practitioners began interrogating the canon of Malayalam drama, they observed that the "woman question" had largely been instrumentalized by male playwrights to construct a sanitized narrative of regional modernity (Devika, 2007; Kumar, 1993). In the mainstream commercial and professional dramas that proliferated across Kerala through the 1970s and 1980s—often referred to as commercial samithi natakams—the complex political agency that had momentarily flickered within early KPAC productions degenerated into heightened melodrama, formulaic emotional manipulation, and conservative domestic tropes (Panikkar, 1995). In these plays, women were systematically relegated to moral binaries: either the virtuous homemaker who anchors patriarchal stability or the westernized, sexually autonomous woman whose deviance precipitates familial devastation and moral retribution.

Feminist theatre emerged as a deliberate methodological revolt against both commercial melodramatic containment and the patriarchal paternalism of left-wing realism. Influenced by international feminist performance theory, third-world feminist critiques, and regional grassroots mobilizations, contemporary theatre makers in Kerala recognized that altering dramatic scripts was insufficient; the entire spatial, somatic, and visual relationship between the performer and the spectator had to be radically rebuilt (Aston, 1995; Case, 1988; Reinelt, 1996). Laura Mulvey's seminal formulation of the "male gaze," which demonstrates how classic visual representation constructs woman as an image to be looked at, coded with an erotic "to-be-looked-at-ness," provided a foundational critique for this shift (Mulvey, 1975, p. 11). For feminist directors and actors in Kerala, deconstructing this male gaze required interrogating the patriarchal scopic regime that historically viewed the female actor as either a sanctified maternal icon or an illicit sexual commodity (Madathil, 2010; Subramanyam, 2002).

A watershed development in this movement was the formation of feminist performance collectives and autonomous productions that explicitly privileged female interiority, bodily autonomy, and anti-caste solidarity. Productions such as Ammadaivangal (Mother Goddesses), works produced under the banner of the feminist collective Samata, and solo performances by artists like Sajitha Madathil and Sreeja K. V. directly questioned the patriarchal and caste biases embedded in traditional theatrical forms (Subramanyam, 2002; Madathil, 2010). Sajitha Madathil's acclaimed production Matsyagandhi (2002), for instance, serves as an exemplary intervention in the politics of performative resignification. The play deconstructs the mythological figure of Satyavati from the Mahabharata—the fisherwoman whose natural body odor (matsyagandha) was miraculously transformed by sage Parasara into celestial fragrance (yojanagandha) before she could be deemed suitable for royal copulation—and superimposes this mythic narrative onto the contemporary lived struggles of Kerala's subaltern fisherwomen battling displacement, corporate exploitation, and patriarchal violence (Madathil, 2010; Devika, 2007).

In Matsyagandhi, Madathil does not conform to the polite, sanitized body of middle-class theatrical realism. Instead, she unleashes a visceral, guttural performance: she squats, screams, hurls verbal abuse at the state and patriarchy, and openly invokes the pungent, non-negotiable smell of raw fish, sea salt, and female sweat (Madathil, 2010). Applying Butler's framework, this performance enacts an aggressive parodic subversion of the regulatory norms that produce the "proper" Malayali woman (Butler, 1990; Butler, 1993). By deliberately rejecting the polished, sanitized elocution and restrained physical gestures expected of female actors, Madathil makes the visceral labor of the subaltern woman visible and audible, refusing to allow the male or upper-caste spectator the comfort of passive aesthetic consumption. The performance stages what Jill Dolan defines as a "feminist spectator"—an active, engaged witness who is compelled to confront their own complicity in the structures of caste and gender subjugation that the performance lays bare (Dolan, 1988).Similarly, the theatrical work of Sreeja K. V., particularly in plays like Chakki Chankaran and various street-theatre adaptations, interrogates the daily micro-politics of domestic labor and sexual violence. Sreeja abandons the traditional proscenium boundary, operating in intimate courtyards, college quadrangles, and urban streets, thereby abolishing the physical distance between spectator and performer that traditionally shielded patriarchal violence from public scrutiny (Chandrasekhar, 2006; Aston, 1995). In these spaces, the female body does not perform a scripted text written by a male political leader; rather, the body itself becomes the text, utilizing non-linear narratives,

fragmented speech, ritual chanting, and raw physical vulnerability to articulate experiences of domestic battery, marital rape, and emotional confinement that the heroic realism of the KPAC era had systematically silenced (Devika, 2005; Subramanyam, 2002).

This shift from melodramatic containment to bodily autonomy fundamentally alters the mechanics of theatrical performativity. If the early Malayalam stage substituted real women with male bodies, and the mid-century stage disciplined female bodies to fit patriarchal communist archetypes, contemporary feminist theatre mobilizes the female body as an un-containable, defiant presence. It recognizes that gender performativity is not a performance that one puts on like a costume in the morning and removes at night; rather, it is the compulsory matrix through which bodies are materialized as human (Butler, 1993). By deliberately staging acts of physical resistance—unveiling the female body from ornamental modesty, confronting patriarchal harassment through direct address, and staging alternative histories of Dalit, Bahujan, and working-class women—contemporary practitioners demonstrate that the theatrical stage remains Kerala's most volatile arena for disrupting hegemonic power and reclaiming democratic space.

CONCLUSION

The evolution of women's presence on the Malayalam stage chronicles a Century-long struggle over corporeal sovereignty, spatial democratization, and cultural representation. From the ritualized exclusions of the pre-modern temple arts and the strategic male transvestism of early traditional performance, through the dramatic spatial crossings incited by social reform movements like Adukkalayil Ninnu Arangathukku, the secular theatrical stage emerged as a decisive frontier for challenging feudal caste-patriarchy. The progressive political theatre of the KPAC institutionalized this breakthrough by placing real women at the physical center of mass mobilization, establishing the working-class female body as an indispensable agent of regional socialist transformation, even while struggling to free itself from conservative domestic surveillance and patronizing narrative archetypes.

Through the theoretical framework of Judith Butler's gender performativity, this paper has demonstrated how the physical act of performance functions not merely as passive cultural expression, but as an active, disruptive intervention within historical regulatory regimes. The stylized acts that sustained patriarchal dominance for generations—demure vocalization, private cloistering, and moral subservience—were systematically exposed as contingent, artificial social constructs when women seized the stage to act, speak, scream, and organize. In the contemporary era, feminist avant-garde and grassroots practitioners have pushed this performative agency to its radical horizon, deconstructing the male gaze, interrogating caste and subaltern intersections, and transforming the theatrical space into an unapologetic site of bodily autonomy and counter-hegemonic critique. The trajectory of women on the Malayalam stage mirrors the unresolved contradictions of Kerala's wider democratic project. While legal, educational, and political reforms have long positioned Kerala as an egalitarian model of social development, the cultural sphere has consistently remained a battlefield where traditional patriarchal anxieties reassert themselves. By refusing spatial confinement and reclaiming their voices, female performers on the Malayalam stage have consistently unmasked these hypocrisies, transforming performance into a profound political instrument of continuous emancipation and social change.

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The Role of English as a Lingua Franca in International Trade Negotiations

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Abstract— *English has become the default working language of cross-border commerce, yet the great majority of its users in this domain are not native speakers. This article examines the role of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and, more specifically, Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) in international trade negotiations, synthesising three decades of research at the intersection of applied linguistics, pragmatics, and international business studies. Drawing on a narrative review of empirical and conceptual literature, the article traces the shift from a native-speaker-normed view of business English to a function-oriented, accommodation-based model in which intelligibility, cooperation, and relational competence outweigh grammatical correctness. It identifies four recurring themes in the literature: (i) the genre-specific pragmatics of negotiation talk, including hedging, repetition, and comprehension-checking; (ii) the accommodation and meaning-negotiation strategies that BELF users deploy to pre-empt and repair misunderstanding; (iii) the persistence of power asymmetries and native-speakerism despite the theoretical 'de-nativisation' of English; and (iv) the emerging influence of digital and AI-mediated communication on lingua franca negotiation practice. The article concludes that trade negotiation success in ELF settings depends less on proficiency in Standard English than on shared business and cultural knowledge, cooperative pragmatic strategies, and negotiators' capacity to co-construct meaning in real time. Implications for negotiation training, language policy in multinational firms, and English for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP) pedagogy are discussed, alongside directions for future research.*

Keywords— ***English as a Lingua Franca, Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), international trade negotiation, intercultural business communication, pragmatic accommodation, global Englishes***

I. INTRODUCTION

International trade is, in practice, conducted overwhelmingly in English, but it is a form of English that belongs to no single nation. Estimates cited across the business-communication literature consistently note that native speakers form a numerical minority among the world's English users, and this is nowhere more visible than in cross-border commerce, where a German buyer, a Japanese supplier, and a Brazilian intermediary may transact an entire deal without a single native speaker of English present in the room (Seidlhofer, 2011). This reality has prompted a substantial body of scholarship reconceptualising English not as a foreign language to be mastered against a native-speaker yardstick, but as a lingua franca a contact language whose norms are negotiated locally, in situ, by its users (Jenkins, 2015; Mauranen, 2012).

Within international business, this shift has crystallised into the concept of Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF), a term developed to capture the distinctive, hybrid, and highly functional variety of English used by professionals for whom English is neither a first language nor, typically, a shared second culture (Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011). Trade negotiation is one of the genres in which BELF's communicative demands are most acute: negotiators must simultaneously manage linguistic accuracy, cultural sensitivity, commercial risk, and interpersonal rapport, often under time pressure and with

asymmetric power relations between buyer and seller (Planken, 2005; Charles, 2007).

This article addresses three interrelated questions. First, how has the conceptualisation of English in international business shifted from an English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) paradigm to an ELF/BELF paradigm, and what are the theoretical implications of that shift for the study of negotiation? Second, what pragmatic and interactional strategies characterise successful ELF communication in trade negotiation contexts? Third, what challenges linguistic, cultural, and political persist despite English's apparent neutrality as a lingua franca? In addressing these questions, the article synthesises findings from applied linguistics, international business communication, and, where relevant, pragmatics and discourse analysis, with a view to informing both theory-building and practice in negotiation training and ESBP pedagogy.

II. FROM EFL TO ELF/BELF: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Early research on business English treated non-native usage largely as a deviation from native-speaker norms, implicitly positioning native English speakers as both linguistic authority and communicative advantage (Nickerson, 2005). The ELF paradigm that emerged from the work of Seidlhofer (2004, 2011) and colleagues challenged this deficit view, arguing that when English functions as a contact language among speakers of different first languages, its 'ownership' shifts to its users collectively, and communicative success is measured by mutual intelligibility rather than conformity to a native standard.

Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen extended this reasoning to the corporate domain, coining BELF to denote English used as a neutral, shared communication code among business professionals of differing linguistic backgrounds, oriented toward getting the business done rather than toward native-like correctness (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). Kankaanranta and Planken's (2010) influential study of BELF competence proposed that effective BELF use rests on three interlocking components: language and communication skills, knowledge of business practices and genre conventions, and a shared, negotiated understanding of the professional relationship itself. Crucially, none of these components privileges native-speaker fluency; instead, they foreground pragmatic flexibility, clarity, and cooperative meaning-making (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; Ehrenreich, 2010).

This reconceptualisation matters for the study of trade negotiation because negotiation is, at its core, a genre defined by asymmetric interests, strategic ambiguity, and the need to build enough trust to reach agreement. If English in this genre is understood as a co-constructed, situationally negotiated code rather than a fixed target norm, then negotiation research must attend as much to the interactional work participants do to establish shared meaning as to the propositional content of offers and counter-offers (Firth, 1996; Pitzl, 2005).

III. LITERATURE REVIEW: ELF AND BELF IN TRADE NEGOTIATION CONTEXTS

3.1 Genre-Specific Studies of Negotiation Talk

A relatively small but methodologically rich strand of research has examined negotiation as a distinct communicative genre within BELF scholarship. Planken's (2005) comparative study of professional and aspiring sales negotiators found that experienced BELF negotiators used rapport-management strategies including hedges, humour, and small talk more skilfully than novices, suggesting that negotiation competence in a lingua franca setting is acquired through professional socialisation rather than formal language instruction alone. Vuorela's (2005) case study of a sales team's international negotiations similarly showed that goal attainment depended less on grammatical polish than on the team's ability to read the counterpart's business priorities and adapt their discourse accordingly.

Charles's (2007) research on long-term buyer–seller relationships further demonstrated that language choice and negotiation style are embedded in the broader relationship history between trading partners: negotiators who had worked together over time developed shared linguistic shortcuts and implicit understandings that reduced the communicative burden English might otherwise impose. Poncini's (2004) analysis of multicultural distributor meetings likewise illustrated how participants from a dozen or more countries constructed a shared professional identity through English, using linguistic choices strategically to signal inclusion, deference, or authority within the negotiating group.

3.2 Pragmatic and Accommodation Strategies

A second, larger strand of literature examines the micro-level pragmatic strategies that make ELF negotiation work in practice. Building on Firth's (1996) foundational notion of the 'let-it-pass' principle whereby interlocutors tacitly overlook non-standard forms that do not impede understanding subsequent research has catalogued a repertoire of accommodation devices used by BELF speakers: comprehension checks, repetition and paraphrase, explicit confirmation requests, and self-initiated repair (Cogo & Dewey, 2012; Mauranen, 2012). Pitzl's (2005) study of non-understanding episodes in business talk found that participants rarely let misunderstandings derail a

negotiation; instead, they collaboratively repaired trouble spots through negotiated clarification, treating communication breakdown as a joint problem to be solved rather than a failing attributable to either party.

Hedging is a particularly well-documented strategy in this literature. Modal verbs, vague quantifiers, and conditional phrasing allow BELF negotiators to soften face-threatening moves such as rejecting an offer or pressing for concessions, making proposals more palatable across cultural and linguistic distance (Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2013). Nickerson's (2005) research similarly found that BELF users adapt their communicative style strategically according to power relations, industry norms, and the cultural expectations of their counterpart, rather than applying a single fixed register. More recent work has extended this attention to nonverbal and multimodal accommodation gesture, visualisation, and shared documentation as resources BELF users draw on alongside spoken language to make understanding visible in real time, particularly in face-to-face and hybrid meetings (see discussions of nonverbal communication strategies in BELF interaction).

Taken together, this literature suggests that what might appear, from a native-speaker-normed perspective, as linguistic 'simplification' is, in fact, a sophisticated and strategically deployed communicative competence: BELF negotiators prioritise functional clarity and relationship maintenance over idiomatic correctness, and they treat meaning as something to be jointly constructed rather than transmitted (Kankaanranta et al., 2015).

3.3 Power, Identity, and the Native-Speaker Question

Despite the theoretical de-nativisation of English proposed by ELF scholarship, empirical studies consistently find that native-speaker status continues to carry symbolic and, at times, material advantage in negotiation contexts. Kankaanranta and Louhiala-Salminen's survey research found that a substantial proportion of BELF users reported feeling disadvantaged relative to native speakers in meetings and negotiations, even while functioning competently in English for their day-to-day work; some respondents nonetheless described treating native speakers as informal models to emulate rather than resenting the asymmetry outright (see discussions in Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010).

This tension connects to a broader critique, developed within sociolinguistics, of 'native-speakerism' the ideological privileging of native-speaker norms and native-speaking professionals in language teaching and international business alike (Jenkins, 2015). Ehrenreich's (2010) study of a German multinational corporation illustrated how, in practice, corporate language policies mandating 'English' as the official working language often left considerable interpretive latitude to employees, who developed localised, hybrid forms of BELF that diverged from Standard English while remaining fully functional for business purposes. Such findings complicate any straightforward claim that ELF is a linguistically 'neutral' or power-free medium: the choice of English itself, even when de-nativised in use, still advantages speakers with greater exposure to English-medium education, and trade negotiations conducted in English can subtly reproduce broader asymmetries between economically dominant and developing trading partners.

3.4 Digital Mediation and the Changing Negotiation Environment

A more recent development in the literature concerns the effect of digital communication technologies on ELF negotiation practice. E-mail, video conferencing, and instant messaging have become primary channels for pre-negotiation and follow-up exchanges, introducing new genre conventions such as the negotiated use of openings, closings, and politeness markers in written BELF correspondence that differ from those of face-to-face talk (Louhiala-Salminen et al., 2005). Research on BELF e-mail and virtual exchange has shown that written channels can both ease and complicate lingua franca negotiation: the absence of prosodic and nonverbal cues removes some accommodation resources available in spoken interaction, but the asynchronous nature of e-mail also affords negotiators more time to plan hedged, face-saving phrasing than real-time talk allows.

Pedagogical innovation has followed this shift: virtual-exchange projects have been used to give business students structured practice in BELF negotiation pragmatics, simulating cross-border deal-making between geographically dispersed classrooms. The growing use of machine translation and AI-assisted drafting tools in cross-border correspondence represents the newest frontier in this strand of research, raising open questions as yet only lightly addressed in the peer-reviewed literature about how such tools reshape accommodation strategies, and whether they narrow or widen existing native-speaker advantages in trade negotiation.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This article adopts a narrative literature review methodology, appropriate for synthesising a conceptually heterogeneous body of research spanning applied linguistics, pragmatics, and international business communication (Nickerson, 2005; Louhiala-Salminen & Kankaanranta, 2011 provide comparable precedent for this integrative approach). Sources were identified through the

core BELF and ELF literature associated with the Aston/Jyväskylä/Vienna research traditions, cross-referenced with studies indexed in Scopus-listed outlets such as *English for Specific Purposes*, the *Journal of Business Communication*, *Ibérica*, and *Journal of Pragmatics*. Studies were included if they addressed spoken or written business communication in English among speakers of different first languages, with particular weight given to studies explicitly treating negotiation, meetings, or deal-related correspondence as the object of analysis. The review is thematic rather than systematic: given the conceptual aim of the article tracing the development of a theoretical paradigm and synthesising its findings for a negotiation-specific readership thematic organisation around recurring constructs (accommodation, power, genre, technology) was judged more useful than a PRISMA-style systematic protocol, which is better suited to intervention or effect-size questions than to a conceptually oriented synthesis of this kind.

Readers intending to submit an empirical extension of this review are encouraged to pair the conceptual synthesis offered here with primary data collection for example, discourse-analytic transcription of authentic negotiation talk, corpus-based analysis of trade correspondence, or interview-based studies of negotiators' own accounts of their BELF strategies since the present article is explicitly conceptual/review in nature and does not report new empirical data.

V. DISCUSSION: SYNTHESIS AND IMPLICATIONS

Three cross-cutting observations emerge from this review. First, communicative success in ELF trade negotiation is overwhelmingly reported as a function of pragmatic and relational competence rather than grammatical proficiency. Across genre studies, accommodation research, and BELF-competence models alike, the recurring finding is that skilled negotiators treat English as a flexible, jointly managed resource, deploying hedging, repair, and comprehension-checking strategically to keep the negotiation moving forward (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; Pitzl, 2005). This has direct implications for negotiation training: programmes premised on native-speaker-accuracy targets may be less useful to practitioners than training that builds explicit awareness of accommodation strategies, active listening, and cooperative repair.

Second, the literature's own findings complicate the notion of English as a fully neutral lingua franca in trade contexts. Persistent reports of native-speaker advantage, whether real or perceived, indicate that language policy in multinational firms cannot treat 'English-medium' negotiation as automatically a level playing field; firms and trainers alike may need to actively counteract native-speakerist assumptions, for instance by normalising BELF forms in internal style guides or negotiation protocols rather than holding all correspondence to native-variety standards (Ehrenreich, 2010; Jenkins, 2015).

Third, the shift of negotiation activity into digital and increasingly AI-mediated channels is under-theorised relative to its practical importance. Much of the empirical BELF literature predates the widespread use of real-time machine translation, AI drafting assistance, and video-conferencing as default negotiation infrastructure. Given how central accommodation and repair strategies are to successful ELF negotiation, research is needed on how these strategies transfer or fail to transfer into technology-mediated environments, and on whether AI tools flatten or reinforce existing asymmetries between native and non-native English users in trade talks.

VI. PRACTICAL AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

For negotiation practitioners, the review suggests that investment in explicit accommodation skills comprehension-checking, strategic hedging, and collaborative repair is likely to yield more negotiation value than pursuit of native-like fluency alone. For corporate language policy, the findings support moving away from monolithic 'English-only' or native-variety mandates toward policies that explicitly recognise and legitimise functional BELF forms. For English for Specific Business Purposes (ESBP) curricula, the review reinforces long-standing calls to shift pedagogical emphasis from correctness-based instruction toward genre-aware, strategy-based training that simulates authentic cross-border negotiation scenarios, ideally incorporating the intercultural and relational dimensions of BELF competence identified by Kankaanranta and Planken (2010) alongside the linguistic ones.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This review has three notable limitations. It is conceptual rather than systematic, and therefore does not quantify effect sizes or provide a fully exhaustive inventory of the BELF literature. It draws predominantly on research from European and, to a lesser extent, East Asian business contexts, reflecting the geographic concentration of existing BELF scholarship; trade negotiation practice in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East

remains comparatively under-represented in the literature reviewed here and merits dedicated empirical attention. Finally, as noted above, the accelerating role of AI-mediated translation and drafting tools in real-world negotiation is only beginning to be studied, and future research combining discourse analysis with technology-in-use methodologies would substantially extend this review's conclusions.

VIII. CONCLUSION

English functions in international trade negotiation not as a fixed, native-owned code but as a jointly constructed, pragmatically rich lingua franca whose effectiveness rests on cooperation, accommodation, and shared business knowledge among its users. The BELF research tradition reviewed here demonstrates that successful negotiators treat linguistic imperfection as normal and manageable, prioritising intelligibility and relationship-building over grammatical correctness. At the same time, persistent native-speaker advantage and the rapid rise of AI-mediated communication indicate that the study of ELF in trade negotiation remains an open and evolving field, with significant scope for further empirical, cross-regional, and technology-focused research.

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Husband (*lǎogōng*) Beyond Marriage: The Generalization of a Kinship Address Term on *Weibo*

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Abstract— *The generalization of kinship terms is a highly active linguistic phenomenon in modern Chinese. However, existing studies have largely focused on consanguineal kinship terms, leaving the generalization of marital kinship terms under-examined. Taking the kinship term lǎogōng ("husband") as a case study, this paper draws on 507 Weibo posts collected from January to July 2025 and employs qualitative content analysis to investigate its referents, pragmatic functions, and underlying motivations. The findings show that: (1) lǎogōng has been highly generalized on Weibo, with generalized uses accounting for 73.96% of the data and referring to male idols, female idols, virtual characters, and fellow netizens; (2) the generalized use of lǎogōng serves three main pragmatic functions, including constructing intimacy, conveying positive evaluation, and mitigating face-threatening acts; (3) the generalization is driven not merely by intra-linguistic mechanisms but also by users' emotional needs and communicative strategies, and is continually shaped by platform affordances. This study fills a gap in online address term research concerning marital kinship terms, reveals how address term evolution in the new media era is increasingly embedded in the affective and attention economies of platform society, and offers implications for regulating online language use and community governance.*

Keywords— ***Kinship Term, Generalization, Address Term***

I. INTRODUCTION

Address terms are linguistic forms employed to attract an interlocutor's attention or to designate that person in interaction (Braun, 1988). Among these, kinship terms of address were originally used to refer to family members related by blood or marriage. In actual communication, however, their scope of use frequently extends beyond the kinship domain and becomes generalized to non-kin addressees, as when a waitress addresses a customer as *jie* ("older sister") or when internet users address one another as *xiaojiejie* ("little sister"). Such non-kin use of kinship terms has become an increasingly common phenomenon in contemporary Chinese.

Scholarly attention to the generalized use of kinship terms has a long history. A review of the relevant literature shows that many studies have focused on the semantic evolution of kinship terms and its motivating factors (Chen & Ren, 2020; Huang & Zhou, 2017; Mansor *et al*., 2018; Wang & Gao, 2022), while others have examined the functions that generalized kinship terms perform in different communicative contexts (Ren & Chen, 2019; Shahid *et al*., 2025). With the development of the internet, generalized kinship terms in online communication have also entered the research agenda. However, existing studies are scattered across settings such as e-commerce livestreaming and *WeChat*, and the few *Weibo*-based studies available have focused primarily on self-referential uses (Ren & Yao, 2025); systematic investigation of other-referring generalized uses remains insufficient. More importantly, existing studies of online communication have concentrated largely on consanguineal kinship terms such as "aunt" (Ren & Yao, 2025) and "son" (Yang &

Chen, 2023), paying inadequate attention to marital kinship terms such as "husband."

Against this background, the present study takes the Chinese kinship term *lǎogōng* ("husband"; *hereafter referred to simply as lǎogōng*) as a case in point and investigates the generalization of address terms on the basis of *Weibo* data. The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature on kinship terms of address. Section 3 presents the methodology, including the research questions, data collection, and analytical procedures. Section 4 reports the findings, analyzing the referents and communicative functions of the generalized use of *lǎogōng*. Section 5 discusses the factors shaping the use of *lǎogōng*, and Section 6 concludes the paper.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 The generalized use of kinship terms

The generalized use of kinship terms refers to the extension of address terms originally used for specific kin relations to interlocutors with whom no actual kinship relation exists (Alenizi, 2019). Existing research has examined this phenomenon from semantic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic perspectives, focusing respectively on the semantic changes involved in kinship-term generalization, its sociocultural conditions, and its functions in situated communication.

From a semantic perspective, studies have been concerned primarily with the semantic changes that kinship terms undergo in generalized use and with the mechanisms driving such change. Wu (1990) investigated the semantic features and linguistic manifestations of kinship terms in generalized use. Taking *jie* ("older sister") as an example, Wang and Gao (2022) argue that its generalization involves processes such as pragmatic inference and the conventionalization of inferred meaning. Research of this kind reveals how kinship terms break free from their original kinship constraints and acquire, in new contexts of use, meanings that differ from their traditional ones.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, researchers have explored the social-structural and cultural factors that condition the generalized use of kinship terms. Some studies link the phenomenon to changes in social structure. Huang and Zhou (2017), for example, argue that the shift of Chinese kinship terms toward occupational address terms reflects a re-evaluation of occupational status in the course of social transformation. Other studies attend to the sociocultural values embodied in kinship-term generalization. Chen and Ren (2020) note that generalized kinship terms in academic settings embody China's family-centered sociocultural values; similarly, Mansor *et al.* (2018) point out that the prevalence of non-kin uses in Malay is closely related to its collectivist cultural background. Together, these studies demonstrate that the generalization of kinship terms is not an isolated linguistic phenomenon but is shaped by particular social structures and cultural ideologies.

From a pragmatic perspective, research has focused mainly on the functions that kinship terms serve in concrete communicative situations (Hentschel, 2012; Ren & Chen, 2019; Shahid *et al*., 2025). Hentschel (2012), for instance, regards generalized kinship terms as an important means of achieving politeness. Shahid *et al*.(2025) find that in Pakistani English, kinship terms are frequently used between strangers and new acquaintances to establish immediate familiarity. Ren and Chen (2019) show that generalized kinship terms not only reduce interpersonal distance but also express respect among graduate students.

Overall, existing research has revealed the multifaceted nature of kinship-term generalization in terms of semantic change, sociocultural conditioning, and pragmatic function, thereby laying an important foundation for understanding this phenomenon.

2.2 The generalized use of kinship terms online

The development of the internet has created space for the flexible use of address terms. In recent years, researchers have begun to examine how kinship terms are used across different online platforms and online communities.

In ordinary online interaction, studies have focused primarily on the interpersonal functions of kinship terms. Yang and Wang (2022), for example, find that *baobao* ("baby") in e-commerce livestreaming helps create a sense of closeness and serves commercial goals in livestream sales. Yang and Chen (2023) point out that erzi ("son") in WeChat interaction can express intimacy while also serving a jocular function. Ren and Yao (2025) find that young women on *Weibo* construct virtual identities by referring to themselves as *lao ayi* ("old auntie"), alleviating age anxiety through self-deprecation. These studies indicate that kinship terms in online contexts are used not only to build or signal relationships but may also perform distinct pragmatic functions in particular interactions, and that their meanings must be understood in light of the actual contexts of use.

Online subcultures and fan communities constitute another important setting for the generalized use of kinship terms. In such contexts, kinship terms are used not only to express affection toward particular figures but may also contribute to the formation of community norms and the expression of group belonging. Tinaliga (2018) finds that oppa, a Korean term originally used to address an older

male relative, has become an important symbol in K-pop fan culture of emotional bonding between female fans and male idols. Li and Hiramoto's (2025) study of address terms in the Chinese pop music fandom examines the role of kinship terms such as *lǎogōng* and erzi in the construction of group belonging. These studies further demonstrate that the use of kinship terms in online communities is closely tied to particular cultural practices and patterns of group interaction.

2.3 Research gap

In sum, existing studies have examined the generalization of kinship terms from semantic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic perspectives, and have gradually extended their scope to online settings. This body of work provides valuable reference points for understanding the use of kinship terms among non-kin. Nevertheless, several gaps remain. On the one hand, prior research has focused largely on generalized kinship terms in offline communication; although studies of online settings have grown in recent years, they remain scattered across platforms such as e-commerce livestreaming and WeChat. With respect to *Weibo*—a platform that combines public discussion with fan interaction—existing research has concentrated mainly on self-referential uses (Ren & Yao, 2025), while systematic investigation of other-referring generalized uses is still lacking. On the other hand, studies of online communication have concentrated on consanguineal kinship terms such as *jiejie* ("older sister"), *erzi* ("son"), and oppa; although marital kinship terms have been mentioned in individual studies (Li & Hiramoto, 2025), systematic examination of the generalized use of this category remains absent. Accordingly, the present study takes the kinship term *lǎogōng* on *Weibo* as a case study and investigates its generalized use, with a view to addressing these gaps.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research questions

To address the gaps identified above, this study takes the Chinese address term *lǎogōng* ("husband") as a case study and investigates its generalized use in *Weibo* posts and the underlying motivations. Specifically, it answers the following three research questions:

(1) What are the referents of the address term *lǎogōng* in *Weibo* posts?

(2) What functions does the generalized use of *lǎogōng* perform in *Weibo* posts?

(3) Why do *Weibo* users generalize the use of *lǎogōng* to achieve these functions?

3.2 Data collection

The data for this study were collected from *Weibo*. The platform was selected for two reasons. First, as one of the most influential open social media platforms in China, *Weibo* allows posts to be publicly visible, which facilitates systematic data collection. Second, *Weibo* has 587 million monthly active users and a diverse user base (Gong, 2026), and can therefore offer a relatively representative picture of how address terms are actually used in online communication.

Using *lǎogōng* as the search keyword, we searched the *Weibo* platform for posts from January to July 2025, restricting the search to original posts and collecting the first 30 pages of search results each month under the platform's default ranking. This yielded roughly 100-200 posts per month. To ensure the validity of the collected data, we further excluded the following types: (1) reposts; (2) posts containing only links or images with no substantive textual content; (3) commercial content posted by marketing accounts or suspected of being mass-posted by bots; and (4) posts for which contextual information was so limited that the use of *lǎogōng* could not be determined. After this screening, a final corpus of 507 valid posts was obtained.

Although all data were drawn from a public platform, this study adheres to established ethical guidelines for internet research (franzke *et al*., 2020). During data processing and writing, all information that could identify users—including usernames, profile pictures, and exact posting times—was removed or anonymized, and @-handles in quoted examples were masked. We are aware that verbatim quotations from public posts may be traceable to their original sources via search engines. However, because the linguistic phenomenon under investigation resides in the precise wording of the posts, paraphrasing would compromise the authenticity of the data. We therefore retain verbatim quotations only where analytically necessary, on the grounds that the posts constitute publicly accessible, non-sensitive fan discourse, that the quoted users are not identifiable by name, and that the research poses minimal risk of harm to the original posters. When quoting the data, we retained only the textual content relevant to the research questions and applied the necessary technical processing to expressions involving personal information, so as to avoid any potential impact on the original users.

3.3 Data analysis

The study adopts qualitative content analysis, addressing the three research questions one by one. For Research Question 1, the researchers analyzed the textual content of each *Weibo* post. In the great majority of cases, the

referent of *lǎogōng* can be readily determined from the post text, accompanying images, hashtags, and @-mentioned accounts. For example, if a post is accompanied by a picture of a public figure together with relevant hashtags, the referent of the term can be identified. Where the available textual and contextual information was still insufficient to determine the specific referent of *lǎogōng*, the researchers drew inferences from the user's complete timeline, consecutive preceding and following posts, and comment interactions.

Upon completing this first step, we proceeded to address Research Question 2 by analyzing the same set of posts and comments, while also taking into account users' interactive feedback on certain high-engagement posts. Specifically, whenever a generalized use of *lǎogōng* was identified, we analyzed the communicative function of the address term and the user's communicative intention. Where the textual context was ambiguous and the function difficult to determine, we focused on commenters' interpretations, likes, and replies in order to confirm the communicative purpose the user sought to achieve through *lǎogōng*.

Research Question 3 is addressed in the Discussion section.

IV. FINDINGS

4.1 Referents of the generalized address term *lǎogōng*

Through coding and analysis, five categories of referents of *lǎogōng* were identified: real-life spouses, virtual characters, male idols, female idols, and *Weibo* netizens. Their distribution is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Referents of lǎogōng

Referent	Frequency	Percentage
Real-life spouse	132	26.04%
Virtual character	9	1.78%
Male idol	301	59.37%
Female idol	28	5.52%
Weibo netizens	37	7.30%
Total	**507**	**100%**

When *lǎogōng* is used to refer to the user's real-life spouse, it constitutes the literal (non-generalized) use of the term. Of the 507 posts collected, 132 involve this literal use. Example 1 is a typical case.

(1) 这会肚子饿的咕咕叫，想吃烧烤[团子][关东煮]把洗完澡已经躺在床上准备睡瞌瞌的老公薅起来去门口给我买买买[购物袋] 爱妻者风声水起～我老公以后肯定越过越好 发财暴富升职加薪[钱][庆祝]

"My stomach is growling with hunger right now and I'm craving barbecue [dango][oden], so I dragged my husband—who had already showered and was lying in bed ready to sleep—out of bed to go to the entrance and buy buy buy for me [shopping bags]. Fortune favors loving husbands~ My husband is bound to do better and better: get rich, get promoted, get a raise [money][party popper]"



In Example 1, the blogger shares an everyday episode in which she rouses her husband—who had showered and was ready for bed—to go out and buy her barbecue. The remark attached to the chat-record screenshot she posted, labeled *xiansheng* ("Mr") confirms that *lǎogōng* here is used in its literal sense.

Beyond the literal use, the study finds that in the 507 posts, *lǎogōng* appears more often in generalized uses, totaling 375 instances (73.96% of the corpus). These are discussed in turn below with reference to the data.

Among all generalized uses, the most frequent is the use of *lǎogōng* to refer to male idols, totaling 301 instances, as in Example 2:

(2) #我的超话卡册##龚俊苏暮雨#gj#龚俊 暗河传# 见过横店深夜三点的月和清早五点的雨，雨哥在我们心中已是如此亲切又梦幻的存在。老公五个月拍摄辛苦啦！期待与龚俊苏暮雨@龚俊 Simon 在优酷电视剧《暗河传》中早日相见！

#MySuperTopicCardAlbum##GongJunSuMuyu#gj#GongJun TheDarkRiver# Having seen the moon over Hengdian at three in the morning and the rain at five in the morning, Brother Yu has become such an intimate and dreamlike presence in our hearts. Husband, thank you for your hard work over the five months of filming! Looking forward to meeting Gong Jun's Su Muyu @GongJunSimon soon in the Youku drama The Dark River!

Example 2 is taken from a fan's *Weibo* post; the user uses multiple Super Topic hashtags (e.g., #MySuperTopicCardAlbum#, #GongJunSuMuyu#, #GongJun TheDarkRiver#). Such hashtags both tag the content of the post, making it searchable for other fans, and boost the trending momentum of the topic; they constitute a typical discursive practice through which fans

participate in chart-ranking campaigns (Zhang & Negus, 2020). The user addresses the actor Gong Jun as *lǎogōng*, an emotionally projective form of expression internal to the fan community: *lǎogōng* here does not point to a real marital relationship but conveys the user's solicitude, appreciation, and affection for the actor's five months of hard filming.

In addition to male idols, *lǎogōng* is also used to refer to female idols, totaling 28 instances (5.52%), as in Example 3:

(3) #迪丽热巴摄影尹超#老公我要被帅晕了

#DilrabaPhotographedByYinChao# Husband, I'm about to faint from your handsomeness



In Example 3, the name of the referent does not appear in the text itself, but the accompanying photo and hashtags make it clear that the person addressed as *lǎogōng* is the actress Dilraba. Dilraba's dashing styling in the photo gives rise to the user's exclamation of being "about to faint from her handsomeness." This use of *lǎogōng* for a female celebrity is consistent with previous findings (Miao, 2025).

In recent years, with the development of otome games, some users have also used *lǎogōng* to refer to virtual characters from games, totaling 9 instances (1.78%), as in Example 4:

(4) [爱慕]#秦彻# [爱慕]#秦彻 0715 一周年快乐# 快啦快啦到七月啦马上就可以见到老公咯

[adore]#QinChe#[adore]#HappyFirstAnniversaryQinChe0715# Almost there, almost there, July is coming—I'll get to see my husband soon



Example 4 comes from the Super Topic community of a character in a Chinese otome game, and the user is a player of the game. As the accompanying image shows, an anniversary card for the game character Qin Che was scheduled for release in July. The user here addresses Qin Che as *lǎogōng* to express her anticipation of the character's anniversary event. This type of use extends *lǎogōng* further to virtual characters, illustrating how generalized use extends from real persons to targets of parasocial relations.

In addition, 37 instances (7.30%) use *lǎogōng* to refer to fellow *Weibo* netizens. This use occurs mostly in interactive *Weibo* scenarios, where users address non-spouse netizens as *lǎogōng* while performing speech acts such as requesting, thanking, and apologizing (see Examples 5–7). Of these 37 instances, 21 use the plural form *lǎogōng*-men to address groups of netizens, while the remaining 16 target specific users through the @-mention function; verification shows that all 16 mentioned users were women. This is consistent with the previous observation that *lǎogōng* can serve as an intimate, jocular form of address among women (Miao, 2025).

In Example 5, the user thanks another user who gifted her a Weibo membership decoration, saying *xiexie lǎogōng* ("thank you, husband") followed by a jocular request. *lǎogōng* here does not express a real marital relationship but creates an intimate conversational atmosphere online, serving as a familiarity-based politeness strategy (Hentschel, 2012).

(5) @*** 谢谢老公，其实你可以送我 iphone16promax ，我不介意的

@*** Thank you, husband—actually you could have sent me an iPhone 16 Pro Max, I wouldn't have minded

In Example 6, the user publishes a post soliciting opinions, using the plural form *lǎogōng*-men to address netizens in the Super Topic. The use of the plural marker -men creates a kind of group intimacy (Cook, 2020) that helps elicit more positive community feedback.

(6) 老公们能否帮我抉择一下我想做 p3 那样的镜子用哪张图

Husbands, could you help me decide which picture to use—I want to make a mirror like the one in p3

In Example 7, the user apologizes for being unable to maintain continuous interaction, likewise addressing netizens as *lǎogōng-men*. The address term mitigates the awkwardness of the apology and maintains interpersonal relations within the online community (Taylor, 2016).

(7) 老公们今晚休息一天先不续火了明天继续

Husbands, taking a day off tonight—won't keep the streak going today, will continue tomorrow

4.2 Pragmatic functions of the generalized address term *lǎogōng*

The analysis shows that the generalized use of *lǎogōng* on *Weibo* performs three main pragmatic functions: creating intimacy, positive evaluation, and mitigating face threats.

The prototypical function of the generalized address term *lǎogōng* in *Weibo* discourse is the creation of intimacy. This conclusion is consistent with previous findings on the generalization of kinship terms (Wang *et al*., 2025; Yang & Chen, 2023). However, whereas existing research has mostly emphasized that generalized kinship terms shorten the psychological distance between interactants, the use of *lǎogōng* in the present data creates an imagined intimacy. In Examples 2 and 4 above, for instance, the users address a male idol and a virtual character, both media personae, as *lǎogōng* to express their emotions. Such one-directional emotional bonding can be regarded as a manifestation of what Horton and Wohl (1956) termed the parasocial relationship.

Second, the generalized *lǎogōng* on *Weibo* performs a positive-evaluation function. In Example 3, the user, a fan of the actress Dilraba, posts "*lǎogōng*, I'm about to faint from your handsomeness," in which the use of *lǎogōng* does not necessarily express genuine romantic attraction (Li & Hiramoto, 2025) but rather appropriates the address term to convey admiration for the actress. This finding echoes the study by He (2016) on the use of *ye* ("grandpa") and *ge* ("older brother") for outstanding women in various professions; the present study further demonstrates that *lǎogōng* likewise serves this commendatory function.

In addition, *lǎogōng* can be used to mitigate face threats. Previous research has noted that the use of kinship terms can soften tone and reduce confrontational force in particular contexts (Garlepow, 2026). Unlike Garlepow (2026), who examines English address terms, the present study shows that the generalized use of the Chinese kinship term *lǎogōng* on *Weibo* likewise performs this mitigating function. Take Example 6, "lǎogōng-men, could you help me decide which picture to use—I want to make a mirror like the one in p3." Requests are face-threatening acts (Brown & Levinson, 1987); the use of the address term *lǎogōng* here functions as a downtoner (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p. 23), weakening the illocutionary force of the request and reducing its negative interpersonal effects. The comments on this post provide corroborating evidence: the post received nine substantive replies, all of which were positive responses to the request, with no questioning of or objection to the *lǎogōng-men* address itself. This suggests, to a certain extent, that the address term *lǎogōng* likewise helps to create an informal, friendly interactional atmosphere and softens the speech act.

V. DISCUSSION

The above analysis shows that on *Weibo* the kinship term *lǎogōng* has become highly generalized: it can be used to refer to male idols, female idols, virtual characters, and fellow netizens, and its generalized use performs a range of functions in different communicative situations, including creating intimacy, positive evaluation, and mitigating face threats.

A comprehensive examination of the corpus reveals that the generalized use of *lǎogōng* on *Weibo* is not merely a matter of individual choice on the part of *Weibo* users; it is a choice driven by emotional and communicative needs, and one that is simultaneously shaped by platform affordances.

The first factor is emotional needs. Existing research indicates that addressing idols as *lǎogōng* occurs mainly among young female fans (Li & Hiramoto, 2025), and the observations from our corpus are consistent with this. As contemporary young women face the structural predicament of the disciplinary regime of marriage and romance, coupled with the scarcity of ideal intimate relationships (Wang, 2026), the symbolic performance of intimacy afforded by the use of *lǎogōng* constitutes a low-cost, compensatory emotional outlet. Unlike platforms such as *WeChat* Moments, which are characterized by strong-tie acquaintance networking and highly embedded real-life identities, *Weibo*'s weak ties and semi-public nature constitute a "third place" (Oldenburg, 1989), in which female users can project private emotional fantasies and temporarily suspend the social discipline imposed on women's expression of desire (Zarafonetis, 2017).

The second factor is communicative needs. The generalization of address terms has a distinctly pragmatic character: in different communicative situations, communicators select particular address terms to meet specific communicative needs (Ren, 2019). The netizen-directed uses of *lǎogōng* in this study are precisely motivated by this need. On the one hand, the term conveys closeness and solidarity between the parties (Hampel, 2015), conforming to the operating logic of the "solidarity politeness system" (Scollon & Scollon, 2001), that is, establishing temporary quasi-intimate relationships at relatively low linguistic cost. On the other hand, it constitutes a positive politeness strategy (Brown & Levinson, 1987): by signaling goodwill through an intimate form of address, it reduces interactional friction among strangers and manages "relational face" (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), thereby satisfying communicative needs (Examples 5-7).

The third factor is the shaping role of platform affordances. Existing research shows that social media

recommendation algorithms tend to allocate exposure on the basis of engagement metrics, and that content of higher emotional intensity typically gains greater visibility (Zafar *et al.,* 2026). *Lǎogōng*, used with high frequency within fan circles, is repeatedly exposed and replicated under the acceleration of the platform's algorithmic recommendation logic, gradually transforming into a reusable emotional resource and a circulating code of the fandom (Ahmed, 2004; Papacharissi, 2015). In other words, platforms are not neutral sites of language use (boyd, 2010; Van Dijck, 2013;). Algorithms amplify emotion, and emotion feeds traffic in return. The generalization of the address term *lǎogōng* in the new media environment is thus an almost inevitable trend that increasingly permeates everyday interpersonal interaction (Li & Lai, 2025).

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper analyzes the generalized use of the kinship term *lǎogōng* on *Weibo*. The study finds that the term has become markedly generalized on the platform: in the corpus collected, only 26.04% of instances are literal uses, while generalized uses account for 73.96%, designating male idols, female idols, virtual characters, and even strangers online. In the *Weibo* context, the generalized use performs such pragmatic functions as creating intimacy, conveying positive evaluation, and mitigating face threats. The study further argues that the generalization of *lǎogōng* on *Weibo* does not simply follow language-internal regularities; rather, the observed patterns are consistent with an account in which individual emotional appeals, communicative strategies, and platform affordances jointly drive the process, although the relative weight of each motivational factor remains to be established through interviews or surveys.

The study has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, it addresses the tendency in existing research on online address terms to focus on consanguineal kinship terms, thereby enriching research on generalized kinship terms online; at the same time, it reveals how the evolution of address terms in the new media era is increasingly embedded in the affective and attention economies of platform society. Practically, the study deepens understanding of address-term generalization in social media environments and may inform work on online language use, platform communicative norms, and community governance.

The study also has certain limitations. First, data collection was restricted to the period from January to July 2025, so the data did not allow tracking of the diachronic development of *lǎogōng*. Second, the study mainly focuses on *Weibo*; future research could compare other social platforms such as *WeChat*, *Douyin*, and *Xiaohongshu* to further reveal how platform-specific features shape the generalization of address terms. In addition, subsequent studies could incorporate interviews or questionnaires to probe the underlying motivations for users' generalized use of *lǎogōng.*

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Nature's Retribution: An Ecocritical Perspective on Human-Environment Conflict in *The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract— *In the field of contemporary Indian English fiction, Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide (2004) is one of the richest and most sensuous literary depictions of the complex ecology between nature and humanity. The novel is set in the ecologically fragile Sundarbans, where nature is not only a scenic backdrop but an active entity that contributes ceaselessly towards the shaping of human communities, their lives, their identities, and destinies. Ghosh focuses on the conflict here between the conservation of the environment, the efforts to make a living, state policies and indigenous inscribed knowledge through the overlapping experiences of Piya Roy, Kanai Dutt, Fokir and Nirmal. This paper aims to apply ecocritical approaches to The Hungry Tide to reinterpret the novel in the context of a more ethical and sustainable view of human existence in nature, which will doubtless involve a contestation of anthropocentrism. It adopts an ecocritical approach to support its interpretation that Ghosh depicts ecology as an interactive gathering in which the very survival of the human species is contingent upon coexistence with others, and not domination. Moreover, "The Tides of Numenera" sheds light on the environmental injustices faced by the residents of the Sundarbans, and it also poses challenging questions about the conservation policies that ignore human suffering for the sake of preserving biodiversity. Finally, The Hungry Tide argues that ecological sustainability and human survival are not separate, making the question of environmental ethics a major issue in the social and political debate of today.*

Keywords— ***Ecology, Human Survival, Sundarbans, Environmental Justice, Amitav Ghosh and Ecocriticism***

I. INTRODUCTION

Now more than ever, the twenty-first century has put us in full awareness of environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, rising sea levels and the like displacement caused by climate change. The profound and confounding ecological crises have become some of the most significant issues negotiated, challenged, and re-imagined in literature. Ecocriticism, an environmental literature criticism, suggests that the relationship of man and nature is jointly moulded by the literary work and the nature of that world and that ecological crises are also social, political and moral crises. Ecocritical studies do not only treat nature as an inert element to be manipulated by humans but are thought to be the ones which explore the agency of nature in its relationship with human beings that are revealed in literary texts. Cheryll Glotfelty comments that "Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment." (Glotfelty p.18) Amitav Ghosh may hold a unique position among novelists of the contemporary era in India due to his consistent participation in the themes of environment history, climate change, migration and ecological justice. *The Hungry Tide* places these issues against the backdrop of the peculiar Sundarbans environment—home to one of the biggest mangrove forests and a place of mud-brick islands and tide-fed rivers, cyclones and endangered animals, and human settlements that are also at risk. Through Ghosh's depiction, the Sundarbans are alive; their rhythms continuously change the map of geography on the surface

of the earth and the lives of people. The instability, firstly, of the landscape is highlighted during the very start of the novel with Nilima noticing that even the river has shifted. "Because of the river… It's changed" (Ghosh 79), she explains to Kanai. There's nothing very complicated about this obvious statement, which starts to pose one of the novel's main issues: Ecology changes forever, and human beings have to keep up when they are not in a position of control. The Sundarbans are not giving up on the transitory nature. Changing river courses, submerging islands, shifting forests and always vulnerable human settlements. Through Kanai's shock and awe at the dwindled Matla River, Ghosh illustrates the shifting terrain. The once mighty river is now "no wider than a narrow ditch" (Ghosh 83). proof that the environment is not stagnant. These kinds of descriptions obscure the fact that nature is not solid and is not a resource to be consumed by man. Throughout the book, the reader is constantly reminded that in the tidal country one must be humble to all the ways of nature. In the vast lands of the Sundarbans, human intelligence, technological progress and political power are very limited. In its geographical location, it shows that nature has a power of its own to alter human history just as the environment changes irrespective of any political borders and economic aspirations. The Hungry Tide – ecocritically read as a book – has an explicit antipathy towards anthropocentrism – the concept of the centrality of the human in creation. Rather, it is a narrative about humans as just a part of a bigger ecosystem that includes rivers, tides, forests, animals, the weather, and all of the species that interact. Therefore, there is no problem in conquest of nature but only in comprehending its modes. The book is a critique of dominant development theories based on the material progress at the expense of nature. Environmental concerns are affected by industrial development, conservation policies, and the location of, and governmental interventions for, refugees. Without any doubt, human survival goes hand in hand with ecological sustainability, Ghosh notes, because when ecological degradation happens, it will surely pose threats to human communities. Greg Garrard observes that "Environmental problems are fundamentally cultural problems because we act according to the stories, we tell ourselves." (Garrard p.8)

In many novels, a landscape serves as a mere backdrop to human conflict; in *The Hungry Tide,* the Sundarbans are an active character. The mangrove forests, tidal rivers, estuaries, mudflats and wildlife constantly shape every character's action, emotions, and destiny. Be aware, nature is not passive; it acts. This is the angle in which Nirmal's reflections introduce themselves from the get-go. According to him, "On the banks of every great river you'll find a monument to excess" (Ghosh 82). The former 'observation' connects human endeavour and ecosystem fragility. Rivers have been conquered by civilisations many times, but people always end up realising how weak they are. Throughout this journey through Canning, Kanai is so him to reinforce this. He recalls the Matla River as a grand body of water, and finds the changed ecology astounding. The narrator depicts the river as down, "its vast bed exposed beneath layers of fresh silt "(Ghosh 83–84). This is not a geographical description, but Ghosh uses the changed river as a symbolic representation on instability which permeates ecology and human existence. Use of sensory language to depict the natural world. The rain-freshly deposited silt, to quote Ghosh, "glistened in the sun like dunes of melted chocolate" (Ghosh 84), and the bubbles which bubble through the mud seemed to be on the verge of speech. These pictures give personality to the landscape, as though there were means of communication that nature could have beyond human language. The tidal world also teaches the close connection between ecological processes and daily living. "Nilima discusses the real-life implications of environmental change: "There isn't as much water in the river nowadays, and at low tide it gets very shallow" (Ghosh 86). The fact that she observes it here shows the connection between ecological change and aspects of everyday life for local people, including transportation, trade, health care and communication. Climate and geography become material conditions that affect all of the aspects of human life. So much in this novel is good because it conveys the uncertainty of ecology as a normal way of being, not an extraordinary catastrophe. The people of these Sundarbans live in a life adapted to tides, cyclones, monsoons, animals and seasons. Their knowledge is based not on scientific abstraction, but on their lived ecological experience. An intimacy with nature emerges particularly in the figure of Fokir. Despite never going to school, he has an amazing knowledge of river, dolphin, tides and sea navigation. He does not have to learn through an institution, but rather through generations of interaction with the environment. Piya, on the other hand, starts in the Sundarbans with a scientific methodology using maps, equipment and doing biological research. As their relationship unfolds, Ghosh shows how the scientific and indigenous understanding of the ecology need not be mutually exclusive. Rather, both are complementary approaches to knowledge of nature. The Sundarbans also defy the boundaries between the civilised and the wild. Forests are home to tigers, crocodiles, snakes, dolphins and a myriad other species, and in fact human settlements are inextricably linked to it. Lawrence Buell criticises the attitude of humans; he says, "Nature writing and environmental literature challenge the assumption that

nature exists merely for human use." (Buell p.7) The wildlife is not romanticised or demonised, but rather seen as another species, a legitimate part of the ecological community in which man is an inhabitant as well. Aung San Suu Kyi refers to the beliefs about Bon Bibi that exist in the area in which the author grew up: "people believe she rules over all the animals of the jungle" "(Ghosh 95). It is a belief system that offers an alternative vision of an environmental ethics of coexistence to one of domination. Bon Bibi serves as a cultural reminder that forests are not solely humans' territory; they also belong to other forms of life. Thus, it is important to acknowledge limits in order to achieve ecological balance. There are many species of animals that can be found in these landscapes, each of which has equal value and importance for the environment, and for which human beings have no absolute right of ownership. This is a different knowledge from the existing economic models of development which treat forests as an instrument of production. The ecological imagination then calls upon a reader to have a different thought about nature in which he or she dwells in *The Hungry Tide*. Ghosh's idea of humanity is not separate from nature but just one that is in need of recognition as a prerequisite for survival. Such forests living inside other forests are an illustration of the fact that it is the nature that always transforms human life, and to adapt, to be humble, to live in harmony with nature is better than to conquer and occupy. *The Hungry Tide* confronts squarely the dilemma between the uncertainty of the environment and the survival of humans. Even today, activities in the Sundarban forests are affected by forces beyond man's control, such as the changing direction of the river, the Cyclone, tidal floods, tiger attacks, crocodile attack, erosion etc. all pose a threat to the life and livelihood of the people. Ghosh is no idealiser of Nature, of rural life. Instead, he paints a picture of survival being a precarious dance of human strength and nature's unpredictability. Overall, the Sundarbans seem to be a landscape where living in harmony is not merely a survival skill, but a way of living with nature's changing patterns. As the climate suggests, economic fragility soon follows when the ecology is fragile, the book reveals. The majority of residents who live in the tide country are engaged in fishing, crab catching, honey harvesting and wood collection – all jobs that help them to be directly in contact with hazardous environments. Everybody that ventures into the woods has a chance at survival, as well as a confrontation with death. Nature then is a great giver and taker. This duality is what makes the "wilderness" discussion that sticks to the ecologic side, and views wilderness as "good" and "bad", incorrect. This ecological instability is represented by the changing Matla River. Nilima explains to Kanai about the state of the water in the river, which has gone down. This observation does not just refer to the surface geology. The effect on the lack of accessibility is manifested in its effects on the transportation system, delays in providing medical services, loss of economic transactions, and isolation of communities from essential services. Environmental transformation thus becomes a social and economic crisis, as well as simply a natural phenomenon. Sitting on the roadside, Kanai sees these effects and sees those passengers struggling to get through the exposed mudflats. Rob Nixon questions this state: "Environmental justice asks who bears the burden of environmental risk." (Nixon p.4) The narrator writes about how each of the travellers" sank slowly into the mud" before laboriously moving forward (Ghosh 85). The scene depicts environmental change placing a physical burden on ordinary citizens who are directly dependent on the environment. Unlike in cities where the protection of modern infrastructure shields people from ecological change, people in the Sundarbans feel it every day, in each of their bodies. But one thing which is highlighted by ecocriticism is that environmental degradation primarily has an impact on the marginalised communities, and Ghosh powerfully brings to light this reality. The tide nationals have no technological protection, nor political influence. But not only from natural hazards, but their vulnerability is also determined by the lack of access to economic and governmental resources. The science of human survival is at stake, which is the science of environmental justice. The novel's message in its quest is repeatedly casts doubts over the developmental models which are more interested in urban development and ignore ecological frontiers. Whereas some communities benefit from modernization, others living within fragile ecosystems are still failing to rise to the challenges of environmental risks which barely register with policymakers. Ghosh thus unveils a differential pattern of ecological insecurity among social classes. Rivers are even unpredictable, complicating the chances of human survival. In Nirmal's words: "On the banks of every great river you'll find a monument to excess" (Ghosh 82). It's an historical statement as well as an ecological one. Every time human beings try to control rivers, be it for engineering reasons, settlement or commercial activity, they ultimately have to face the might of nature. The rivers are forever changing the face of the earth, thereby reminding people of their own powerlessness in earthly processes. Ghosh's conception of survival is a communal one based on the Amalekite idea of cooperation. The Badabon Trust and other local groups, as well as fishing communities and even families, rely upon each other for mutual support against environmental challenges. Thus, ecological resilience is created in the community rather

than in isolation and a sense of self-sufficiency. Indigenous ecological knowledge and environmental ethics. One significant achievement of *The Hungry Tide* is to be the first to acknowledge indigenous ecological knowledge as a valid and complex approach to nature. Ursula K. Heise believes that "Ecological knowledge is always locally situated." (Heise p.33) Ghosh questions the notion of the supposed authoritative interpretations of environmental systems offered by scientific knowledge. Rather, he shows how embodied experiences of generations create understandings of the ecology that would not be encountered through formal institutions. Fokir and Piya Roy most represent this antithesis. Trained in Western scientific traditions, Piya is an accomplished marine biologist. She studies the Irrawaddy dolphins based on observation, data, complicated equipment and classification. By contrast, Fokir has no formal education and yet his knowledge of rivers, tides, currents, weather and animal behaviour always goes beyond the bounds of science. At first Piya sees the Sundarbans largely from the perspective of biological research. However, as the friendship between her and Fokir grows, she finds out that an intimate understanding of ecology cannot be limited to science. Fokir's mastery of dolphin movements, understanding of tides and waterways, and navigation of these intricate environments showcase how intelligent systems and processes live within the everyday. Ghosh therefore declines to prioritise the scientific knowledge over indigenous knowledge. The book proposes rather that it is the dialogue between different epistemologies that is required to produce real ecological knowledge. The two types of information, scientific research and traditional ecological knowledge, carry out empirical analysis and provide knowledge that results from longstanding interaction with specific environments, respectively. This ecological knowledge goes beyond mere survivalism and comes to cultural and spiritual practices. The story of Bon Bibi is a legend which represents an environmental ethics of co-existence, instead of domination. Kanai asks about Bon Bibi, and Nilima tells him, "The goddess of the forest… people believe she rules over all the animals of the jungle" (Ghosh 95). Bon Bibi represents an ethic of relations where woods are shared spaces and not to be understood as solely human property. The myth teaches restraint, respect and mutual responsibility on the part of man to non-human beings. In contrast to the current industrial paradigm, which sees nature mostly as a resource to be used, Bon Bibi's heritage is aware of ecological constraints and interdependence. From the ecocritical point of view, these cultural stories are, if you like, a set of environmental ethos embedded in the 'folklore'. They promote interactions between human communities and ecological systems that are compatible for their continued survival and their lack of encouragement of excessive use. Thus, by glyphing mythology as superstition, Ghosh considers it as an ecological philosophy that is other than the hegemonic one, and one which could be used for environmental balancing. In the novel, one figure – Fokir – represents this philosophy. The bond with rivers, dolphins, birds and forests is a bond of familiarity, not domination. He tries to learn to love nature, rather than make it love him. His knowledge is both hands-on and bona fide and celebrates nature. Over time, Piya realizes that in order to have a chance at successfully conserving the environment, these forms of local knowledge must be respected. The dynamic geography of the Sundarbans is such that their scientific knowledge is not enough. All indigenous ecological methods, evolved over generations, become essential to conservation and survival. Thus, Ghosh's actam is a defiant assertion of defiance against the colonial line of thought which equates education with institutional education. The novel assumes that ecological literacy is not solely formal, belonging to the realm of the school, and that rustic and marginal groups know a lot about the environment that is not part of the discourse of present-day science. Livelihood and ecological dilemma, Conservation versus Livelihood. One of the most complicated ecological issues touched upon in *The Hungry Tide* is the balance between the protection of wildlife and human lives. Ghosh isn't a man of simple sentiment, and considers conservation and livelihood to be equally powerful and sometimes conflicting ideals. The Sundarbans are known the world over because of their exceptional biodiversity, including the endangered Royal Bengal tiger and the Irrawaddy dolphin. The conservation policies involve limiting access of people to protected forests to conserve these species. But these forests are also vital livelihood of thousands of poor people. Issues of basic ethics emerge in the conflict. In the event of endangered species, should these species take precedence over impoverished human communities? Does there exist any form of support for the conservation of environment when the human species is endangered? Ghosh actually refrains from giving hard and fast answers. Through the Badabon Trust, Nilima strives to resolve these paradoxes in her work in humanitarian fields in a manner that enhances education, health and economic opportunities while supporting environmental conservation. Throughout her career, she has shown that ecological and social justice goals are not mutually exclusive. She (Kanai) highly admires her commitment because she had dedicated herself "for the betterment of the people who lived" in the tie country (Ghosh 72). Her efforts prove that protecting the environment should also involve attention to man's dignity.

Another episode in the Morichjhãpi furthers that debate. Refugees need land and find conservation of the protected forest areas hostile to their survival. Their displacement indicates the potential for, and the actual consequences of, social injustice having as its unintended effects conservation policies that fail to take into account human needs while considering ecological objectives. *The Hungry Tide* highlights the positive role that vulnerable populations of humans can play in environmental ethics from an ecocritical point of view. But there must be a balance between biodiversity and economic justice – both systems, human and ecological, are closely intertwined.

In addition to its analysis of ecological fragility, *The Hungry Tide* puts diplomatic environmental change on the front burner in relation to historical memory. Ghosh shows landscapes that carry histories that are erased from official archival representations. Rivers, forests, and islands carry human suffering, migration, displacement and resilience. Therefore, ecologies of the Sundarbans are not amenable to being comprehended without the political. Most notably, the novel's historical episode, the massacre of Morichjhãpi, is one that shows the interplay between environmental protection and violence of the state. Refugees who have found shelter on the island were forcibly evicted as part of a campaign to 'save' the reserve forest; this demonstrates that the ecomodernist concept could also be used for political exclusion. Nilima explains to Kanai that "Some refugees had occupied one of the islands in the forest. There was a confrontation with the authorities that resulted in a lot of violence" (Ghosh 89). This declaration reveals the sad irony in which the Partition and economic deprivation victims were conserved policies victims, as well. Observes by Nixon "The environmentalism of the poor is inseparable from struggles over survival." (Nixon p.17) Environmental justice has become an important aspect of ecocriticism because it demands an equally balanced consideration of the preservation of the environment as well as human rights. Ghosh showcases, through his work, that it is impossible for conservation to be ethically viable if it does not take in to account the marginalised people's survival. The episode Morichjhãpi thus challenges the traditional environmental discourse, revealing the close association of environmental protection with that of social justice. The ecology politics are further reinforced by the memory of the films of Nirmal. His feelings towards the refugees testaments to his belief in the moral dimension of the environment. The island is not an uninhabited paradise that awaits protection, but it is a land occupied by human desires, miseries, and collective memory. "Places are repositories of memory as well as ecological systems." (Heise p.56) The ecological space here in Nirmal's diary is transformed into a historical testimony by Ghosh. The book also predicts issues that are current today, such as climate change. *The Hungry Tide* is a novel that was written prior to climate change dominating literary conversations in the world, but it often addresses the issues of climate change, including rising waters, changing river channels, coastal erosion, and ecological instability. Nirmal's mournful shriek: "The Matla will rise! The Matla will rise!" "(Ghosh 91) . The river represents nature's power, something that is out of humanity's control. Rising sea levels are now jeopardising the existence of many of the Sundarbans islands, and Ghosh's ecological vision is all too prescient. His tale indicates that environmental crises are already a reality and are affecting exposed populations. Environmental justice also arises out of dis-ecological risk distribution. While the city dwellers are relatively protected from floods, cyclones, and wildlife attacks, the dwellers of tide country have to face all such challenges on a daily basis. In this way, Ghosh challenges social systems that allow for the social elite to profit from the ecological exploitation of the environment, while the poor suffer the effects.

The idea of water is the main theme in *The Hungry Tide*. Physical and philosophical aspects of the novel are constantly remoulded by rivers, tides, estuaries, rain, cyclones, and oceans. Whereas most literary symbolism suggests water as a sign of rebirth, purification, or new life, Ghosh's water can be a source of both life and death and is not so predictable. Hubert Zapf observes that "Literature functions as cultural ecology by preserving ecological knowledge." (Zapf p.3) The rising and falling of the tide represents the constant change in form. Islands are formed and lost; river banks are washed away; settlements move; humanity's insecurities disintegrate. In the Sundarbans, nothing is permanent as the geographical reality is being constantly reshaped by the movements of the tides. This instability reflects a questioning of anthropocentric perspectives in which the human is assumed to have a permanent dominion over nature. Water is a symbol of connectedness as well. All ecology of the Sundarbans mangrove forests, dolphins, crocodiles, birds, tigers and human communities are tide dependent. Thus, the life of Man is linked to marine life. The scientific research of Irrawaddy dolphins that Piya continues to conduct there adds to the above symbolism. As her research has a great deal to offer in terms of understanding the incredible diversity that can be maintained in an estuarine environment, as her growing appreciation for Fokir shows, there is more to this knowledge than merely science – there's emotion involved. Together, they sail across rivers, creating symbolic explorations of how people and nature can live together. The continuity of the dolphins is an ecology. Like human communities, their survival is

dependent and linked to healthy river systems, which are vital for transportation, fishing and agriculture. Ghosh therefore makes it a point that the environment is degraded, so not only individual species, but whole ecological networks are under threat. The novel's climax of the cyclone is the strongest manifestation of nature's action. Human technologies, knowledge, politics and economies all pale in comparison to the might of the storm. The Cyclone eradicates the concepts of civilisation and wilderness, revealing that men are not living above nature. Fokir's death from the cyclone is not just a personal tragedy. It represents the weakness of the people whose lives are most close to nature. But at the same time his death reinforces the global ecological wisdom he gave in the novel. Fokir does imply that the real environmental ethics comes from coexistence, humility and respect for nature's processes and not through domination, says Ghosh.

CONCLUSION

A Hungry Tide is a complex novel in many ways, a book which steadfastly rejects easy depictions of nature and man, and because of this, the novel is in fact one of the most important ecocritical novels of contemporary Indian English literature. This statement is thought-provoking: "The environmental imagination asks readers to rethink the relationship between human culture and the natural world." (Buell p.2) Amitav Ghosh depicts Sundarbans as a dynamic ecological system where rivers, forests, animals, tides and human communities live in a state of deep interdependence. The novel shows how the environmental crises must be approached on a scientific, political, economic, but also on an ethical, historical, and cultural level. An environmental criticism shows that throughout the novella, Ghosh has consistently deprovincialized nature by positioning it as an active element, instead of a mere background. Human fates are moulded by nature, as human activity can affect nature. Survival consequently relies on understanding how they are mutually dependent and not how one dominates the other. Aside from that, the novel also tries to state that environmental protection would not be possible unless there are equilibriums at the social level. Ghosh unmasked the moral shortcomings of conservation policies which ignore the existence of marginalised human communities, as in the case of the Morichjhãpi tragedy. Likewise, the narration of Piya and Fokir shows that no two types of knowledge, namely scientific and indigenous ecological, are incompatible as environmental knowledge. Water, tide, forest and wildlife all represent ecological systems that constantly defy our efforts to exert lasting control as human beings. The Sundarbans also remind the reader that environmental uncertainty is not unusual, but the basic condition of life in this world! It is not until man learns to live with nature's rhythm that he lives. In sum, *The Hungry Tide* provides an environmental philosophy of humility, coexistence, and environmental responsibility. Ghosh's novel is even more relevant at this particular juncture in history when the climate is changing, biodiversity is being lost and ever more people are displaced from their environment. It reminds today's society that human life is closely connected with the health of the environment as well as with the vulnerable people who inhabit the environment, all of which, in turn, is interconnected with sustainable future generations.

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The Terms and Conditions of Intimacy: Contracts, Consent, and Emotional Negotiation in *The Big Bang Theory*

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Abstract— *This research examines the roommate and relationship agreements in The Big Bang Theory as recurring devices through which friendship, romantic attachment, and personal boundaries become subjects of explicit negotiation. Focusing on Sheldon and Leonard's shared domestic life and Sheldon and Amy's romantic relationship, with selective reference to Leonard and Penny, the paper considers who establishes the terms of intimacy, who interprets them, and who undertakes the work of sustaining relationships when those terms become inadequate. The agreements offer reassurance through clearly stated expectations, yet their apparent reciprocity requires closer examination when the authority to draft and enforce provisions is unevenly distributed. Through close audiovisual analysis of selected episodes, including "The Agreement Dissection," "The Flaming Spittoon Acquisition," and "The Romance Recalibration," the study traces the movement from contractual compliance to disagreements over care, attention, privacy, and physical intimacy. Drawing on scholarship on negotiated intimacy, relational autonomy, and emotion work, it distinguishes consent to a relationship from continuing consent to particular interactions. Sheldon's preference for predictability and Amy's desire for greater closeness are examined as needs whose recognition depends on the possibility of refusal and revision. Leonard's accommodation of domestic rules provides a parallel inquiry into the obligations attached to friendship. The analysis also attends to formal dialogue, bodily gestures, reaction shots, comic pauses, and audible laughter to examine how television comedy frames boundaries and unequal demands. Across recurring conflicts, separation, and reconciliation, the paper asks whether character development alters established patterns of authority or temporarily softens them. It argues that the series locates the difficulty of intimacy in the distance between stated obligations and responsive care: agreements can clarify expectations, but their value depends on whether those affected retain a meaningful voice in changing them.*

Keywords— ***contractual intimacy, consent, emotional negotiation, relational autonomy, emotion work, sitcom comedy, The Big Bang Theory***

Introduction: Making Intimacy Explicit

In *The Big Bang Theory*, the expectations attached to living together or being romantically involved frequently acquire the form of written provisions. Sheldon Cooper's roommate and relationship agreements give routines, responsibilities, and personal boundaries a documentary presence. Matters that other characters might settle through conversation become questions of interpretation and compliance. The humour rests partly on the disproportion between the ordinary situation and the elaborate procedure brought to bear upon it. Yet these agreements also raise a question that persists beyond the joke: what does agreeing to share a life with someone actually require? The answer becomes uncertain when a provision that offers reassurance to one person places an unwelcome obligation upon another. The agreements therefore provide a way of examining how the series represents attachment through competing claims to security, independence, and care.

The presence of contractual language within these relationships makes their expectations unusually visible. Friendship and romance can carry obligations that remain unstated until someone fails to fulfil them. Shared living involves assumptions about privacy, domestic responsibilities, and consideration; romantic attachment introduces further expectations concerning attention, exclusivity, affection, and disclosure. A written agreement appears to reduce the uncertainty surrounding such matters. However, the act of specifying an obligation does not establish that it has been negotiated fairly. Its implications depend on who proposes the terms, whose preferences they accommodate, and whether the other person can question them without jeopardising the relationship. This paper approaches the agreements in *The Big Bang Theory* through that distinction between explicit expectations and equitable participation.

The roommate agreement provides the initial ground for this inquiry because it extends the question of intimacy beyond the romantic couple. Sheldon and Leonard's shared domestic life involves proximity, dependence, familiarity, and repeated adjustment. Their relationship makes it possible to examine the difference between protecting personal space and regulating another person's conduct. Sheldon's reliance on rules can be read as an attempt to make everyday life manageable, while Leonard's responses invite scrutiny of the accommodations through which companionship is sustained. "The Agreement Dissection" brings interpretive authority directly into dispute when Priya uses her legal expertise to challenge the roommate agreement. Her intervention exposes the possibility that the document's meaning need not remain under Sheldon's control. The episode consequently provides a point of entry into the relationship between written authority and the power to contest it.

The relationship agreement between Sheldon and Amy carries these questions into romance. Here, the acknowledgment of attachment becomes connected to the specification of its permitted forms. Their relationship allows the paper to consider whether formal recognition gives both partners a language for expressing needs or makes those needs dependent on previously authorised terms. Neither character's position should be understood as fixed. A preference for predictability can coexist with affection, just as a desire for greater closeness can involve persuasion, impatience, and calculation. The relevant issue is how their expectations are communicated and revised. Reading their relationship alongside Sheldon and Leonard's domestic arrangements also reveals how habits of negotiation move between friendship and romance without producing identical consequences.

Anthony Giddens's *The Transformation of Intimacy* offers a useful starting point for understanding relationships sustained through mutual disclosure and continuing negotiation. His account connects changes in intimate life with the possibility of greater democracy within the personal sphere. Applied to *The Big Bang Theory*, this perspective directs attention to whether both participants can articulate expectations and influence the relationship's course. It does not establish that an explicitly negotiated arrangement is necessarily democratic. Rather, it makes the conditions of participation central to the analysis: acknowledgment, willingness, and the opportunity to reconsider an arrangement must be examined alongside the arrangement itself.

Lynn Jamieson's critique of the "pure relationship" sharpens this inquiry by questioning the distance between ideals of intimate equality and the inequalities that continue to organise everyday life. Her emphasis on practical care is especially relevant here. A relationship may possess an extensive vocabulary of mutual obligation while depending upon one person's repeated adjustments. Jamieson observes that considerable effort can go into preserving intimacy despite inequality, rather than transforming the conditions that produce it. This distinction allows the paper to ask whether an agreement redistributes responsibility or merely supplies a formal structure within which familiar accommodations continue. Leonard's patience and Amy's negotiation of emotional attention can consequently be examined as practices whose costs and recognition matter to the relationship.

Arlie Russell Hochschild's discussion of emotion management provides a further vocabulary for considering these practices. The concept of unpaid emotion work is useful for examining efforts to manage disappointment, reassure another person, or preserve an interaction after conflict. It should be distinguished from emotional labour performed within paid employment. Within the relationships considered here, the question concerns who manages feelings and how that effort becomes expected. A provision can identify an obligation, but it cannot fully explain the patience or restraint involved in carrying it out. Attention to emotion work therefore brings the paper closer to the lived implications of fictional rules: the effort required to accommodate them, the feelings they generate, and the responses available when accommodation becomes difficult.

Consent requires equally careful differentiation. Acceptance of a relationship does not settle every subsequent question about physical affection, sexual intimacy, shared living, or the disclosure of private information. This paper uses consent to examine agreement

to particular interactions and the continuing possibility of refusal or revision. Sheldon's boundaries and Amy's wish for greater closeness both require attention; neither can simply determine the other's participation. Such an approach also permits scrutiny of romantic conventions themselves. If greater physical intimacy is presented as evidence of progress, the analysis must ask what happens to a character whose preferences do not follow that expectation. The issue is how the series represents changing willingness without allowing prior commitment to become a substitute for present agreement.

These concerns belong to television studies because the meaning of a boundary is shaped by its presentation. A refusal delivered as a punchline occupies a different dramatic position from a refusal followed by sustained acknowledgment. Formal language, vocal emphasis, bodily distance, reaction shots, and audible laughter can influence whether a demand appears reasonable, excessive, affectionate, or inconsequential. Margaret A. Weitekamp's work on *The Big Bang Theory* recognises that its representation of scientists operates through the conventions of situation comedy and works both with and against familiar stereotypes. Building on that attention to genre, this study examines how comic construction frames relational authority. It analyses the programme's invitations to interpret a scene without assuming that every viewer accepts those invitations in the same way.

The recurring agreement also presents a problem of serial development. Its return provides familiarity and comic continuity, while changing relationships require earlier expectations to be reassessed. An episode can resolve a disagreement without permanently altering the behaviour that produced it. Close analysis must therefore consider both individual scenes and the persistence of patterns across selected episodes. Focusing primarily on Sheldon and Leonard and Sheldon and Amy, with Leonard and Penny as a comparative relationship, this paper argues that *The Big Bang Theory* makes intimacy legible through the negotiation of obligations while exposing the limits of procedural reassurance. Written terms can clarify needs, but their capacity to support a relationship depends on the participants' continuing authority to question them. The central concern is the relationship between what a document requires and what another person, in a changing circumstance, needs.

Critical Context and Method: Reading Agreements as Television

The agreements in *The Big Bang Theory* invite analysis because they give a visible form to expectations that often remain implicit within relationships. Their presence, however, does not make the series a straightforward endorsement or rejection of contractual intimacy. A document can express commitment, establish a boundary, or become an instrument through which one participant acquires authority over another. These functions may coexist within the same relationship. The critical task is therefore to examine what an agreement permits in a particular situation, how its provisions are interpreted, and what happens when a character questions their application. The paper brings scholarship on intimacy and relational autonomy into conversation with television studies to investigate these questions through the programme's dialogue, performance, and narrative organisation.

Existing scholarship provides a useful foundation without exhausting the significance of the agreements. Margaret A. Weitekamp's study of scientific identity in *The Big Bang Theory* examines how the programme works with and against familiar stereotypes through the conventions of situation comedy. Research on gender performance and the representation of women scientists similarly establishes the importance of studying how professional authority and social expectations intersect within the series. These concerns remain relevant to contractual intimacy, particularly where confidence in intellectual expertise becomes authority within domestic or romantic life. The present inquiry concentrates on the procedures through which characters establish obligations and contest their interpretation. It asks how expertise becomes persuasive in a relationship, while recognising that knowledge of rules does not necessarily confer authority over another person's needs.

Giddens's account of negotiated intimacy offers a starting point for considering relationships whose continuation depends on the participants' investment in them. Read alongside Jamieson's critique, it also requires attention to the circumstances under which negotiation occurs. Jamieson argues that ideals of disclosure and equality can obscure persistent inequalities and the practical work through which intimacy is maintained. This qualification matters to the analysis of agreements: the existence of a conversation, or even a signature, cannot by itself establish equal influence over its outcome. The paper consequently distinguishes the opportunity to express a preference from the capacity to have that preference recognised. A character may speak clearly and still find that the available terms have already been organised around someone else's priorities.

Relational autonomy provides a more precise way of examining this problem. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar's work situates autonomy within social relationships, challenging the assumption that meaningful self-direction requires independence from others. Attachment, reliance, and care can support a person's

agency; they can also create circumstances in which disagreement becomes costly. Applied here, relational autonomy directs attention to the conditions surrounding a character's decision. The relevant questions concern whether alternatives are available, whether objections receive consideration, and whether participation can be revised. Leonard's willingness to preserve a friendship, for example, should not automatically be read as either unrestricted choice or the absence of agency. Its meaning must be established through the specific pressures, benefits, and possibilities represented within the interaction.

This framework also helps distinguish a boundary from a claim to control. For the purposes of the paper, a boundary identifies the conditions under which a person is willing to participate in an interaction. A demand becomes more problematic when it treats another person's conduct as subject to unilateral determination. The distinction requires contextual judgment because shared living necessarily involves arrangements that affect more than one person. A domestic schedule may protect both residents' needs, or it may privilege one resident's convenience. The analysis will therefore ask who benefits from a provision, how burdens are distributed, and whether an objection can produce amendment. It will avoid treating all rules as restrictive or all informal arrangements as equitable.

Consent is examined as agreement to a particular interaction or arrangement, with attention to the possibility of withdrawal and reconsideration. Domestic, romantic, sexual, and informational consent require separate analysis because permission in one area does not establish permission in another. Willingness to continue a relationship cannot settle a later disagreement about physical affection or the disclosure of intimate information. The study will distinguish explicit agreement, hesitant acceptance, negotiated compromise, and pressure where the episodes provide evidence for doing so. Discomfort alone will not be treated as proof of coercion, just as compliance will not be accepted as sufficient evidence of freely given consent. Dialogue, gestures, narrative circumstances, and the response to refusal will inform the interpretation.

Care ethics extends the inquiry from permission to responsibility. Joan C. Tronto's work treats care as an activity whose social distribution is connected to power, rather than as an exclusively private disposition. This perspective encourages attention to who notices a need, who responds, and whose contribution is taken for granted. Hochschild's concept of unpaid emotion work adds a more specific concern with the management of feeling. Reassurance, restraint, and the effort to address disappointment may sustain a relationship without appearing in its written provisions. However, practical care and emotion work will not be treated as interchangeable: completing a domestic task is different from managing resentment about its unequal allocation. Both may matter to the same scene, but they require distinct descriptions.

These concepts acquire meaning through the programme's comic form. Brett Mills's *The Sitcom* foregrounds humour as central to understanding the genre and examines the construction of jokes through textual analysis. His work on audiences also emphasises that comedy depends on response, making the relationship between a programme's comic invitation and its reception especially significant. This paper studies the invitation encoded within the scene. Audible laughter, a pause, or a reaction shot can position a statement as comic, but cannot establish how every viewer evaluates it. The analysis will therefore describe how an interaction is framed before drawing conclusions about its ethical implications.

The primary method is qualitative close audiovisual analysis of purposively selected episodes. The corpus centres on the introduction, enforcement, contestation, and revision of agreements, with additional scenes addressing physical intimacy, cohabitation, separation, and relational repair. Episodes such as "The Agreement Dissection," "The Flaming Spittoon Acquisition," and "The Romance Recalibration" serve different functions within this selection: domestic authority, the formalisation of romance, and a comparative examination of marital expectations. Each relevant sequence will be considered through its immediate context, spoken exchange, performance, spatial arrangement, comic timing, and outcome. Exact quotations and timestamps must come from the episodes themselves; synopses can identify relevant material but cannot establish its audiovisual construction.

The analysis will also trace recurring conflicts across episodes to distinguish temporary resolution from sustained change. An apology, concession, or affectionate gesture may settle one encounter while leaving an earlier distribution of authority intact. Conversely, the continued appearance of an agreement need not mean that its function remains unchanged. The paper will attend to such differences without assigning clinical diagnoses to characters or treating fictional conduct as direct evidence of real audiences' relationships. Its interpretive aim is to establish how *The Big Bang Theory* makes obligations visible, places them under comic pressure, and represents the capacity of those involved to renegotiate their participation.

The Roommate Agreement: Domestic Rules and Unequal Authority

The roommate agreement in *The Big Bang Theory* turns shared domestic life into an arrangement whose obligations

can be cited, disputed, and enforced. Its significance lies in the authority it gives to particular interpretations of ordinary conduct. A disagreement about temperature or visitors becomes a question of whether Leonard has violated an existing provision. Sheldon can consequently present his objection as the defence of an established order rather than as a preference requiring further discussion. The document lends continuity to his expectations, making them appear settled even when the circumstances surrounding them have changed. This section reads that continuity as a source of both reassurance and unequal authority. The agreement makes cohabitation predictable, but its fairness depends on whether Leonard retains a meaningful role in determining what predictability requires.

"The Staircase Implementation" (season 3, episode 22) establishes the circumstances of Leonard's initial acceptance through a retrospective account of his arrival. Sheldon subjects the prospective roommate to questions and domestic requirements, including a bathroom schedule. Leonard later explains that the apartment was attractive and reasonably priced. The episode thus gives his decision a practical context: he accepts an inconvenient arrangement because it also offers something he wants. Agreement here involves weighing advantages against burdens. This complicates any reading of Leonard as simply unable to choose, while leaving open whether the conditions he accepts remain reasonable over time. His original willingness cannot resolve every subsequent disagreement.

The flashback structure matters because Leonard recounts the relationship from within an ongoing conflict. The past becomes an explanation for the present, allowing the programme to hold irritation and attachment together. This is particularly important for the paper's understanding of consent. Leonard's account establishes that he entered the arrangement, but it also gives him a voice through which to reconsider its consequences. The narrative recognises a distinction between explaining why a person agreed and establishing why that person must continue to agree. In a continuing domestic relationship, earlier acceptance provides a history of participation. It cannot reasonably function as a permanent answer to changing needs.

The agreement also contains provisions Leonard can use. When Sheldon challenges the introduction of a couch, Leonard invokes his entitlement to a share of the common space and establishes that he supplied the required notification. Elsewhere, Sheldon claims the authority to settle tied decisions, including a dispute over television viewing. These exchanges reveal competing possibilities within the document: a stated entitlement can protect Leonard's participation, while a procedural rule can return final authority to Sheldon. The difference concerns who controls the movement from disagreement to decision.

This distinction makes the agreement more interesting than a collection of excessive restrictions. A written entitlement can give the less authoritative participant a basis for objection. Leonard does not always have to persuade Sheldon that his preference deserves recognition; he can point to a provision that already recognises it. Yet that advantage remains vulnerable if the interpretation of the agreement belongs to the person being challenged. Reciprocity therefore requires more than the inclusion of rights for both residents. It also requires a process through which competing claims receive consideration without one participant determining the outcome in advance.

"The Agreement Dissection" (season 4, episode 21) brings that interpretive problem into the foreground. Priya disputes Sheldon's reading of provisions governing bathroom use and challenges his replacement of the designated pizza restaurant without following the document's own procedure. Her intervention uses the agreement's language against the authority of its drafter. Sheldon's difficulty is that he encounters someone able to distinguish his preferred outcome from what the document permits. The episode makes his procedural inconsistency visible: he expects others to follow rules whose requirements he has not consistently observed himself.

Priya's role also raises a question about access to effective objection. Leonard can disagree with Sheldon, but Priya supplies a form of expertise that changes the force of that disagreement. Her participation suggests that having a position and being able to defend it are different capacities. Read through relational autonomy, the episode shows how another person's support can strengthen agency within an existing relationship. Assistance does not diminish Leonard's participation; it helps make his challenge consequential. At the same time, his reliance on specialist interpretation exposes how difficult ordinary negotiation has become. A domestic disagreement now requires an advocate capable of contesting its procedural terms.

The episode's final confrontation abandons that interpretive contest. Sheldon threatens to disclose Leonard and Priya's relationship to her parents unless Leonard signs a revised agreement. A computerised countdown compresses the time available for response, and Priya's fear of disclosure becomes pressure on Leonard to comply. His eventual acceptance follows the creation of a consequence outside the domestic dispute. The scene therefore separates obtaining a signature from securing willing agreement. Sheldon restores his authority by making refusal costly rather than by answering the objections to his rules.

The comic mechanism gives this pressure a particular form. The countdown transforms a dispute over provisions into a hurried confrontation, while the science-fiction reference supplies a recognisable performance of strategic victory. Sheldon presents himself as having defeated competing expertise through ingenuity. Analytically, however, the consequence threatened is a breach of relational privacy. Information becomes leverage because its disclosure matters differently to the people involved. The episode does not establish a general account of Indian families; it establishes Priya's apprehension within this relationship. The coercive force lies in Sheldon's use of that apprehension to obtain an outcome unrelated to her parents.

"The Roommate Transmogrification" (season 4, episode 24) extends the pattern when Raj becomes a temporary resident. Sheldon gives him modified paperwork and responsibilities that include transport and collecting meals. Raj accepts the arrangement as preferable to the discomfort of remaining in his own apartment. His subsequent enthusiasm for preparing dinner also prevents the relationship from appearing entirely reducible to reluctant service. Accommodation can be pleasurable and still form part of an unequal arrangement. The episode invites attention to where generosity ends and an expectation of continued availability begins.

Across these episodes, domestic intimacy involves a persistent negotiation between practical benefit, affection, and authority. Sheldon's preference for order is understandable as a need, but recognising that need does not settle how much of the surrounding work others should perform. Leonard and Raj have reasons to participate, yet those reasons do not authorise every demand attached to participation. The roommate agreement becomes most ethically unstable when it treats continued residence as continuing permission, or when the possibility of refusal is displaced by a penalty unrelated to shared living. Its more constructive potential appears when a provision gives another resident grounds to assert a need. *The Big Bang Theory* thus supplies an uneven account of contractual reciprocity: the document can support a voice, but it can also furnish procedures through which that voice is overruled.

The Relationship Agreement: Naming Attachment and Regulating Romance

The relationship agreement between Sheldon and Amy in *The Big Bang Theory* extends contractual regulation into a relationship whose status has itself been uncertain. Whereas the roommate agreement organises an already shared domestic environment, the romantic document accompanies the explicit acknowledgment that its participants are boyfriend and girlfriend. It therefore performs two related functions: it recognises attachment and attempts to determine what that attachment will require. Recognition matters because an unnamed relationship can sustain expectations without making either person accountable for them. Yet naming the relationship does not settle the distribution of authority within it. The agreement establishes a vocabulary of rights and responsibilities whose implications must be tested through the interactions that follow.

"The Flaming Spittoon Acquisition" (season 5, episode 10) places this recognition within a conflict over Amy's availability. When Stuart expresses interest in her, Sheldon initially denies that he has authority over her decisions. His subsequent discomfort, however, exposes an expectation that their existing connection will discourage her from pursuing someone else. Amy challenges that expectation when he interrupts her date: their current arrangement does not entitle him to determine whom she sees. The episode thus makes a distinction between feeling attached and having negotiated an exclusive relationship. Sheldon's jealousy cannot itself establish an obligation on Amy's part.

This distinction is central to the agreement's eventual appearance. The document follows a moment in which Amy's capacity to choose becomes consequential. Her availability can no longer be assumed, and Sheldon must articulate a position that he has previously avoided stating directly. The prospect of losing a familiar connection prompts recognition, but recognition also carries responsibility. An exclusive relationship cannot fairly preserve every advantage of attachment while excluding every demand the other participant might make. The scene raises that difficulty without immediately resolving it: a change in relational status must be followed by negotiation over what changes in practice.

Sheldon initially attempts to propose the new status while insisting that nothing else will change. Amy asks him to replace his evasive formulation with a direct question, and he asks her to be his girlfriend. This exchange gives her an active role in establishing the relationship's intelligibility. She does not simply receive a designation; she requires a proposal to which she can respond. Later, Sheldon presents the thirty-one-page agreement, which Amy initially welcomes as romantic before questioning its restrictions on hand-holding. Her reactions combine pleasure in recognition with concern about its terms.

The agreement's emotional appeal should therefore be taken seriously. Explicit commitment can offer reassurance when a relationship has lacked a clear definition. For Amy, the document may make the connection more definite and give its obligations a form that Sheldon recognises. For Sheldon, it may make a newly acknowledged relationship less uncertain. These benefits do not cancel the question of

authorship. A document can express commitment while allowing its drafter to define that commitment narrowly. Its constructive value depends on whether the other participant can introduce expectations that the original terms have overlooked.

The regulation of hand-holding brings this problem into physical intimacy. Restrictions can communicate a legitimate preference concerning touch; romantic involvement does not remove the need to respect that preference. The difficulty arises when a list of authorised circumstances is treated as a complete and permanent account of both participants' needs. A boundary remains meaningful because it expresses a person's willingness. Its documentary form should not prevent either person from initiating a later conversation. Equally, a request to reconsider cannot become an obligation to accept greater physical contact. The agreement's fairness must be assessed through the possibilities of discussion and refusal rather than through whether the relationship conforms to familiar romantic expectations.

"The Shiny Trinket Maneuver" (season 5, episode 12) shifts attention from the regulation of touch to the quality of attention. Sheldon and Amy attend a scheduled date, which he conducts through the language of meeting procedure. Amy shares news that her research has received prominent recognition, but Sheldon repeatedly redirects the conversation towards his own social-media milestone. The arrangement secures an occasion for companionship without ensuring that Amy's experience receives acknowledgment. Attendance fulfils a visible requirement; responsiveness proves harder to establish.

The scene identifies a limit of procedural compliance. A scheduled encounter can protect time that might otherwise be neglected, but its emotional value depends on what occurs within that time. Amy's disappointment concerns the failure to recognise something important to her. This does not require Sheldon to experience identical enthusiasm or abandon his judgment about scientific disciplines. It requires him to distinguish his own interests from the significance an achievement holds for his partner. Relational care involves that distinction. A person can acknowledge another's pleasure without claiming to share every preference that produced it.

The episode's movement towards gift-giving complicates the repair. With advice from Leonard and help from Penny, Sheldon purchases a tiara, and Amy responds with delight. The gift successfully changes the immediate emotional encounter, but the resolution leaves a question about what has been addressed. A welcome present may communicate affection while also allowing the original disagreement to recede before its implications are fully discussed. The episode consequently offers both repair and a possible shortcut around acknowledgment. Its comic resolution should not be treated as proof that Amy's desire for professional recognition was unnecessary.

"The Fish Guts Displacement" (season 6, episode 10) provides a different test of the agreement. When Amy becomes ill, she invokes its requirement that either partner care for the other. Sheldon initially admits that he intended the provision to secure care for himself, then returns and acknowledges both his written commitment and his concern for her well-being. The sequence gives the document a more reciprocal function. Amy can use its language to assert a claim that Sheldon had not intended to honour in the same way. An obligation drafted with one expectation becomes available to the other participant.

This moment qualifies a reading of contractual intimacy as necessarily incompatible with care. An explicit provision can challenge selective interpretation and prompt a response that habitual behaviour would not have produced. Sheldon's return matters because he connects compliance with concern, although neither statement guarantees that every subsequent action will be responsive. The agreement supplies a reason to act; the quality of care still depends on listening to the person receiving it. Obligation and affection can reinforce each other when the obligation is understood as genuinely reciprocal.

Amy's later conduct introduces another complication. She continues to present herself as ill after recovering because she enjoys Sheldon's attention. Her deception prolongs care on a basis he does not understand to be false. The episode thereby prevents her desire for closeness from becoming an unquestioned justification for her methods. Its significance lies in the information withheld from the person whose participation is being secured. A wish for affection can be understandable while the means of obtaining it remain open to criticism.

Across these episodes, the relationship agreement functions as a promise, a restriction, and a resource for making claims. Sheldon's authorship gives him an initial advantage, but Amy can contest his language and invoke provisions on her own behalf. Their difficulties arise when either participant attempts to preserve a desired outcome without allowing the other an informed role in determining it. *The Big Bang Theory* therefore represents contractual romance through the continuing distance between recognised status and responsive participation. Being named a partner establishes an attachment that matters; it does not settle what either person may demand. The agreement becomes useful when it supports a conversation whose outcome remains open to both.

Consent Over Time: Boundaries, Desire, and the Right to Reconsider

The relationship agreement establishes a recognisable structure for Sheldon and Amy's attachment, but the continuation of that attachment produces situations its initial terms cannot fully anticipate. Physical affection, sexual intimacy, cohabitation, and privacy each require decisions that extend beyond accepting the status of boyfriend or girlfriend. In *The Big Bang Theory*, these decisions frequently become comic conflicts because the characters approach the same interaction with different expectations. Examining consent across these situations requires attention to what has actually been agreed, what one participant assumes, and what remains open to discussion. The central issue is whether an established relationship permits each person to express a present preference without treating that preference as a failure of commitment.

"The Locomotive Manipulation" (season 7, episode 15) places competing expectations within an apparently negotiated Valentine's Day trip. Amy arranges separate rooms and chooses a vintage-train dinner that appeals to Sheldon's interests. Her planning recognises several of his concerns, yet the evening becomes disappointing when his attention remains directed towards trains rather than their relationship. During their disagreement, she acknowledges that she wanted romance and did not know how else to obtain it. The episode exposes a mismatch between the terms used to secure participation and the experience expected from it. Agreeing to attend does not necessarily mean that both participants have understood the occasion in the same way.

Amy's disappointment is intelligible because she has invested effort in making the trip possible. That effort, however, cannot by itself determine the affection Sheldon should provide. Equally, his enjoyment of the activity does not answer her concern about being neglected within an occasion presented as shared. The disagreement therefore involves distinguishable claims: attention to a partner and participation in particular romantic gestures. Care may require taking disappointment seriously, while consent still requires that bodily involvement remain open to choice. Treating these claims as identical would either reduce Amy's concern to unreasonable pressure or make Sheldon's acceptance of the trip an advance obligation to perform romance.

The kiss that follows emerges from this unresolved tension. Sheldon begins by mockingly performing familiar romantic conventions, but the exchange concludes with Amy's appreciative response and his invitation to join him in the engine room. The scene moves from adversarial demonstration towards shared participation. Its affectionate outcome does not erase the disagreement that preceded it. Rather, the sequence invites examination of how a moment initiated in irritation becomes narratively available as closeness. The subsequent invitation matters because Amy is offered a choice within an activity meaningful to Sheldon, making companionship something they can undertake together.

"The Opening Night Excitation" (season 9, episode 11) makes sexual consent explicitly verbal. Sheldon asks whether Amy is willing to be intimate, receives her agreement, and then proposes obtaining an online contract. Later, when she expresses nervousness, he acknowledges his own uncertainty and suggests that they discover the experience together. These exchanges place two approaches to reassurance alongside each other. The contractual joke seeks a definite record of permission; the bedroom conversation recognises that willingness can coexist with apprehension. Neither participant possesses complete knowledge of what the encounter will feel like.

The difference is significant because consent does not require the absence of uncertainty. It requires that uncertainty can be expressed without invalidating the speaker's agency or creating an obligation to proceed. Amy's previous desire for intimacy does not mean that her present nervousness is irrelevant. Sheldon's decision to participate likewise should not be interpreted as evidence that his earlier reluctance was merely an obstacle awaiting correction. The scene becomes more useful to this paper when read as a particular agreement between two people at a particular moment. Their history informs the encounter, but does not substitute for what they communicate within it.

The episode's parallel movement between the couple's encounter and the others' anticipation of a new *Star Wars* film gives long-awaited experience a shared comic structure. Excitement and anxiety circulate across both storylines, creating comparisons between expectations and their eventual fulfilment. This construction makes sexual uncertainty accessible through the programme's established language of fandom. It also introduces an interpretive risk: waiting can appear to confer entitlement to an anticipated outcome. Within the couple's exchange, however, Amy's accumulated desire remains distinct from Sheldon's present willingness. The narrative's pleasure in a milestone should not be allowed to collapse that distinction.

"The Cohabitation Experimentation" (season 10, episode 4) extends negotiation into shared domestic space. Amy proposes a five-week experiment in living together, and Sheldon contributes the requirement that they use a neutral environment. Their decision also excludes sexual intercourse from the arrangement. When they prepare to sleep, Amy separately raises the possibility of snuggling,

while Sheldon proposes a pillow barrier. The episode distinguishes moving in together, sharing a bed, and accepting physical closeness as related but separate decisions. An agreement in one area does not automatically authorise participation in the others.

The experimental framing offers a useful way of understanding provisional consent. A limited duration can make participation more manageable by allowing assessment rather than demanding permanent commitment in advance. Sheldon also helps determine the experiment's conditions, so the arrangement involves more than his accommodation of Amy's wishes. Nevertheless, an end date alone cannot secure fairness. The participants must remain able to discuss what happens during the trial. Living together introduces bodily habits, sleeping preferences, and practical inconveniences that cannot all be settled before they are experienced. The ethical value of the experiment depends on whether those experiences become grounds for mutual adjustment.

"The Allowance Evaporation" (season 10, episode 16) turns to the circulation of intimate information. Amy objects when Sheldon's disclosures make their sexual relationship a subject of workplace gossip. He responds that she has discussed their physical relationship with Penny; Amy distinguishes disclosure to a close friend from wider circulation. Sheldon subsequently maps conversational subjects into "zones of privacy," attempting to identify what can be shared and with whom. The conflict makes clear that participating in an intimate relationship does not automatically establish permission to make its details available to others.

Amy's distinction between audiences is important, but it does not completely resolve the question. Friendship may offer a more trusted context for disclosure without granting unrestricted authority to share a partner's experience. Both participants contribute to the information at issue, and each may have interests in seeking advice or preserving privacy. Negotiation must therefore concern the nature of the disclosure, its audience, and its consequences. The privacy diagram has constructive potential because it makes assumptions discussable. Yet its categories require shared interpretation; classification cannot replace a conversation about what either person considers sensitive.

The episode also complicates the promise of procedural repair. After acknowledging Amy's embarrassment, Sheldon later discloses another personal detail while explaining the disagreement to others. The return of the problem suggests a distance between recognising a principle and applying it consistently. His attempt to distinguish private subjects represents effort, but that effort does not cancel the consequences of renewed disclosure. The comic recurrence permits the paper to examine how character development remains incomplete even after an apparently successful conversation.

Across these situations, consent operates through specific decisions whose meaning can change over time. A relationship provides continuity, while its participants retain separate claims concerning their bodies, domestic lives, and private information. Neither romantic convention nor the existence of an agreement can determine those claims in advance. *The Big Bang Theory* makes the difficulty visible through encounters in which expectations become explicit only after disappointment or conflict. Its more responsive moments occur when uncertainty produces a question, an acknowledgment, or an invitation. These moments locate intimacy in the possibility of continued negotiation, including the possibility that a partner's answer will differ from what was hoped.

Emotional Negotiation: Who Maintains the Relationship?

The agreements in *The Big Bang Theory* specify obligations, but the relationships they organise also depend on work that is harder to record. Someone must recognise disappointment, explain why an interaction has become hurtful, or find a way to reopen a conversation after disagreement. These activities require time and attention, often from the participant already experiencing frustration. Their importance becomes apparent when compliance with a provision fails to produce reassurance or when affection is used to justify continued accommodation. The question is therefore how the work of maintaining attachment is distributed and whether that work receives acknowledgment. A relationship can appear stable because its participants have reached an understanding, but it can also appear stable because one person repeatedly manages the consequences of another's conduct.

Hochschild's account of emotion work offers a vocabulary for examining the management of feeling within private life. In this context, it concerns efforts to contain irritation, communicate disappointment, or sustain reassurance during conflict. It should remain distinct from practical assistance, although the two can occur together. Driving someone to an appointment is a material contribution; suppressing resentment when that contribution is treated as an entitlement involves an additional emotional demand. The distinction matters because the visible task may conceal the less visible effort required to keep performing it. A contractual provision can identify a duty without recognising the emotional conditions under which it is fulfilled.

"The Friendship Contraction" (season 5, episode 15) makes this distinction concrete through Leonard's exhaustion.

Following a disruptive emergency drill, Sheldon expects him to provide transport to a dental appointment and cites the roommate agreement when he refuses. Leonard's objection separates being a roommate from being a chauffeur. The episode subsequently reduces their relationship to its contractual essentials when he invokes a clause suspending their friendship. This reduction exposes how much assistance has been incorporated into the meaning of companionship. Refusing a task becomes consequential for the relationship itself rather than remaining a disagreement about availability.

Leonard's resistance is significant because care can remain voluntary even when it is habitual. Repetition may create an expectation, but the person performing the task still has circumstances that require consideration. Exhaustion makes that consideration particularly urgent. Sheldon's appeal to a provision avoids engaging with Leonard's present capacity, treating the earlier commitment as sufficient reason for performance. The conflict therefore concerns the recognition of limits within an ongoing friendship. A dependable person should not have to withdraw the relationship entirely before a refusal becomes intelligible. When ordinary disagreement produces a threat to companionship, the emotional cost of setting a boundary increases.

Their later negotiation centres on appreciation. Leonard offers to continue helping but asks that Sheldon acknowledge his contributions. Sheldon proposes an annual "Leonard's Day" instead of routine expressions of thanks. The compromise gives Leonard symbolic recognition while preserving much of the existing arrangement. Its comic appeal arises partly from the disproportion between everyday assistance and the ceremonial response offered in return. The settlement recognises that Leonard contributes something valuable, yet remains uncertain about how that recognition will alter their daily interactions.

This uncertainty distinguishes acknowledgment from redistribution. Gratitude can improve the experience of giving care, but it does not automatically reduce the amount of care expected. A celebration may make someone feel valued while leaving their availability largely assumed. Tronto's attention to the allocation of caring responsibilities helps clarify the issue: the analysis must consider whose needs organise the arrangement and whose time makes it possible. Leonard's request shows that he wants recognition within the friendship, while the episode's settlement invites scrutiny of whether the same friendship continues to depend on unequal service.

"The Romance Recalibration" (season 10, episode 13) shifts the question to Leonard and Penny's marriage. Its opening presents an attentive Leonard preparing an evening around Penny's preferences before revealing the sequence as her daydream. The contrast introduces her sense that familiar companionship has ceased to include the gestures through which she once felt considered. Leonard later responds that he has made the effort throughout their relationship. Their disagreement places current dissatisfaction against an accumulated history of contribution. Each understands the relationship through a different account of what effort means and when it should be recognised.

The opening's imagined scene is useful because it gives dissatisfaction a positive form. Penny's concern is represented through an encounter in which her difficult day has been noticed and her preferences remembered. Emotional attention becomes specific rather than abstract. Leonard's response, however, frames effort as something already established by his history. The disagreement reveals a limit in treating past devotion as credit against present expectations. Earlier contributions deserve recognition, but they cannot establish that a partner's current experience is mistaken. Conversely, a present complaint does not erase the work that preceded it. Negotiation requires both accounts to become available without either functioning as a final defence.

The episode also complicates the assumption that making an effort guarantees a welcome response. Leonard follows Penny to the spa to apologise, while she asks for time to herself. They later request an agreement tailored to their relationship. Its provisions address both his behaviour and her tendency to deny that something is wrong. The document therefore distributes explicit expectations between them, although it cannot establish in advance how those expectations will work in a difficult conversation.

The timing of repair matters here. A person may want acknowledgment without being ready to complete the discussion immediately. Arriving with an apology can represent initiative, but the recipient's need for space remains relevant. Equally, the requirement to communicate dissatisfaction should not become a demand to produce a complete explanation on request. Feelings can be recognisable before their causes are fully understood. The agreement has potential when it creates an expectation of eventual communication; it becomes restrictive if it eliminates the time needed to arrive at that communication.

"The Empathy Optimization" (season 9, episode 13) examines another form of relational work. After Sheldon treats those caring for him during illness badly, Amy explains why their withdrawal is understandable. She asks him to consider Leonard's experience of preparing soup and receiving an unkind response. The exchange directs attention away from Sheldon's exclusion and towards the effect of his conduct. Amy's intervention involves making

another person's contribution emotionally legible to him. The scene presents empathy as an effort to recognise a particular injury rather than merely as a procedure for regaining access to the group.

Amy's role should not be naturalised as an obligation attached to being a girlfriend. Explaining hurtful behaviour requires effort, especially when the explanation encounters defensiveness. Leonard performs comparable work within friendship, and Sheldon's developing attempts at care prevent its distribution from being understood through a simple division between attentive women and inattentive men. The sharper question concerns whose difficulty receives explanation and whose fatigue is expected to remain manageable. Care becomes unequal when one participant's limitations repeatedly organise the interaction while another's limits are treated as impatience.

Across these relationships, maintenance involves recognising contributions, responding to present circumstances, and allowing disagreement to be expressed without making attachment conditional on compliance. Contracts can help name expectations, but they leave unresolved the judgment required to act upon them. *The Big Bang Theory* makes that unresolved work visible through disputes over transport, apologies, attention, and gratitude. Its settlements often provide a gesture of recognition whose everyday consequences remain uncertain. The analysis of emotion work therefore brings the paper back to reciprocity as a continuing practice: each participant must be able to receive care, question its demands, and have the effort of providing it taken seriously.

Making Boundaries Funny: Performance, Laughter, and Comic Framing

The agreements in *The Big Bang Theory* acquire their significance through the comic situations in which they are introduced and enforced. A provision concerning physical contact, domestic assistance, or privacy does not reach the audience as an isolated statement. It appears within an exchange that gives someone the opportunity to object, turns an objection into a punchline, or settles a conflict through an affectionate gesture. Understanding contractual intimacy therefore requires attention to how the programme organises the encounter. The ethical question and the comic construction are closely connected: whose expectation becomes excessive, whose discomfort becomes amusing, and whose interpretation supplies the scene's concluding point?

Brett Mills's account of sitcom foregrounds its humorous intent as a defining feature of the genre. His discussion of audiences also examines how laughter and other conventions signal the programme's relationship with its viewers. These arguments provide a basis for studying the agreements as devices designed to generate comic responses. They also require a distinction between the response a programme solicits and the judgments viewers actually make. A scene can encourage amusement at a character's conduct without securing agreement with that conduct. The analysis must consequently identify how the joke works before deciding what its construction makes easier to accept or harder to question.

One recurring mechanism is the collision between intimate experience and administrative language. In "The Flaming Spittoon Acquisition," the acknowledgment of romantic attachment leads to an extensive written agreement and narrowly defined permissions concerning hand-holding. The comic discrepancy arises because a gesture commonly associated with affection is organised through exceptional circumstances. Sheldon's language attempts to make bodily participation predictable, while Amy's response identifies the restrictions as excessive. The exchange allows the agreement to communicate commitment and constraint almost simultaneously. Its humour depends on the audience recognising that these functions need not sit comfortably together.

This construction can support more than one interpretation. The elaborate conditions may expose the limits of attempting to anticipate every interaction. They may also make a preference concerning touch appear inherently absurd. Those possibilities should remain distinct. The critical issue is whether the joke targets the bureaucratic form, the unequal distribution of authority, or the boundary itself. The presence of humour does not settle that question. A reading attentive to consent must preserve the legitimacy of bodily choice while examining the language through which that choice is represented. Otherwise, criticism of excessive regulation can become an assumption that romantic involvement should eliminate reluctance.

"The Shiny Trinket Maneuver" uses a related discrepancy to distinguish organising a date from attending to a partner. The scheduled encounter begins through the language of meeting procedure, but Amy's account of her professional achievement encounters Sheldon's preoccupation with his social-media popularity. The two contributions are placed in immediate competition. Her repeated attempts to explain the importance of the news establish a concern that his responses fail to address. The scene's comic structure depends on that mismatch between what is being communicated and what receives attention.

The exchange also creates an asymmetry in explanatory work. Amy has to elaborate why an achievement matters while Sheldon's excitement remains readily available as a topic. The humour can make his self-absorption visible, but visibility is not equivalent to correction. The eventual gift

supplies a satisfying change of mood and a clear narrative resolution. That resolution raises a formal question: how much of the earlier conflict remains available once the scene has produced delight? Comic closure can recognise affection while reducing the time devoted to the unresolved demand for acknowledgment. The paper must therefore distinguish the pleasure of a settlement from the extent of its relational change.

"The Agreement Dissection" constructs authority through a contest with a recognisable reversal. Priya initially defeats Sheldon's interpretations by applying the document's own procedures. The final countdown then changes the terms of the encounter, making threatened disclosure the means through which he regains control. The movement from interpretive defeat to strategic victory gives the plot a clear comic trajectory. Yet the victory depends on vulnerability elsewhere in the relationship: Priya's apprehension about her parents learning of her involvement with Leonard. The scene can be read as exposing the inadequacy of Sheldon's authority because he resorts to leverage when argument fails.

The countdown is particularly consequential. It limits the opportunity for discussion and reorganises the exchange around preventing an outcome. The pressure belongs to the narrative action itself, rather than requiring an assumption about the audience's feelings. Sheldon's composure and the others' hurried responses establish unequal control over the available time. His technological device makes enforcement visible and gives it momentum. Comic ingenuity and coercive pressure therefore occupy the same sequence. An interpretation centred solely on cleverness would overlook the means by which acceptance is obtained.

Familiarity creates another complication. A recurring agreement becomes recognisable as part of Sheldon's conduct, so its appearance can carry an expectation of humour before its immediate consequences are considered. The document provides continuity across different conflicts, but that continuity may make an unequal demand seem ordinary within the programme's world. This does not mean that repetition necessarily endorses the demand. Repeated objections can also accumulate a record of resistance. The relevant question is whether each return allows the affected character's position to develop or confines that character to supplying a familiar reaction.

"The Romance Recalibration" makes this tension explicit when Amy explains her laughter at Sheldon's contractual joke as something required by their agreement. The line turns the apparent spontaneity of amusement into an obligation. It can suggest shared playfulness between the couple, while also placing compelled approval within the language of reciprocity. The ambiguity matters because laughter is ordinarily available as a sign of enjoyment. By making that sign contractual, the episode unsettles the assumption that a positive response necessarily expresses an unregulated feeling.

Audible laughter elsewhere in the programme requires similarly careful treatment. Its placement can mark a statement as comic and shape the interval before the next response. It cannot by itself establish that viewers approve of the conduct represented. Nor should transcript-based analysis invent pauses, facial expressions, or reaction shots that have not been checked against the episode. Dialogue and narrative sequencing establish one level of evidence; performance, editing, and sound supply another. Close audiovisual analysis must bring them together where the episode permits a claim, rather than treating imagined delivery as confirmation of an interpretation.

Comic framing thus matters because it influences how a relational problem is sustained, interrupted, and resolved. *The Big Bang Theory* gives contractual language the capacity to disclose self-interest, articulate a need, and turn discomfort into a recognisable joke. Its humour can expose an unequal arrangement while allowing that arrangement to remain a source of future comedy. The most productive reading preserves this tension. A boundary may be respected, mocked, or partially understood within the same encounter, and an affectionate ending may leave the distribution of authority substantially intact. The analysis must follow what the scene enables each participant to say and do, alongside the comic pleasure through which their disagreement is presented.

Revising the Terms: Separation, Reconciliation, and Serial Change

Separation tests the authority of an agreement by revealing that a relationship can cease to satisfy its participants even when it retains a recognisable structure. In *The Big Bang Theory*, Sheldon and Amy's difficulties cannot always be resolved by clarifying a provision or securing compliance. Their attachment involves expectations that have developed over time, including the desire to feel considered within the relationship. When those expectations remain unmet, the question shifts from how the relationship should operate to whether it should continue. This shift is central to contractual intimacy because it establishes that consent to an arrangement remains open to reconsideration. A document can record commitment, but it cannot make continued participation independent of the people whose commitment it records.

"The Commitment Determination" (season 8, episode 24) places this problem within the couple's fifth anniversary. During an intimate encounter, Sheldon redirects attention towards whether he should begin watching *The Flash*.

Amy's frustration connects that interruption to the longer history of their relationship. At the episode's end, she explains that being his girlfriend has been emotionally and physically challenging and asks for time to reassess their situation. Her request combines an acknowledgment of love with a decision to step back. The episode does not make affection disappear before withdrawal becomes possible.

That combination matters because dissatisfaction need not demonstrate the absence of attachment. A person can value a relationship while questioning the conditions under which it continues. Amy's request refuses the assumption that loving Sheldon requires indefinite acceptance of their established pattern. It also identifies patience as something with a history and a limit. Earlier accommodation cannot fairly become evidence that the same accommodation should remain available forever. The scene therefore brings the paper's concern with continuing consent into the duration of the relationship itself: the right to reconsider includes the right to question whether its current terms remain bearable.

Amy's concern nevertheless requires careful interpretation. The pace of physical intimacy is one aspect of her disappointment, but it should not become the sole measure of relational adequacy. A partner's desire for greater closeness does not invalidate another person's boundaries. The issue is whether their different preferences can coexist within an arrangement both find acceptable. If they cannot, withdrawal may acknowledge that difficulty without assigning either person an obligation to change bodily participation. The scene becomes more analytically useful when read through attention, compatibility, and accumulated frustration rather than through an assumption that a relationship must advance along a prescribed physical timetable.

The episode's final revelation that Sheldon possesses an engagement ring complicates the audience's understanding of his position. It establishes a commitment that Amy has not been given the opportunity to consider. His private intention therefore exceeds what she can know from their interactions. The narrative supplies viewers with information that alters the emotional interpretation of the separation, but it does not supply Amy with that information before her decision. Her request must be assessed in relation to the relationship available to her, rather than an undisclosed future Sheldon may have imagined.

This difference between intention and communication is crucial. A withheld plan can invite sympathy for the person who holds it while leaving the other participant unable to respond to it. The ring should therefore qualify the claim that Sheldon lacks commitment without discrediting Amy's experience of insufficient attention. Both positions can remain intelligible. The episode's ending asks the audience to reassess his feelings, but it need not imply that her withdrawal was mistaken. Reciprocity depends partly on making consequential expectations available for discussion; intentions cannot perform that work while remaining private.

"The Platonic Permutation" (season 9, episode 9) gives reconsideration a further dimension. Sheldon and Amy spend time together at an aquarium and recover an ease associated with their shared interests. Amy subsequently proposes becoming his girlfriend again. Sheldon declines, explaining that recovering from their separation has been difficult and that he wants to remain friends. Her renewed willingness does not immediately restore their previous status. The encounter recognises that reconciliation requires the present agreement of both participants.

Sheldon's refusal prevents the breakup from becoming merely a device through which Amy establishes the relationship's future. He also acquires a position from which to reconsider participation. The distinction between friendship and romance becomes meaningful because he identifies one as manageable when the other feels too painful. Enjoying an encounter does not automatically require renewed commitment. Similarly, Amy's disappointment does not render her proposal improper; she asks for a possibility that he remains entitled to decline. Their different answers demonstrate that continuing attachment and continuing romantic consent are related without being identical.

The aquarium encounter also distinguishes compatibility in a particular moment from confidence in a continuing arrangement. Familiar humour and shared knowledge can make an interaction pleasurable without resolving the circumstances that previously made the relationship difficult. Nostalgia may recover what was valued, but it cannot establish what would change after reconciliation. This distinction guards against treating a successful meeting as sufficient evidence that earlier problems have disappeared. A renewed relationship requires more than remembering that companionship was once enjoyable.

"The Earworm Reverberation" (season 9, episode 10) changes Sheldon's position through his interpretation of a song that repeatedly occupies his thoughts. He comes to understand it as connected to Amy and to the difference her presence has made in his life. When he approaches her, he states that he wants to be her boyfriend again if she wishes to resume the relationship. Amy reciprocates. The reconciliation is articulated through present desire, making her response necessary to its completion.

The song gives emotional recognition a form distinct from contractual reasoning. Sheldon initially treats its recurrence

as a problem to solve, but identifying it leads him towards an acknowledgment of attachment. His familiar analytical habits remain present while their object changes. The sequence therefore represents development without requiring the character to abandon every recognisable feature. Yet acknowledgment has a limited scope: recognising Amy's importance does not establish that all the previous demands have been renegotiated. The scene secures a renewed relationship whose practical consequences must be assessed through later interactions.

Serial storytelling makes that assessment necessary. Reconciliation offers a decisive emotional event, while everyday reciprocity develops less conclusively. The later negotiation of cohabitation and privacy shows that renewed commitment generates further questions rather than eliminating them. A character can become more expressive while remaining inconsistent in the treatment of another person's needs. Within *The Big Bang Theory*, change therefore appears as an uneven process shaped by the continued availability of familiar comic habits.

Separation and reconciliation revise the authority of the agreements by locating it within continuing willingness. Amy's withdrawal establishes that patience does not constitute permanent permission; Sheldon's later refusal establishes that renewed interest does not oblige immediate return. Their eventual reconciliation depends on a mutual answer given in the present. These moments provide a more reciprocal basis for intimacy, although they do not certify the fairness of every subsequent interaction. The series represents attachment as something capable of surviving reconsideration, while leaving its everyday terms open to further dispute.

Conclusion: Reciprocity Beyond the Written Agreement

The agreements in *The Big Bang Theory* make the expectations of intimacy unusually explicit. They identify duties that might otherwise remain assumed and give characters a language through which to assert needs. Their apparent precision, however, does not settle whether those needs receive equal consideration. Across the relationships examined, the decisive questions concern who establishes the terms, who controls their interpretation, and what happens when another participant objects. A provision can protect a boundary or reinforce an unequal arrangement. Its significance emerges through its application, particularly when present circumstances conflict with an earlier commitment.

Sheldon and Leonard's shared domestic life demonstrates this tension. The roommate agreement sometimes gives Leonard grounds to defend his participation, yet Sheldon's authority over interpretation can diminish those grounds. Priya's intervention exposes the difference between what the document permits and what its drafter prefers. Sheldon's subsequent use of threatened disclosure shows how acceptance can be obtained through pressure unrelated to the disagreement itself. The resulting signature cannot establish the fairness of the revised terms. Leonard's later demand for appreciation identifies a further problem: assistance that has become familiar can cease to be recognised as a contribution. Contractual obligation then obscures the time and effort through which companionship is maintained.

Sheldon and Amy's relationship extends the inquiry into romantic recognition, physical affection, and privacy. Their agreement gives an uncertain attachment a definite status, but that recognition remains open to negotiation. Amy can invoke its provisions to claim care, just as she can question restrictions that do not accommodate her expectations. Sheldon's boundaries also require recognition; her desire for greater closeness cannot establish an obligation to provide it. The analysis consequently distinguishes continuing a relationship from consenting to every interaction within it. Physical intimacy, shared living, and the disclosure of personal information remain particular decisions whose terms cannot be permanently settled by the designation of boyfriend or girlfriend.

The comparison with Leonard and Penny qualifies any general rejection of agreements. Their request for a document tailored to their marriage suggests that explicit expectations can become useful when habitual assumptions produce disappointment. Formal negotiation may clarify a concern that affection alone has failed to communicate. Its usefulness nevertheless depends on how both partners participate and whether the arrangement accommodates the time needed to understand and express dissatisfaction. A requirement to communicate cannot reasonably eliminate uncertainty, and a promise to make an effort cannot determine when that effort will be welcome.

The programme's comic form complicates these relational questions. Administrative language, interruption, recurring demands, and recognisable patterns of response make unequal expectations available as humour. Comedy can expose self-interest while allowing the behaviour that produces it to remain familiar. An affectionate resolution may communicate repair without establishing a lasting redistribution of responsibility. This distinction is important to a media studies reading: the pleasure of narrative closure and the fairness of the relationship cannot be treated as equivalent. The agreements must be understood through the exchanges and resolutions that give them their comic meaning.

Separation and reconciliation establish the limits of their authority most clearly. Amy's decision to step back shows

that love and patience do not remove the right to reconsider participation. Sheldon's later refusal to resume the relationship demonstrates that reconciliation also requires his present willingness. Their eventual return to each other rests on mutual acknowledgment, while subsequent disagreements show that renewed commitment does not complete the work of negotiation. Emotional development remains uneven.

The paper therefore reads contractual intimacy in *The Big Bang Theory* as an attempt to make attachment manageable whose success depends on practices the document cannot guarantee. Clarity matters, but so do informed participation, acknowledgment of effort, and the capacity to revise an expectation. Reciprocity is sustained when a partner's changing circumstances become a reason to listen rather than an exception to be defeated. The most consequential term of an intimate agreement is the continuing authority of those involved to question what it asks of them.

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Bridging the L2 Speaking Gap through Multimodal Re-Speaking

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Abstract—*Oral fluency in English does not always grow along with the acquisition of vocabulary, grammar and written language. Learners' hesitation, anxiety and difficulties in spontaneous oral communication are not uncommon when they perform well in academic English. The study investigates the effectiveness of a Multimodal Re-Speaking Cycle (MRC), an integrated classroom intervention that aims at facilitating secondary-school students' linguistic knowledge to be expressed orally. A quasi-experimental study was conducted on a group of 40 students of Class IX of a secondary school in Ernakulam district, Kerala. The results were evaluated based on a pre-test post-test speaking task. The evaluation method followed a recurring pattern of multimodal input like verbal self-analysis, group interaction, verbal intervention re-speaking, and reflection. The mean score increased from 5.11 (SD = 2.32) in the pre-test to 17.45 (SD = 2.67) in the post-test, producing a mean gain of 12.34 points. It was a very large within group effect size (Cohen's dz = 4.19), and there was a statistically significant difference, t (39) = 26.52, p < .001. 40 participants had higher post-test scores. The results indicate the importance of a structured cycle of repeated oral performance, noticing, multimodal support, interaction, and scaffolding as a productive way to develop L2 speaking. The study demonstrates the pedagogical potential of viewing attempts at first speaking as less of a performance and more as an opportunity for reflection, support and better re-speaking.*

Keywords— ***L2 speaking, oral performance, task repetition, re-speaking, multimodal learning, noticing***

I. INTRODUCTION

English has a significant role in the Indian educational system and is taught from the school level, however, continuous instruction in English as a language of learning doesn't necessarily foster the confidence or competence of the learners' spoken skills. This means that learners can grasp grammatical structures, do written work, read English literature, and do examinations well but have a hard time engaging in spontaneous conversation in English. The gap between the knowledge of the language and its use in oral expression is an essential pedagogical problem.

Several processes are necessary to take place almost concurrently when one is speaking. The learner needs to think up ideas, find words to use, construct sentences and structures, pronounce words with sufficient intelligibility, adjust what was said to the listener's feedback, and keep the conversation going. As a language activity, speaking gives little opportunity for planning and revising like many written activities do. Students might, for example, have the necessary language competences but not be able to apply them effectively in the time- and mind-bursting environment of an oral task.

This difference between the linguistic resources learners possesses and the resources they have access to for real-world communication is described as a knowledge–performance gap in the present study. This can happen due to lack of vocabulary or lack of the ability to organize thoughts during speech, poor interaction with language partners, as well as poor ability to recall words quickly, to articulate thoughts while speaking, and to keep going despite mistakes.

There is an effective aspect of speaking. Others can tell if someone hesitates, mispronounces or can't find a word. Errors, embarrassment, and negative assessment can then be an impediment for students to speak. This concern is especially relevant as the willingness to communicate is also related to linguistic ability, perceived linguistic ability, anxiety, and situational factors (MacIntyre et al.).

This was reiterated as a problem to be addressed because of the researcher's previous study of the difficulty of English-speaking. A large proportion of the respondents indicated that they had knowledge of English but found it difficult to carry a conversation. Learners also came to understand that they depended on their mother tongue translation, that they were anxious, afraid to make errors, lacked vocabulary and pronunciation, and required a speaking partner. The results indicated that grammar and vocabulary explanations would not be sufficient to solve the problem. Learners needed to be given opportunities to transform linguistic knowledge into usable oral language, with support.

To answer this need, the present study proposes a Multimodal Re-Speaking Cycle (MRC). MRC is a combination of multimodal stimuli, initial speaking, self-observation, guided noticing, peer interaction, linguistic scaffolding, re-speaking, and reflection. It is intended to be a method of carefully incorporating several pedagogical approaches into a recurring classroom procedure rather than a novel philosophy of second language acquisition.

The essential point is that the first time does not always count as the last time.The first speech performance shows problems; the learner's own self-observation and noticing make problems available for reflection; peer interaction and scaffolding offers help to the learner; re-speaking provides an immediate opportunity for the learner to reformulate his/her speech performance. The study thus aims to find out if there is any measurable improvement in the oral performance of class IX students at Kerala School because of participating in this structured cycle.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 L2 Speaking, Anxiety, and Oral Performance

L2 speaking is not just about the knowledge of language. Learners should learn and apply language in an actual real time communicative process. Skehan suggests that learners have limited attentional resources and might struggle to focus their attention on fluency, accuracy, and complexity at the same time. Therefore, the ability to remember and use a grammatical structure or a word acquired doesn't necessarily mean that the learner will be able to do so in spontaneous situations.

Goh and Burns also believe that speaking should be taught, and not merely as an arena to demonstrate language already learnt. Learners must be given opportunities to plan, perform, interact, and reflect on their oral production. The emphasis in this view is on the importance of speaking pedagogy for transitioning from language knowledge to communicative use.

There can be affective factors that exacerbate this change. Two of the factors Horwitz and Cope believe to be important in foreign-language anxiety are communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. The model of willingness to communicate by MacIntyre further indicates that in addition to linguistic competence, other factors such as situational confidence and perceived competence are also essential in L2 communication.

The problem is still pertinent in the educational context in India where students might have been formally taught English for a few years but not have been given chances to participate in sustained oral use of English. There has also been recent research that showed anxiety in ELC in Kerala. Das & Zachariah (2025) examined the English-language classroom anxiety and writing anxiety and performance relationship with 188 indigenous school students of Kerala. The study has shed light on the concern of the students of the region regarding the oral use of English language.

(2.2) Task Repetition and Re-Speaking

Repetition of tasks is important in the process of MRC. In repeated task performance, Bygate proved that it can have an effect on the structure and control of oral production. During this time, Bygate and Samuda evolved this idea of repetition as an integrative planning process, where learners re-visit and re-work the language that has been used in the previous production. Learners are receiving an opportunity to restructure communication in a novel methodology. This has been confirmed by another recent research. Aaj, Maftoon and Siyyari investigated the immediate and delayed task repetition with young EFL learners and determined that immediate repetition had a positive impact on complexity, accuracy and fluency and delayed repetition also had a positive effect on aspects of oral performance. Their work has been very relevant due to the fact that they demonstrate the use of task repetition with younger learners.

Another study, which was conducted in a classroom where the students learned the same or parallel tasks with the same communicative content, also supports the value of repeated exposure to familiar communicative content particularly for fluency. More importantly, the results of the meta-analysis carried out by Abdi Tabari, Zhuang and Farahanynia (2025) reveal that task repetition has positive effects on L2 oral performance with regards to various dimensions such as complexity, accuracy, lexical complexity and fluency. A

wide variety of factors such as task or learning context, type of repetition influences the effects, which implies that repetition can be useful but not necessarily.

So, asking the learner to do the same speaking task does not lead to the improvement of the learner and MRC does not consider that the learner will improve when he or she does the same speaking task as before. It's about what goes on between the first and the next act.

2.3 Noticing, Multimodality, and Scaffolding

From noticing, one can derive a theory for the reflective aspect of MRC, as Schmidt does. It can assist learners in being able to recognize the variations in their intended and actual output. This is particularly the case to produce oral language, such as when speaking. Hesitation, lexical difficulty, repetition, or difficulty in pronunciation may be out of immediate awareness if an utterance is produced.

Oral performance elements will be re-thought based on the recorded and guided self-observation. Campbell's teaching training observation, model input, and task repetition emphasizes the pedagogical benefits of providing reflection between performances. In MRC, the awareness is not complete; rather, it is selective, that is, students can identify manageable difficulties that they can make a difference in if they speak about them again.

Support through multimodal stimuli is given. Visual material such as images, sequences of images or short AV material, or situational prompts, can provide meaningful content for learners to speak about, which will consequently make the generation of ideas and language less demanding. Their involvement with the MRC is not about technology but thinking and talking.

Scaffolding is not given before, but after the first performance. Vocabulary, expressions, and pronunciation support (connectors, sentence starters) are provided as they are needed at the time of speaking. This implies that the support can intervene in a "communicative need" experienced by the learner, rather than making available a "whole model" that the learner can emulate.

Peer interaction is another form of interaction that plays a similar role. It allows the opportunities for pupils to speak to be spread out and allows pupils to hear alternative expressions, test language, negotiate meaning, and rehearse ideas. MRC purposely introduces peer interaction between initial interaction and re-speaking with the aim of some direct contribution to re-formulation.

2.4 Research Gap

Some of the earlier research has given evidence of the importance of task repetition, noticing, interaction and multimodal support and affective factors in L2 speaking. However, each of these components is studied separately. Research into repeating tends to be on fluency, accuracy and complexity; research into anxiety tends to be on affective barriers; research into noticing or multimodality tends to be on individual pedagogical mechanisms.

Moreover, while there is more research in younger children, the context of ESL secondary school is relatively underrepresented compared to the adult/ college context. In the field of research, some reports on language anxiety and communicable issues have been noted; the field of research in the Indian context for structured oral performance development of school learners is yet to be explored extensively regarding the communicative issues.

The study intertwines these principles into one recursive sequence:

Multimodal Stimulus →Initial Speaking →Self-observation →Guided noticing →Peer interaction →Linguistic scaffolding →Re-Speaking →Reflection

The contribution is thus not one of assuming that the novelty of the linguistic components is what one is interested in, but rather to consider a classroom procedure that is systematic and integrated, and whose aim is to fill the gap between linguistic knowledge and oral performance.

III. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was set against the aim of investigating the potential of the Multimodal Re-Speaking Cycle for the development of L2 oral skills of secondary school learners. It was used to identify a particular level at which the learners begin their oral-performance, to perform the structured re-speaking cycle, and to make comparisons of pre- and post-oral-performance scores.

The main research question was:

Do there appear to be significant differences between the L2 oral-performance scores of secondary-school students who took part in a Multimodal Re-Speaking Cycle and secondary-school students who did not take part in the cycle?

The null hypothesis was that the mean pretest scores would not be significantly different from the mean post test scores after the intervention and the alternative hypothesis was that the mean post test scores would be greater than the mean pretest scores following the intervention.

IV. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design and Participants

The study was conducted with a group of 40 students of class IX in a secondary school in the Ernakulam district of

Kerala. A pre-test was given in speech prior to the intervention, and a post-test was conducted after the instruction programme and MRC.The design enabled the post-intervention performances of each learner to be compared with their initial performances.

4.2 Speaking Assessment

The pre-test and post-test were both similar to the speaking assessment that was given a maximum of 25 marks each. Five areas of oral performance were looked at: fluency, vocabulary and lexical resource, grammatical control, pronunciation/comprehensibility, and communicative effectiveness.

Multiple dimensions were used to recognise that effective oral performance is not something that can be summarised as grammatical accuracy. Learners also need to arrange their ideas, acquire vocabulary, maintain comprehensible speech, and successfully convey meaning.

4.3 Multimodal Re-Speaking Cycle

The intervention was a replication of eight stages. The intervention was based on eight recurring stages.

In the multimodal stimulus stage, learners were presented with visual, verbal, or audiovisual information that provided meaningful content for the learners to use for communication. Then they made a first attempt to speak using the language they could muster and followed it up with another attempt. Then they made an initial attempt to speak, using the language that they had, and tried again.

In self-observation, learners revisited their own performance; guided noticing focused on selected difficulties either in hesitation or lexical gaps, in pronunciation, in expressions that are not complete, or in organisation.

Learners were then exposed to peer interaction, allowing them to share ideas and meet with other expressions. Linguistic scaffolding followed to offer specific vocabulary, pronunciation cues, sentence building, connectors or other language needed that emerged as a result of the difficulties identified during the initial performance.

In the re-speaking task, learners repeated the task, but they did not memorize their first response, rather they reconstructed it. Lastly, reflection helped them see what they could do better and any on-going challenges.

It was thus necessary to make the following progression:

attempt → observation → noticing → support → reconstructed performance.

The intervention lasted for about six weeks, with 2 sessions each week with about 12 sessions lasting 40-45 minutes.

4.4 Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the analysis of the pre-test and post-test scores. Means, standard deviations, medians, ranges of scores, and individual gains were investigated. A paired-samples t-test was used to assess the significance of the mean difference since the same 40 learners took both assessments. A p value of $< .05$ was chosen as the criterion for statistical significance.

Cohen's dz was also computed to assess the extent of change on an individual level.

V. RESULTS

Learners' improvement was significant between the two assessments. The mean pre-test score was 5.11 out of 25 (SD = 2.32), while the mean post-test score increased to 17.45 (SD = 2.67). The median went up from 5.00 to 17.00. The pre-test scores vary from 0 to 9, and the post-test scores vary from 13 to 23.

Table 1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Performance

Measure	Pre-Test	Post-Test
N	40	40
Mean	5.11	17.45
SD	2.32	2.67
Median	5.00	17.00
Minimum	0	13
Maximum	9	23

Overall mean gain was 12.34 marks and the standard deviation of the gain-scores was about 2.94. Remarkably, all 40 participants had higher post-test scores than their pre-test scores. This meant that the improvement of only some of the better pupils in the group was not the cause of the rise in the group mean.

The difference was statistically significant ($t(39) = 26.52$, $p < .001$) and was confirmed using a paired-samples t-test. The 95% confidence interval for the mean gain was around 11.40 to 13.28 marks. So, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Cohen's dz = 4.19, which is a very large within group difference. This effect size reflects the pre/post change of the group that participated in the intervention and does not imply that MRC is superior to an alternative teaching approach in a controlled setting.

VI. DISCUSSION

The results show that the use of Multimodal Re-Speaking Cycle significantly improved the oral-performance scores of the learners. There was a statistically significant difference between the mean value, which increased from 5.11 to 17.45, and all 40 learners had improved. The results

of this study support the pedagogical validity of teaching speaking as a process as opposed to a final product.

6.1 Language Knowledge to Oral Use

The research is especially salient for the knowledge–performance gap that was a catalyst for the study. In the primary efforts of MRC, it was not the aim of providing learners with more abstract knowledge of English. Instead, they were encouraged repeatedly to draw upon and use the linguistic resources they had at their disposal in communicative contexts.

The importance of first-time speaking was clear as it helped to make the points that may be missed in the written part of the exercise obvious. Problems in lexical retrieval and pronunciation, grammatical formulation, fluency, and organisation were found in spontaneous speech. When performance issues arose due to difficulties rather than being pre-selected because of the teacher's language problems, these were then observed and scaffolded.

This process is similar to the process Goh and Burns recommend (2006): "It is suggested that speaking needs to be made explicit by focusing on performance, interaction, and reflection." The utility of knowledge is communicative when the student has repeated opportunities to retrieve and reorganize knowledge in the speech.

Research on task repetition is also in line with this. Bygate and Bygate and Samuda show that the requirements for conceptual activity in a task can become less with prior knowledge.The results are also consistent with recent evidence. Aaj, Maftoon and Siyyari experienced positive outcomes with repetition with younger children; Hunter experienced positive outcomes with repetition of the same communicative content. The 2025 meta-analysis conducted by Abdi Tabari, Zhuang and Farahanynia provides more support with positive results found for task repetition in terms of several dimensions of L2 oral performance.

MRC is no simple repetition, however. Learners observe, notice, interact, and get targeted support between performances. The second performance is to be a re-construction and NOT a replica of the first.

This difference might be a partial explanation for the pedagogical value of re-speaking. If learners simply repeat a failure, they can help to cement in place any weaknesses that they have. When it is repeated with reflection and support, then the learner will have a base to change the next repetition.

6.2 Noticing, Interaction and Scaffolding

Noticing is important in connecting first and subsequent performance. Schmidt's description of the role of conscious attention indicates that students would benefit in their awareness of what they know and don't know in their target language. In MRC, students were asked to focus on a few errors instead of writing down all the errors. This maintained an interest in communication.

It was especially important to speak as soon as possible. If you see a problem and don't use a better version of it, it won't be of much use. Awareness followed Action in the cycle.

Peer support was another form of support. Learners were able to hear other ways of saying things and they could practise their thoughts and talk with other people than the teacher. This is particularly significant when it comes to the researcher's previous discovery that there was a need to have speaking partners as perceived by the learners themselves.

Scaffolding was also malleable. Full model answers were not given prior to the first attempt, but linguistic support was given after learners have experienced communicative difficulty. Vocabulary or expressions thus met a need and could be used when re-speaking.

To enhance this process, multimodal prompts provide meaningful content from which to speak. Their intent would not have been to make a technological claim for the intervention, but to lessen the simultaneous load of content and language.

6.3 Interpreting the Improvement

Assessment of the learner's improvement was done. A significant within-group shift is indicated by a change of 12.34 points on a 25-point scale and a Cohen's dz of 4.19. It was observed that all the participants had made significant improvements.

There was, however, still room for improvement as the initial mean was only 5.11. Oral assessment may also have become familiar due to repeated tasks of speech. It is not possible to completely rule out other factors such as regular teaching in the classroom or increasing intimacy with the speaking context.The paired sample result is statistically significant if there is a reliable difference between the two sets of scores, but it does not prove that MRC was responsible for this improvement.

The most defensible conclusion is thus that the participating learners' oral-performance scores showed a large and consistent increase when participating in MRC. There would be greater cause and effect if there was a controlled study.

VII. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Interpretation of the result proves that the strategies used can enhance the speaking ability of the learners. The initial

response can be used as a tool for diagnosis to identify the areas that require support. Additionally, the study also shows that the mechanical repetition of tasks is not required.

In cases of reflection, interaction and scaffolding between performances, learners can reformulate instead of memorise speech via repetition. Likewise, there shouldn't be corrections for each and every first attempt. Selected problems can be solved during performances while maintaining the communicative flow, while also offering linguistic guidance.

The MRC procedure is also rather flexible to use in a typical classroom. The multimodal support does not have to be technologically advanced; it can be pictures, short clips, situational prompts, or visual sequences. Classrooms can be conducive to speaking practice when individual teacher–student interaction is limited, while pair and group interaction can increase the opportunities for speaking.

It should be noted, however, that there are several restrictions. The study only sampled 40 secondary school learners within one secondary school, which also restricted the wider applicability of the study. Also, the intervention was relatively brief.

Furthermore, an overall speaking score was used for the present analysis. Additional research might focus on fluency, grammatical correctness, word knowledge, pronunciation, and communication skills individually. Direct measurement of the potential impact of MRC on speaking anxiety and willingness to communicate with validated instruments is also needed. The use of comparison groups, larger number of learners, delay of the post-test, learner interviews, and detailed analysis of recorded speech in future research could yield more convincing data on how and why re-speaking affects oral development.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study examines one of the main challenges faced by learners of the English language. Although they have knowledge of the language, their ability to communicate is limited. To address this gap between knowledge and performance, the Multimodal Re-Speaking Cycle was created for the classroom setting that incorporates multimodal stimulus, initial speaking, self-observation, noticing, peer interaction, scaffolding, re-speaking, and reflection.

All participants (40 learners) made significant gains, with the mean oral-performance score going from 5.11 to 17.45 out of 25. All participants improved with a mean gain of 12.34 that was statistically significant, $t(39) = 26.52$, $p < .001$. The results suggest that structured re-speaking can be an effective context for the development of L2 oral performance.

Task repetition, noticing, scaffolding, multimodality, and peer interaction are well established in theoretical and empirical bases for task repetition, noticing, scaffolding, multimodality, and peer interaction. The value to be gained from it is to make use of these processes in a unified sequence in the classroom, whereby a first attempt to speak is not the last test of ability, but an opportunity to learn how to speak better.

The pedagogical principle manifested from the study is simple: learners do not necessarily have to be accredited by their first attempt. The classroom provides opportunities for them to have challenges as well as opportunities for support and opportunities to speak again. If students have some knowledge of the language but are still reluctant to speak it, then that bridge can be a crucial step towards achieving communicative competence.

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A Study on the Challenges and Safeguard Mechanisms in the Exercise of Procuratorial Investigation and Verification Powers in Civil Enforcement

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Abstract— *The power of China's procuratorates to investigate and verify in civil enforcement is established at the normative level, yet its operation is constrained by path dependence on trial-supervision paradigms and the coercive, fast-moving character of enforcement. Rigid initiation thresholds, the absence of coercive deterrents, court–procuratorate data silos, and weak binding force of supervisory outputs impair both procedural and substantive fairness. Grounded in the doctrinal separation of adjudication and enforcement, this article diagnoses these dilemmas and proposes four interlocking reforms: concurrent ex-officio oversight, tiered limited coercive safeguards backed by judicial disciplinary referrals, real-time digital integration across agencies, and a closed-loop accountability regime for procuratorial recommendations. This reconstruction turns enforcement oversight into substantive check-and-balance and offers theoretical reference for the forthcoming Civil Compulsory Enforcement Law.*

Keywords— ***Civil Enforcement, Power of Investigation and Verification, Procuratorial Supervision, Digital Procuratorate, Judicial Compulsory Measures, Legal Dogmatics***

I. INTRODUCTION

Civil compulsory enforcement is the concluding, "last-mile" stage of civil justice, yet an executory title does not guarantee satisfaction: debtors conceal assets through sophisticated strategies, and enforcement agencies may act passively or overreach. Procuratorial oversight of civil enforcement is the constitutionally grounded safeguard that constrains public authority and protects private claims. China's top-level judicial policy has made this a priority: the Opinions on Strengthening the Legal Supervision Work of Procuratorial Organs in the New Era (Central Document No. 28) mandates deepened supervision over civil, administrative, and criminal enforcement, emphasizing precise, substantive fact-finding through thorough investigation (Tang, 2025).

At the statutory level, Article 221 of the amended Civil Procedure Law establishes the procuratorate's power of investigation and verification, marking an intentional transition in civil procuratorial supervision from static paper review toward dynamic, empirical verification. To implement this mandate, the Supreme People's Court and the Supreme People's Procuratorate jointly issued the Provisions on Several Issues Concerning Legal Supervision of Civil Enforcement Activities, and the Supreme People's Procuratorate promulgated the revised Rules of the People's Procuratorate on Supervision of Civil Litigation. Joint provisions on access to duplicate copies of case files in civil, administrative, and enforcement cases further demonstrate a sustained effort to break through longstanding institutional divisions between the judiciary and the procuratorate.

An operational paradox persists despite these advances. Civil execution differs fundamentally from trial: it is inquisitorial, unilaterally coercive, and marked by shifting assets and irreversible dispositions, so reviewing court dockets cannot redress illicit terminations, flawed valuations, or passive delays (Xiao, 2024). Procurators

seeking facts meet resistance or refusal from executing courts, assisting agencies, and evasive debtors, yet the investigative power is non-coercive, giving them no procedural sanctions to compel cooperation. Deprived of rigorous deterrent tools, supervision risks degenerating into an ineffective formality, compromising the policy goal of precise oversight at the final stage of civil justice (Zhang, 2023).

Civil-procuratorship scholarship has centered on trial supervision—fraudulent litigation, evidentiary standards, and final-judgment review—whose constructs of procedural restraint, party disposition, and judicial passivity (Fan, 2015) do not travel cleanly to enforcement. Adjudication authoritatively declares substantive rights; enforcement coercively realizes established claims (Dang, 2022). Transposing a passive trial-oversight posture onto fast-moving execution strips the procuratorate of its functional utility.

External oversight of civil enforcement is a distinctive feature of the Chinese system. Civil-law jurisdictions entrust execution to executing judges or specialized enforcement courts wielding statutory coercive powers; common-law systems leave creditors to private-law devices such as charging orders, garnishment, and writs of execution, with any review of enforcement conduct situated largely within the courts. China's model—an independent constitutional supervisory organ exercising investigative and verification powers over court enforcement—is unusual, and its experience tests whether a non-coercive external organ can discipline state execution power without itself holding compulsory measures. This institutional distinctiveness lends the Chinese experience broader comparative significance, contributing not only to Chinese procedural scholarship but to the comparative literature on the institutional design of execution oversight and the separation of functions between adjudication and supervision.

To fill this gap, this article analyzes the structural contradictions inhibiting procuratorial investigation and verification in civil enforcement—information asymmetries, incomplete legislative authorization, and rigid procedural doctrine—and proposes a reform pathway: a dual-track initiation mechanism permitting ex officio intervention, limited coercive safeguards backed by judicial sanctions, real-time court–procuratorate data sharing, and a closed-loop accountability framework for procuratorial recommendations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Domestic Scholarship on Civil Procuratorial Supervision and the Investigative-Verification Power

Chinese scholarship has developed along two main tracks. The first concerns the nature and operation of the investigative-verification power itself: early doctrine conceptualized it as an auxiliary, procedural instrument derived from the constitutional mandate of legal supervision, with three cardinal attributes—strictly supervisory, supplementary, and non-coercive (Gong & Yang, 2014; Dong, 2020). Fan (2015) examined its operational mechanism and procedural boundaries; later work turned to the practical dilemmas of exercising it, with Liao et al. (2019) identifying the tension between supervision and restriction, and Zhang (2023), approaching the subject from the rigidity of procuratorial legal supervision, arguing that its soft, non-coercive design undermines deterrence.

The second track treats civil-enforcement procuratorial supervision as a distinct field. Dang (2022) distinguished its functional orientation from trial supervision, stressing that the coercive, administrative character of execution requires mechanisms different from those designed for adjudication. Xiao (2024) and Xiao and Li (2024) examined its practical exploration and institutional improvement; Teng and Zhu (2024) analyzed key and difficult issues; Wu (2024) addressed its legislative expression and the incompleteness of statutory authorization. More recently, Chen and Ma (2025) studied the difficulties of supervising termination-of-enforcement cases, Wang and Zhao (2025) proposed institutional optimizations, Zhou et al. (2025) reviewed the investigative-verification power from the perspective of full-process supervision, and Jin and Jing (2025) explored the technical pathway of big-data-empowered supervision.

2.2 Comparative Perspectives on Enforcement Oversight

Civil-law jurisdictions entrust supervision of execution to executing judges or specialized enforcement courts operating under statutory coercive powers; common-law systems, by contrast, leave judgment creditors to private-law devices such as charging orders, garnishment, and writs of execution, with any review of enforcement conduct situated largely within the courts. China's model—an independent constitutional organ exercising investigative and verification powers over court enforcement—is comparatively unusual, and tests whether a non-coercive external organ can effectively discipline the coercive exercise of state execution power without itself being granted compulsory measures.

2.3 Research Gap and the Present Contribution

Existing studies remain fragmented in three respects. First, trial-supervision constructs of procedural restraint, party disposition, and judicial passivity (Fan, 2015; Dang, 2022) are frequently transposed onto enforcement without regard for its distinct character. Second, although recent studies identify practical difficulties (Chen & Ma, 2025; Zhou et al., 2025), few offer a systematic doctrinal analysis connecting operational challenges to structural causes. Third, the comparative dimension of the Chinese model is underdeveloped. This article addresses these gaps by tracing the challenges' causes and proposing an integrated four-pillar reform pathway.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a doctrinal (legal-dogmatic) methodology, a qualitative, normative approach suited to questions of legal interpretation and institutional design. Rather than collecting primary field data, it analyzes positive law and interpretive practice to identify doctrinal gaps and formulate grounded reforms, drawing on Article 221 of the Civil Procedure Law and Article 21 of the Organic Law of the People's Procuratorates, the judicial interpretations and departmental rules of the Supreme People's Court and Supreme People's Procuratorate (including the Rules of the People's Procuratorates on Supervision of Civil Litigation), and the Central Committee's Opinions on Strengthening the Legal Supervision Work of Procuratorial Organs in the New Era (Central Document No. 28).

The study combines three strands of evidence. First, doctrinal analysis of the relevant provisions establishes the normative foundation and distinctiveness of the power in civil enforcement. Second, case analysis, principally Guiding Case No. 109, shows how covert enforcement misconduct can evade static, paper-based review. Third, official statistics in the White Paper on Civil Procuratorial Work (2025) document the scale of the challenge—67,151 enforcement-supervision cases accepted in 2025, 46,841 challenging improper termination of enforcement proceedings, and the discrepancy between a 96.1 percent nominal adoption rate and roughly 6 percent substantive completion of procuratorial recommendations. These indicators are used descriptively, not to test causal hypotheses. The article proceeds in four steps: establishing the doctrinal basis and distinctiveness of the power; identifying the practical challenges across initiation, cooperation, lead identification, and enforcement of findings; tracing the structural causes; and proposing an integrated four-pillar reform pathway. As a doctrinal study of public sources and official statistics, it involved no human subjects and required no ethical approval.

IV. THE LEGAL LOGIC AND DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE PROCURATORIAL AUTHORITY TO INVESTIGATE AND VERIFY IN CIVIL ENFORCEMENT

4.1 General Legal Principles Governing the Civil Procuratorial Power of Investigation and Verification and Its Functional Emphasis in the Enforcement Stage

The modern authority to conduct civil investigations is codified in Article 21 of the amended Organic Law of the People's Procuratorates (2018), which integrated fragmented local and departmental rules into a statutory power (Dong, 2020). In mainstream doctrine it is an auxiliary, procedural instrument derived from constitutional legal supervision (Gong & Yang, 2014), typically assigned three cardinal attributes:

First, it is strictly supervisory rather than adjudicative. Its objective is to ensure the uniform, correct implementation of national law and to rectify unlawful acts committed by public organs, rather than to replace the judicial function of determining substantive rights and obligations (Dong, 2020).

Second, it is supplementary. Investigation and verification serve as an auxiliary mechanism to supplement the primary evidentiary record; they are not intended to displace the private parties' fundamental burden of proof, nor should they absorb the court's statutory obligation to investigate evidence ex officio (Gong & Yang, 2014).

Third, it is non-coercive. By standard statutory definition, the exercise of civil investigative powers cannot involve direct compulsory measures that restrict personal liberty or encumber property, such as arrest, detention, search, seizure, or the freezing of bank accounts (Dong, 2020).

These attributes, however, require a functional distinction between “investigation” (diaocha) and “verification” (heshi) across procedural settings (Liao et al., 2019). In civil trial supervision the factual basis of the dispute has already been tested through adversarial presentation and judicial examination, and the resulting docket is a formal, self-contained record; oversight is therefore largely “verification”—a secondary, retrospective review of whether the record sustains the lower court's legal findings (Teng & Zhu, 2024).

In enforcement the balance reverses. Deviations stem not from flawed legal reasoning in the docket but

from bureaucratic negligence, systemic delay, collusive transfers, or failures to identify, seize, and liquidate property; the file is silent or incomplete, leaving "no evidence to verify" within its four corners (Xiao & Li, 2024). Desk review cannot detect covert bad-faith transfers, unrecorded informal settlements, or artificial termination, so the priority shifts from passive "verification" to proactive "investigation": procurators must venture outside the paper record to gather independent facts and primary evidence in order to identify and correct deviations (Xiao & Li, 2024).

4.2 The Distinctive Nature of the Procuratorial Authority to Investigate and Verify in Civil Enforcement

Recognizing the necessity of proactive investigation reveals the fundamental differences between trial supervision and enforcement oversight across three dimensions: the scope of intervention, the temporal window of involvement, and the adversarial environment.

On scope, trial supervision rests heavily on judicial restraint: civil trial is structured as an isosceles triangle in which two private parties interact on equal procedural footing before a neutral, passive judge (Fan, 2015), and proactive evidence-collection for one litigant would disrupt that equilibrium, exposing the supervisory organ to charges of partiality and distortion of party autonomy (Bai et al., 2025). This concern is largely inapplicable in enforcement.

Execution is not balanced contestation between equal adversaries but the unidirectional deployment of sovereign state power, restricting liberty or encumbering property to satisfy an existing legal obligation (Dang, 2022). The judgment debtor frequently resorts to deceptive stratagems to secrete assets, while the creditor lacks both the coercive authority and administrative reach to track concealed wealth; when the execution court neglects its tracking duties, private remedies become ineffective. An active investigatory posture thus constrains arbitrary state power, counters private bad faith, and corrects a structural failure in the machinery of execution (Xiao & Li, 2024).

On time, trial supervision operates as classic ex post facto review: once an executory judgment is entered, its text remains fixed, affording the supervisory organ ample time for retrospective analysis of the written record (Liao et al., 2019). Enforcement, by contrast, is dynamic and irreversible—a fast-moving sequence of registration, electronic asset queries, freezing, service, appraisal, auction, and distribution (Chen & Ma, 2025).

Where an enforcement officer appraises below market value, returns seized property to an evasive debtor, or sells real estate through an irregular judicial auction, the harm to the creditor is immediate and legally irreversible under the bona fide acquisition doctrine and the finality of auction transfers (Lin, 2025); retrospective review months or years later cannot restore the lost assets. Supervision must therefore be immediate, concurrent, and agile—"in-process supervision" penetrating key milestones to prevent dissipation before it becomes permanent (Dong, 2020).

Enforcement's adversarial setting also clashes with the non-coercive character of investigation, which is confined to soft measures—file review, voluntary interviews, written inquiries (Dong, 2020). Deployed into an uncooperative arena facing both state-coercive court departments and collusive debtors and third parties willing to engage in fraud, these tools, lacking direct contempt sanctions, meet widespread evasion—an institutional mismatch between soft methods and an intensely adversarial setting that seriously impedes practical oversight.

V. FINDINGS: PRACTICAL CHALLENGES FACING THE PROCURATORIAL POWER OF INVESTIGATION AND VERIFICATION IN CIVIL ENFORCEMENT

5.1 Rigid Initiation Procedures and Restrictions on Ex Officio Intervention

How supervision is initiated determines whether it can mobilize in time; current initiation rules, carried over from trial supervision, impede timely intervention in dynamic execution cases.

A primary obstacle is the remedies-first principle. Under Article 28 of the Rules of the People's Procuratorate on Supervision of Civil Litigation, applicants must first exhaust internal judicial remedies within the executing court—execution objections, appellate reconsideration, or execution-objection litigation (Supreme People's Procuratorate [SPP], 2021). This prevents premature interference in ongoing litigation, but applied unconditionally to enforcement it defeats timely relief. Civil execution is governed by urgency and dispositive finality: navigating an objection and its reconsideration can take months or years, during which the debtor dissipates assets, collusive auctions close, and proceeds are distributed. By the time the applicant satisfies the exhaustion requirement and petitions the procuratorate, the assets have disappeared and investigation is futile.

A related constraint is the narrow statutory framing of ex officio initiation. Article 37 of the Rules restricts self-initiated investigation to cases implicating national or public interests or serious judicial misconduct

such as bribery (SPP, 2021), overlooking the administrative, state-directed nature of enforcement.

Much execution misconduct—undervaluing real estate, delaying seizures, arbitrary case closure—infringes primarily upon private civil rights rather than the state treasury, so it falls outside "national or public interests" and escapes ex officio scrutiny. Some legislative drafts would condition ex officio investigations of judicial misconduct on a formal disciplinary or criminal case having already been initiated (Wu, 2024), reducing ex officio discovery to mere post-hoc confirmation and preventing the procuratorate from identifying systemic corruption or procedural fraud independently.

Initiation also over-relies on individual complaints. Empirical studies show that in multiple provinces, enforcement-supervision cases begun by individual petitions are a disproportionately small share of irregularities, with self-initiated filings often below ten percent of the caseload (Chen & Ma, 2025). Private creditors frequently lack the technical resources to identify hidden procedural errors, or avoid filing complaints out of fear of alienating the execution judge who controls their case. Without an automated data pipeline from the court's execution docket, supervision depends on sporadic informal petitions and leaves systemic omissions undetected.

5.2 "Difficulty in Verification" Amid a Hollow Obligation to Cooperate

Once an investigation begins, the procuratorate frequently encounters significant resistance from public and private entities. Although Article 221 of the Civil Procedure Law and relevant judicial interpretations recognize an obligation to cooperate with lawful procuratorial inquiries, this statutory duty lacks enforcement mechanisms—a lex imperfecta that establishes an abstract behavioral expectation without attaching procedural or punitive consequences for non-compliance.

This absence of deterrence is acute in complex, covert violations. In Guiding Case No. 109, released by the Supreme People's Procuratorate (2023), a Hubei real-estate enterprise sought enforcement supervision: an execution court commissioned an appraisal of valuable commercial land but failed to transfer the authentic cadastral files to the appraisal firm, enabling appraisers to reduce the floor-area ratio from 4.16 to 2.0; consequently, land worth approximately 210 million yuan was sold at an artificial valuation of only 57.78 million yuan.

The court docket appeared regular—an agency designated, a report prepared, an auction held—and static review would never have exposed the fraud. Investigators uncovered it only by going outside the docket to demand the original urban-planning archives from the municipal land bureau.

Guiding Case No. 109 shows that substantive distortion of execution authority hides in institutional gaps, collusive valuations, and informal transactions. Yet outside high-profile cases, third-party institutions—banks, appraisal firms, registries, and private companies—often refuse disclosure, citing confidentiality, banking privacy, or administrative burden, knowing the procuratorate cannot fine, order searches, or detain non-compliant actors. Without quasi-coercive measures or judicial contempt referrals, the power of investigation and verification remains a soft request, vulnerable to evasive delay by the entities under review.

Investigative tools are also unevenly deployed. Empirical analyses indicate that most enforcement-supervision files rely almost exclusively on passive requests, while advanced evidentiary techniques—judicial forensic accounting, expert price evaluation, digital data cross-matching, formal site inspections—are rarely utilized (Zhou et al., 2025). Investigations also suffer procedural informalities—unrecorded telephone inquiries, no on-site dossiers, omitted notices—undermining the reliability of the resulting evidence and confining findings to superficial procedural mistakes rather than substantive violations.

5.3 Delays in Identifying Leads and the Rampant "Termination of Cases"

Enforcement is final: once assets are liquidated and proceeds disbursed, reversal is legally and practically difficult. Effective supervision therefore needs timely, in-process intervention, yet oversight remains retrospective, learning of violations long after critical windows close (Wang & Zhao, 2025).

This lag is clearest in "termination of the current enforcement proceedings" (zhongjie benci zhixing chengxu, or zhongben). Under Chinese execution law, where exhaustive investigation confirms no seizable property, the court may order zhongben, temporarily closing the case while preserving the creditor's right to re-open enforcement when assets are located. In practice zhongben is often used to clear dockets and inflate administrative clearance rates, with cases terminated without exhausting required online asset-tracing or verifying real-estate holdings.

Official disclosures confirm the scale. The White Paper on Civil Procuratorial Work (2025) reports that procuratorial organs accepted 67,151 civil enforcement-supervision cases in 2025 (Supreme People's Procuratorate, 2025); within the "Procuratorial Protection of People's Livelihoods" campaign, 46,841 challenged

improper termination—nearly 70 percent of the enforcement-supervision caseload.

Behind these cases lies structural information asymmetry. Courts control the closed internal database tracking bank accounts, vehicles, corporate shares, and real estate (the Integrated Asset Tracing and Control System), to which procurators lack direct, continuous access. They must wait for frustrated creditors to submit a formal complaint, often months or years after the illicit order. By then bank balances are depleted, corporate entities dissolved, and physical assets transferred.

Interventions in 2025 recovered 1.18 billion yuan in improperly handled enforcement (Supreme People's Procuratorate, 2025), yet this is a small fraction of contested claims. Without synchronized data sharing there are no real-time early warnings, so concurrent oversight degenerates into delayed, post-hoc remedies.

5.4 The "Irreversible Loss" of Investigation Findings

The value of investigation depends on converting established factual findings into binding corrective actions. Under the prevailing statutory design, however, the primary instrument available to the procuratorate upon concluding an investigation is the procuratorial recommendation (jiancha jianyi)—an advisory legal document lacking direct executory force and not automatically suspending or overturning an ongoing court execution (Zhang, 2023).

This structural softness creates a discrepancy between formal acceptance and substantive remedial outcomes. Judicial statistics from 2025 put the nominal adoption rate of civil procuratorial recommendations by courts at 96.1 percent (Supreme People's Procuratorate, 2025). Yet in the critical category of improper zhongben terminations, only 2,817 cases were substantively “urged to completion by the courts,” representing approximately 6 percent of the 46,841 accepted cases in that category.

The gap between a 96.1 percent nominal adoption rate and a 6 percent substantive completion rate marks a fundamental bottleneck. Courts treat recommendations as administrative correspondence, replying pro forma to concede abstract deficiencies without re-locating property, vacating unlawful auctions, or disbursing funds. Because a recommendation does not stay execution, courts can adopt a strategy of superficial acceptance while leaving the situation unchanged; when resource-intensive findings cannot yield binding corrections, supervision collapses into administrative formality.

VI. FINDINGS: ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES BEHIND THE OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES OF THE POWER OF INVESTIGATION AND VERIFICATION IN CIVIL ENFORCEMENT SUPERVISION

6.1 Path Dependence on "Trial-Centricism" and the Blurred Conceptual Boundary Between Trial and Enforcement

The difficulties stem from path dependence on trial-centric supervision. During the foundational development of China's civil-supervision system, procedural models were designed around reviewing trials and appellate judgments (Xiao, 2024), elevating party autonomy, disposition, exhaustion of remedies, and judicial passivity to cardinal norms that were then transposed onto execution without regard for its distinct character.

Enforcement authority is nonetheless fundamentally distinct from adjudication: adjudication is passive, deliberative, and interpretive, resolving legal disputes; execution is proactive, administrative, and coercive, deploying state power to alter factual and legal reality (Dang, 2022). Treating party disposition as an absolute barrier to ex officio investigation ignores that execution debtors actively manipulate legal forms to evade debts, and that private creditors lack the coercive reach to unearth this bad faith independently.

Conditioning intervention on prior exhaustion of remedies likewise imports a sequential model built for final judgments, neglecting the fast-moving, irreversible nature of execution and preventing mechanisms tailored to its coercive dynamics.

6.2 The Supervisory Dilemma Arising from Incomplete Legislative Authorization

A secondary cause is incomplete legislative authorization (lex imperfecta)—a gap between abstract statutory grants and the specific powers procurators actually enjoy.

At the statutory level, the power rests on Article 221 of the Civil Procedure Law and Article 21 of the Organic Law of the People's Procuratorates, both brief and declaratory, recognizing the power in principle but omitting provisions on its scope, operational procedures, and enforcement safeguards. The detailed operational rules sit mainly in the Supreme People's Procuratorate's Rules on Supervision of Civil Litigation, which, as internal judicial interpretations and departmental regulations, bind only procuratorial organs and lack general external legal effect over courts, administrative agencies, commercial banks, and private citizens (Wu, 2024).

Thus, when third parties or execution courts refuse to provide financial records or cadastral dockets, the procuratorate has no clear statutory authority to impose direct sanctions. Unlike the executing court, which can rely on the Civil Procedure Law to fine, order civil detention, or initiate criminal prosecutions for obstructing justice, the procuratorate possesses no comparable tools. Against bad-faith obstruction or evasive refusal, supervision is reduced to an advisory request.

6.3 Data Barriers Entrench Supervisory Lags

Access to data is central to oversight in a digitized judicial system, and the third cause of delay is the persistence of data silos between courts and the procuratorate (Jin & Jing, 2025).

Over the past decade the Supreme People's Court has built a comprehensive digital enforcement ecosystem—the Nationwide Executive Command and Dispatch Platform and the Integrated Online Asset Tracing and Control System—linking courts to the central bank, commercial financial institutions, real-estate registries, vehicle-management bureaus, securities depositories, and enterprise registries, allowing execution judges to identify and encumber assets nationwide with high efficiency.

Procuratorial oversight remains largely isolated from this infrastructure. Due to institutional divisions, technical incompatibility, and agency boundaries, no automated real-time data-sharing pipeline connects the courts' asset-tracing systems to procuratorial offices at the national level (Jin & Jing, 2025), so procurators cannot monitor asset tracing or execution milestones as they occur.

Instead, supervisors review physical files or request dockets individually, reducing oversight to retrospective, fragmented review (Supreme People's Procuratorate, 2018). By the time an investigator manually checks whether assets were verified before a zhongben order, funds and property have moved beyond reach.

6.4 Institutional Deficiencies and Practical Deviations in Internal Case-Handling

Finally, internal procedural bottlenecks and risk-averse institutional cultures within the procuratorate itself impede the power.

Internally, case-handling guidelines lack clear, standardized criteria for approving investigative measures. Following judicial accountability reforms, quota-holding procurators (yuan'e jianchaguan) are theoretically empowered to exercise case-handling authority independently, yet initiating an investigation or requesting access to bank and real-estate records often still requires multi-tiered administrative approvals, including from department chiefs and the deputy procurator-general (Zhou et al., 2025), introducing delays ill-suited to the urgent timelines of civil enforcement.

The absence of clear standards fosters two tendencies: passive under-enforcement and, less often, arbitrary overreach. Under-enforcement predominates: fearing that vigorous field investigation will be seen as improper interference, and holding a traditional view that civil disputes are the parties' own, many procurators confine themselves to perfunctory file review.

They avoid forensic audits, on-site inquiries, and witness interviews absent clear external evidence of serious misconduct, underutilizing investigative authority and detaching supervision from execution realities.

VII. DISCUSSION: IMPROVING AND OPTIMIZING THE PATHWAYS FOR PROCURATORIAL INVESTIGATION AND VERIFICATION POWERS IN CIVIL ENFORCEMENT

Meeting these challenges requires systematic restructuring rather than piecemeal fixes—an integrated four-pillar framework that reconstructs the supervisory process from initiation to enforcement.

The framework spans four dimensions: moving beyond the remedies-first doctrine toward concurrent intervention; instituting limited but rigid statutory safeguards supported by judicial disciplinary referrals; establishing deep digital integration between judicial and procuratorial data networks; and building an enforceable closed-loop accountability mechanism for recommendations. Coordinated, these move legal supervision past its historically passive, paper-based boundaries into an effective check on the exercise of compulsory execution power.

7.1 Establishing the Principle of Giving Equal Weight to "Ex Officio Penetration" and "Simultaneous Oversight During the Process"

The first reform abandons the absolute application of the remedies-first rule. The forthcoming Civil Compulsory Enforcement Law should explicitly create a dual-track intervention model in which private party remedies and procuratorial supervision operate concurrently rather than strictly sequentially (Chen & Ma, 2025).

Where execution poses urgent risks—an imminent collusive judicial sale, the unlawful transfer of valuable real estate, or arbitrary disbursement of seized funds—the procuratorate must have statutory authority to intervene immediately upon receiving a complaint or

identifying an irregularity, without waiting for exhaustion of internal court reconsideration procedures (Xiao & Li, 2024). Requiring parties to exhaust multiple layers of internal review while property is actively being dissipated renders substantive legal protection impossible.

In tandem with this procedural flexibility, the statutory scope of ex officio initiation should be moderately expanded beyond "national or public interests." The law should recognize that systemic irregularities in civil execution—fraudulent litigation to evade debt, bad-faith asset transfers by debtors, improper zhongben terminations used to inflate clearance statistics, and gross negligence in asset appraisals—subvert judicial integrity and warrant self-initiated procuratorial scrutiny (Dang, 2022).

Objective statutory criteria would let procurators proactively identify systemic misconduct, using public-supervision initiative to compensate for the structural disadvantages of individual creditors.

7.2 Establishing Limited but Rigorous Safeguards for the Procuratorate's Authority to Investigate and Verify in Enforcement Proceedings

A central design question is whether the power should carry direct coercive force. Some commentators, by analogy to the court's contempt powers under the Civil Procedure Law, would grant procuratorates direct powers of search, detention, and fines (Zhang, 2023).

A more prudent institutional approach respects the functional separation of the judiciary and the procuratorate. The core purpose of procuratorial supervision is the legal oversight of public power, not the direct adjudication or forcible execution of private rights; granting procurators direct, unilateral coercive powers over citizens and property risks institutional overreach and blurs the boundaries between judicial execution and supervisory review.

The balanced solution is a tiered model combining a statutory duty to cooperate with the authority to recommend judicial disciplinary sanctions and limited direct powers in exceptional circumstances.

Legislatively, the Civil Compulsory Enforcement Law should declare a universal duty of public bodies, financial institutions, appraisal bureaus, and private parties to cooperate with lawful investigations. To make this duty enforceable, the statute should authorize procuratorates to issue formal Recommendations for Judicial Disciplinary Action (sifa chengjie jiancha jianyi) where an entity willfully conceals assets, destroys evidence, or refuses cooperation without legitimate grounds. Upon receipt, the People's Court would be statutorily required to conduct an expedited review and, where the obstruction meets the standards of the Civil Procedure Law, impose fines or civil detention accordingly.

This mechanism creates a coherent loop—the procuratorate discovers the obstruction, the court applies statutory sanctions following an expedited review, and both organs cooperate to preserve procedural integrity—retaining coercive deterrence within the judicial branch while preventing arbitrary exercise of authority by supervisory officers.

In high-risk cases of suspected official malfeasance—judicial corruption, collusive auctions, serious dereliction of duty—the law should permit immediate recourse to the procuratorate's internal criminal-coordination mechanisms. Under the integrated Four Major Procuratorial Functions framework, when civil supervisory investigators uncover credible evidence of criminal wrongdoing, they should refer the leads directly to specialized procuratorial-investigation departments or supervisory commissions (Dong, 2020). The credible prospect of criminal investigation supplies substantial institutional deterrence against evasive conduct.

7.3 Establishing a Pathway for Digital Procuratorial Systems to Empower Enforcement Investigation and Verification Authority

Digital integration converts retrospective case checks into automated, continuous oversight (Jin & Jing, 2025).

The core priority is authorized, real-time access to the courts' internal execution databases, above all the Integrated Online Asset Tracing and Control System and the nationwide milestone-tracking network. Through shared data interfaces, procurators could verify, as they occur, which bank accounts were queried, which real-estate holdings identified, whether vehicle titles were frozen, and how auction proceeds were allocated. This integration eliminates manual, physical file requests and gives supervisors an immediate, comprehensive view of procedural milestones as they unfold.

On this foundation, automated early-warning algorithms can detect irregular zhongben. The supervisory platform cross-references external records—real-estate, vehicle, equity, tax, and banking data—against execution orders and milestone records.

Cross-matching flags cases where a debtor holds identifiable, liquidable property yet the executing court terminated proceedings without exhausting required search-and-seizure protocols. Once flagged, the platform issues an automated early-warning alert that triggers targeted verification under Article 221 of the Civil

Procedure Law. By replacing randomized case screening with data-driven identification, this approach improves both the accuracy and the systemic reach of enforcement oversight.

7.4 Comprehensive Improvement of the Entire Process for Exercising the Procuratorial Power of Investigation and Verification in Enforcement Proceedings

Realizing these enhancements requires refining operational mechanisms across the full supervisory cycle—initiation, evidence, and enforcement of findings.

First, approvals should be tiered and risk-adjusted. Under the judicial accountability framework, quota procurators should have statutory authority to independently initiate standard, low-risk investigative actions—retrieving routine court files, conducting voluntary witness interviews, or verifying public registry records—without prior approval from higher-ranking administrative leaders.

Complex matters—trade secrets, state confidentiality, significant financial inquiries, or potential judicial-misconduct referrals—should retain formal multi-tiered approval by the deputy procurator-general, preventing bottlenecks in routine cases while preserving oversight of sensitive investigations.

Second, legal protections for case handlers should be strengthened. The statutory framework should clearly distinguish normal, good-faith procedural errors from deliberate misconduct, establishing an institutional mechanism for tolerating reasonable mistakes made in the performance of duties. Clear boundaries and protections encourage supervisory officers to exercise investigatory authority actively, overcoming the defensive, risk-averse posture that often prevails in current practice.

Finally, recommendations must become a structured, enforceable process rather than an open-ended suggestion. The law should impose a statutory duty on executing courts to respond substantively within a fixed period (e.g., thirty days), detailing the concrete measures taken to correct identified violations—re-opening a terminated case, re-initiating asset searches, or vacating an improper valuation.

If an execution court fails to respond within the statutory deadline or refuses to adopt the recommendation without valid grounds, an automatic escalation mechanism should trigger: the lower procuratorate refers the file to the superior procuratorate, which submits a formal supervisory demand to the superior court.

Adoption and substantive-completion rates should also be integrated into local judicial performance reviews and reported regularly to the standing committees of local People's Congresses. By linking supervisory findings to structural judicial evaluation and legislative oversight, this framework closes the loop, ensuring that substantiated findings produce binding, real-world remedies.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The challenges stem from an institutional and doctrinal misalignment—supervising an administrative, coercive, fast-moving execution process with passive, retrospective paradigms borrowed from trial litigation. If enforcement supervision remains an auxiliary, post-hoc, non-coercive formality deferring absolutely to internal court remedies, oversight cannot meet modern debt evasion and execution deviation.

Addressing this requires a doctrinal transition from soft, auxiliary review to substantive checks and balances. Execution is the direct exercise of sovereign authority to realize established private rights; when that authority is distorted by passive inaction, collusive valuation, or artificial case termination, it subverts judicial integrity and undermines the rule of law.

Grounding supervision in the functional realities of execution—concurrent ex officio initiation, tiered safeguards, digital integration, and an enforceable closed loop for recommendations—transforms the power of investigation and verification into a robust, responsive instrument.

As China codifies its Civil Compulsory Enforcement Law, this architecture offers a balanced theoretical foundation and institutional design for protecting lawful rights at the final stage of civil justice.

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The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

This doctrinal study relies exclusively on publicly available statutes, judicial decisions, official statistics, and published scholarly sources. No human subjects were involved in the research, and no ethical approval was required.

DECLARATIONS

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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Literary Criticism of Sir Philip Sidney: A Critical Study on An Apology for Poetry

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Abstract— *Sir Philip Sidney's "An Apology for Poetry," also known as "The Defense of Poesy," is one of the foundational works of English Renaissance literary criticism. Written in a period when poetry was challenged by moral, religious, and philosophical objections, the treatise argues that poetry is an ancient, imaginative, and morally productive form of knowledge. This paper examines Sidney's use of the term "apology," the intellectual and cultural context of the work, and its principal arguments. It summarizes the treatise in four connected parts: the antiquity and dignity of poetry, the nature and kinds of poetic imitation, poetry's superiority to philosophy and history in moving readers toward virtue, and Sidney's answers to the major objections against poetry. The paper then evaluates the merits and limitations of Sidney's criticism. Its merits include the powerful conception of the poet as a maker, the integration of pleasure and instruction, the emphasis on imagination and memory, and the recognition of poetry's social and political force. Its limitations include the defensive character of its argument, its selective use of Plato and Aristotle, its dependence on historical exempla, and its unresolved tension between pleasure and moral discipline. The study concludes that Sidney remains relevant because he connects literary form with ethical education, political imagination, cultural authority, and the reader's active response.*

Keywords— ***Sir Philip Sidney; An Apology for Poetry, The Defense of Poesy, Renaissance Humanism, Literary Criticism, Mimesis, Poetry and Morality, Rhetoric, History, Philosophy.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Sir Philip Sidney's an Apology for Poetry occupies a central position in the history of English literary criticism. The work is not simply a defense of verse against hostile religious opinion; it is also a wide-ranging account of how literature creates knowledge, shapes emotion, forms moral judgment, and contributes to civic life. Sidney presents poetry as an art of imitation, but his imitation is not mechanical copying. The poet is a "maker" who imaginatively constructs a second nature in order to reveal possibilities of human conduct that ordinary experience may not provide. Recent scholarship therefore treats the Apology as a synthesis of poetics, rhetoric, moral philosophy, political thought, and theories of reading (Brljak, 2025; Craig, 1980; Mack, 2025).

The treatise belongs to the intellectual world of Renaissance humanism, in which classical texts were recovered, translated, debated, and adapted for contemporary education and public life. Sidney draws on classical authorities while also responding to specifically English controversies about drama, pleasure, morality, and religious discipline. His method is simultaneously literary and forensic: he defines poetry, establishes its antiquity, compares it with other forms of learning, answers objections, and finally judges the condition of English poetry. The result is a work whose argumentative structure reflects its subject: poetry is defended through history, philosophy, rhetoric, example, and imaginative performance.

1.1. Use of the Term "Apology"

The word "apology" derives from the Greek *apologia*, meaning a formal defense or speech in answer to an accusation. It does not primarily mean an expression of regret. Sidney adopts the term in this forensic sense

because poetry has been placed in the position of an accused art. His title establishes a rhetorical situation: there is an accuser, there are charges, and there must be a reasoned defense. The title also gives the work an implicit legal and civic seriousness. Poetry is not treated as a private amusement that needs casual justification; it is treated as a public practice whose reputation and social function require examination.

The defensive title does not make Sidney's work narrow. Rather, it allows him to turn an accusation into an opportunity for definition. Before poetry can be defended, Sidney must explain what poetry is, what poets do, and what kind of poetry deserves approval. The "apology" consequently becomes an act of literary theory. Craig (1980) describes Sidney's poetics as a hybrid formation because it combines classical concepts, Christian materials, rhetorical traditions, and Renaissance educational ideals. The title signals this movement from defense to system-building.

The term also carries a degree of strategic caution. Sidney does not present himself as an isolated revolutionary; he speaks as a learned gentleman answering a cultural dispute. This rhetorical posture enables him to acknowledge abuses of poetry while maintaining that abuse does not invalidate the art itself. Lamb's (1994) account of the "nurse of abuse" controversy is especially useful here: the treatise must defend poetic pleasure without appearing to endorse moral disorder. Sidney's title therefore frames the central tension of the work—poetry must be defended because it is powerful, but its power makes its uses ethically consequential.

1.2. Context of Sidney

Sidney wrote within the Elizabethan period, when English culture was negotiating the relationship between classical learning, Protestant reform, courtly values, national identity, and popular entertainment. The immediate background of the Apology is commonly associated with attacks on poetry and theater, especially Stephen Gosson's The Schoole of Abuse (1579). Such attacks accused poets and players of encouraging idleness, sexual disorder, falsehood, and moral corruption. Sidney's response is not a simple rejection of moral criticism. Instead, he accepts that bad poetry can be abusive but argues that the abuse belongs to particular works, writers, or readers—not to poetry as such.

Sidney's education and public identity also shape the treatise. He was formed by the humanist curriculum, which connected grammar, rhetoric, history, moral philosophy, and classical literature. His understanding of poetry reflects the humanist belief that learning should produce virtuous action, not merely accumulate information. The poet therefore resembles the orator and the moral philosopher: each seeks to move the mind, but the poet can unite universal thought with vivid example and emotional force (Barkan, 1995; Sakthivel & Amalan, 2026).

The political dimension of this context is equally important. The Apology imagines poetry as a form of cultural and civic education. Its examples of ideal rulers, heroic action, religious song, and historical memory show that poetic representation is connected with the formation of persons and communities. Farhadi, Mozaheb, and Honarjou (2019) demonstrate how Sidney's poetics can also be read in relation to imperial and national imagination. Poetry does not merely describe a society; it helps a society imagine its values, rulers, conflicts, and possible futures.

II. SUMMARY OF AN APOLOGY FOR POETRY

Sidney's treatise does not present a rigid chapter system in the modern sense. Nevertheless, its movement can be organized into four major parts: the origin and dignity of poetry; the definition and varieties of poetry; the comparison of poetry with philosophy and history; and the answers to objections followed by a criticism of English literary practice.

2.1 Part One

The first part establishes the antiquity and authority of poetry. Sidney argues that poetry preceded many formal branches of learning and served as an early "nurse" of knowledge. The first teachers of religion, morality, history, and civic ideals often communicated through verse. Poetry is therefore not an ornament added to civilization after serious knowledge has been established; it is one of the means by which civilization becomes possible.

Sidney then explains the meaning of "poet." The word is related to the Greek *poiein*, "to make." The poet is consequently a maker rather than a mere imitator of visible reality. By exercising imaginative freedom, the poet creates an "other nature," a world in which moral possibilities can be represented more clearly than in ordinary life. This account of poetic making anticipates later theories of creative imagination. Mack (2013) interprets Sidney's

poetics as a theory of imitation that does not simply duplicate creation but imaginatively participates in its generative power.

The first part also gives poetry a high cultural status. The poet can treat divine, philosophical, heroic, pastoral, comic, and tragic subjects. Such variety is not evidence of

disorder; it demonstrates that poetry can address every dimension of human experience. Sidney's argument is therefore both historical and ontological: poetry is ancient, universal, and capable of producing forms of reality that instruct human beings.

2.2 Part Two

The second part defines poetry as an art of imitation or representation. Sidney uses the language of "counterfeiting," "figuring forth," and "speaking pictures." The phrase "speaking picture" expresses his belief that poetry unites verbal representation with visual immediacy. It makes absent things present to the imagination and transforms abstract principles into memorable scenes, characters, and actions.

Sidney divides poetry into several kinds, including religious, philosophical, historical, comic, tragic, pastoral, lyric, and epic forms. He gives particular importance to the "right poet," whose imaginative inventions are directed toward virtuous understanding. The poet does not simply report what has happened. The poet represents what may happen, what ought to happen, or what human beings are capable of becoming. This is why poetic fiction can communicate moral truth without being literal history.

The governing purpose of poetry is to teach and delight. Instruction without pleasure may fail to reach the reader, while pleasure without ethical direction may become harmful. Sidney's theory thus depends on a union of cognition, emotion, and action. Poetry gives knowledge, makes that knowledge attractive, and moves the reader toward conduct. Helfer (2022) strengthens this interpretation by emphasizing the relationship between poetic form, memorable images, and the art of memory. Sidney's "speaking picture" is powerful partly because it helps knowledge remain in the mind.

2.3 Part Three

The third part compares poetry with philosophy and history. Sidney respects both disciplines but argues that each is limited when considered as an instrument of moral education. Philosophy offers general principles, but its language may be abstract, difficult, and inaccessible to readers who lack specialized training. History offers particular examples, but it is bound to what has actually occurred and therefore includes the moral confusion, accident, and imperfection of real events.

Poetry, Sidney argues, combines the strengths of both. Like philosophy, it can represent universal truths; like history, it can embody those truths in concrete actions and memorable examples. A poem can show an ideal ruler, a virtuous hero, a destructive passion, or the consequences of injustice. Through imaginative form, it makes moral knowledge emotionally available. Barkan (1995) helps explain this process by connecting Renaissance literary representation with the capacity of images to "speak" that is, to produce meaning through vivid form rather than abstract statement alone.

Poetry is therefore not inferior because it invents. Its fiction can be more ethically illuminating than fact when it reveals patterns of conduct. Sidney's famous defense of poetic truth rests on this distinction between factual assertion and imaginative representation. The poet does not claim that fictional events literally occurred. Because the poet "nothing affirmeth," poetic invention should not be condemned as ordinary lying. Fiction becomes a means of expressing moral and imaginative truth.

2.4 Part Four

The fourth part answers the main objections against poetry. Sidney responds to the charges that poetry is a waste of time, that poets are liars, that poetry is morally corrupting, and that Plato banished poets from the ideal republic. He distinguishes between the abuse of poetry and the proper use of poetry. If a poem encourages vice, the problem lies in the poem's misuse of its power, not in the existence of poetic art.

Sidney's response to Plato is selective but rhetorically effective. He argues that Plato's criticism was directed toward certain kinds of poets and toward the harmful effects of false representation, not toward all imaginative art. Krouse (1954) shows that the relation between Plato and Sidney is complex: Sidney both answers Platonic suspicion and borrows philosophical authority to strengthen his own defense.

The final movement turns from general defense to English literary criticism. Sidney criticizes the disorder, mechanical imitation, and weak dramatic practice of contemporary English poetry. He praises the potential of English as a poetic language but demands greater discipline, structure, decorum, and craftsmanship. The work therefore ends not with unconditional praise but with reform. A nation that possesses poetic talent must also cultivate poetic standards.

III. A CRITICAL STUDY OF AN APOLOGY FOR POETRY

Sidney's treatise is persuasive because it combines theoretical ambition with rhetorical flexibility. It is also open to criticism because its arguments do not always fit together without tension. Its value lies partly in this combination of achievement and incompleteness.

3.1 Merits of An Apology for Poetry

The first major merit of the Apology is its comprehensive account of literary value. Sidney does not reduce poetry to entertainment, moral preaching, historical record, or formal ornament. He understands it as a composite art that acts upon intellect, memory, emotion, and will. The treatise also anticipates later debates about representation, imagination, reader response, and the social function of art.

A second merit is its rhetorical design. Sidney does not merely assert that poetry is valuable; he demonstrates value through examples, comparisons, distinctions, historical references, and carefully arranged objections. His prose moves between philosophical argument and imaginative illustration. This combination makes the Apology itself an example of the persuasive power it attributes to poetry.

A third merit is its defense of imaginative freedom. The poet is not confined to copying the world as it happens to be. By creating an "other nature," poetry can criticize the present and imagine alternatives. Such a view permits literature to become a space for ethical and political reflection. Stillman (2002) emphasizes that Sidney's defense is connected with the dangers of tyranny and with the capacity of poetic forms to challenge rigid or oppressive modes of power.

3.1.1 The Power of Poetry

For Sidney, the power of poetry rests on the union of knowledge and movement. Philosophy may teach, history may show, and poetry can do both while also moving the reader emotionally toward action. The poet's task is therefore not complete when a reader understands a moral proposition. The reader must also desire, imagine, and perform the good. This theory gives poetry a distinctive ethical force. Poetry creates exemplary figures, dramatizes consequences, and gives emotional shape to principles. It can make virtue attractive and vice repellent. Its rhythms, images, plots, and voices engage memory and imagination, allowing moral ideas to become part of the reader's inner life. Helfer (2022) shows why memory is essential to this account: a moral lesson that cannot be remembered or emotionally apprehended may not influence conduct.

Poetry's power is also social. Poems transmit cultural memories, preserve religious and political ideals, and teach communities how to imagine leadership and justice. Farhadi et al. (2019) demonstrate that Sidney's poetic theory participates in larger Elizabethan ideas about empire and political identity. The poet's "making" is thus not detached from public life. It helps construct the symbolic world in which political life becomes intelligible.

3.1.2 Problem of Poets

The "problem of poets" is the central difficulty that Sidney must solve. If poetry is powerful, it can also be dangerous. Poets may glorify violence, sensuality, vanity, or false authority. The reader may pursue pleasure without moral reflection. Sidney does not deny these possibilities. His strategy is to distinguish the nature of poetry from the conduct of particular poets and the abuse of particular poems.

This distinction is important because it allows Sidney to preserve a strong theory of poetic power without accepting a theory of automatic moral influence. Poetry does not make every reader virtuous simply because it is poetry. Its effects depend on subject, form, purpose, performance, social context, and reception. Sakthivel and Amalan (2026) emphasize that Sidney's defense constructs poetic authority through humanist rhetoric: the poet must claim cultural legitimacy, but that legitimacy is tied to responsible use.

The weakness of this solution is that Sidney sometimes relies on the moral intentions of the "right poet" more than on the complexity of actual reception. A poem may be designed to teach virtue and still be read for different reasons. Sidney recognizes the risk of abuse, but his confidence in moral design can appear greater than his account of readerly unpredictability.

3.2 Demerits of An Apology for Poetry

The term "demerits" should not be understood as a dismissal of Sidney's achievement. Rather, it identifies the limitations and tensions that become visible when the treatise is read historically and critically. Sidney's argument is powerful partly because it is unfinished: it contains competing models of poetry, knowledge, pleasure, and authority.

3.2.1 Term "Apology"

The defensive title gives the work energy, but it also places poetry in a subordinate position. Poetry appears to require authorization from philosophy, religion, history, and public morality. Instead of beginning from the autonomy of aesthetic experience, Sidney frequently justifies poetry by showing that it serves higher purposes. This may weaken the possibility that poetry has value through formal complexity, emotional ambiguity, or non-instrumental pleasure.

The title also encourages a polemical structure. Because Sidney is answering accusations, he sometimes gives disproportionate attention to his opponents' terms. The treatise must repeatedly prove that poetry is ancient, useful, truthful, and morally safe. Lamb (1994) shows that

this defensive situation produces an unresolved anxiety about pleasure. Sidney wants pleasure to attract readers toward virtue, yet he must also guard against the possibility that pleasure may become independent of virtue.

3.2.2 Defense through Philosophy

Sidney's philosophical defense is intellectually ambitious but selective. He draws upon Plato, Aristotle, Horace, Cicero, and Christian traditions, often combining ideas that are not fully compatible. Craig (1980) calls attention to the hybrid character of Sidney's theory. The synthesis is productive, but it can also appear theoretically unstable.

Sidney's treatment of Plato is a particularly clear example. He uses Platonic criticism as an objection to be answered, yet he also adopts philosophical language about truth, virtue, and the ideal. His Aristotelian account of imitation coexists with a moral and metaphysical emphasis that is closer to Platonism. Mack (2025) shows that Sidney's relation to philosophy should be understood not as a settled system but as a dynamic engagement with philosophical materials.

Another limitation is the tendency to rank poetry above philosophy by emphasizing philosophy's difficulty and poetry's accessibility. This comparison may underestimate the imaginative and rhetorical dimensions of philosophy. It also assumes that poetry's emotional appeal is necessarily more effective than rational reflection. In practice, the two forms may support, complicate, or correct one another.

3.2.3 Defense through History

Sidney uses history in two apparently conflicting ways. On the one hand, he argues that poetry is superior to history because history is confined to actual events and cannot guarantee that reality will provide morally ordered examples. On the other hand, he depends heavily on historical anecdotes, classical authorities, national literary history, and examples of famous rulers and poets.

This dependence is not necessarily a contradiction. Sidney may be distinguishing history as a discipline from historical materials as rhetorical evidence. Nevertheless, the distinction is not always explicit. Miller (1987) demonstrates the importance of Plutarchian materials to Sidney's argument, showing that Sidney's defense relies on the moral and exemplary possibilities of historical writing even while it criticizes history's limitations.

The historical defense is also shaped by Renaissance cultural hierarchy. Sidney often assumes that classical sources provide the most authoritative evidence. His criticism of English poetry may therefore reproduce the standards of classical and continental culture rather than fully recognizing the distinctive possibilities of vernacular forms. Brljak (2025) notes that Sidney's Defense remains important precisely because it stages the tension between inherited classical theory and the emerging authority of English literature.

IV. RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Sidney's Apology remains relevant for at least five reasons. First, it offers an early sustained account of literature as a form of knowledge. Contemporary debates about whether literature teaches anything, produces empathy, preserves memory, or shapes public discourse continue to revisit questions that Sidney formulated in Renaissance terms.

Second, Sidney's account of the poet as a maker remains useful for theories of imagination and representation. Literature does not merely reproduce social reality; it selects, organizes, intensifies, and reimagines experience. This insight is relevant to studies of fiction, narrative, fantasy, adaptation, and digital storytelling.

Third, the Apology remains important for debates about pleasure and morality. Sidney's effort to join delight with instruction resembles current discussions of ethical criticism, reader response, popular culture, and the responsibilities of artists. His distinction between art and abuse also helps explain why a cultural form cannot be judged solely by its worst examples. Fourth, Sidney's political understanding of poetry is increasingly significant. Literature can shape ideas of nation, empire, leadership, citizenship, and resistance. Studies of statecraft and cultural power continue to find in Sidney a model for examining how imaginative forms influence political ideals (Farhadi et al., 2019; Stillman, 2002).

Finally, the Apology is relevant to interdisciplinary study. It brings literary criticism into contact with philosophy, rhetoric, education, theology, history, memory studies, and political theory. Its limitations are productive because they reveal how literary theory develops through argument, borrowing, revision, and contradiction rather than through perfectly closed systems.

V. CONCLUSION

Sir Philip Sidney's an Apology for Poetry is a foundational work because it treats poetry as an intellectually serious and socially consequential art. Its use of "apology" establishes a formal defense, but the work exceeds the immediate dispute that produced it. Sidney defines the poet as a maker, poetry as an art of imitation, and literary pleasure as a means of making knowledge memorable and ethically effective. His comparison of poetry with

philosophy and history shows his central conviction: poetry can unite universal thought with concrete example and can move readers where abstract instruction alone may fail.

The work's merits are substantial. It offers a powerful theory of imagination, memory, moral education, rhetorical persuasion, and political possibility. It also gives the poet a public responsibility. At the same time, its defensive structure creates limitations. Sidney sometimes justifies poetry too strongly through external moral and philosophical standards; his treatment of Plato and Aristotle is selective; and his criticism of history depends upon historical materials. The tension between pleasure and discipline, freedom and responsibility, and invention and truth remain unresolved.

That unresolved quality is one reason the Apology continues to matter. Sidney's treatise does not provide a final definition of literature. Instead, it gives literary criticism a durable set of questions: What does poetry know? How does it move readers? Can fiction tell the truth? What is the relation between pleasure and virtue? How should art participate in public life? These questions ensure that An Apology for Poetry remains not only a historical document but also a living text in the study of literary criticism.

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Bhakti in Translation: The translation of cultural motifs and symbols in selected Abhangas of Janabai

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Abstract— *Bhakti literature has been translated widely into English. These translations range from prosaic texts by scholars to poetic translations by poets and authors. These translations, however, often fail to convey the complete meaning of an Abhanga of a Bhakti Poet. Bhakti poetry often uses obscure metaphors and symbols to explain difficult philosophical concepts. These symbols are clear to Marathi readers because of the cultural significance they have. The language is also rooted in the culture. Hence, cultural symbols and metaphors used in Marathi Bhakti Literature can be understood when the literature is read in Marathi.However, though English is widely used in India, it still remains a foreign language, coming from its own culture. It has its own commonly used cultural symbols and metaphors. Hence, while translating Bhakti poetry into English, it is difficult to translate these symbols and metaphors without compromising the meaning of the Abhanga. This paper studies selected Abhangas from 'The Ant Who Swallowed the Sun' a translation of Abhangas of women saints of Maharashtra. It will seek to examine how the translators have dealt with the above stated limitation of language.*

Keywords— ***Bhakti movement, Cultural motifs Janabai, Translation***

I. INTRODUCTION

One can argue that Bhakti poetry forms the backbone of Marathi literature. It developed from the thirteenth century. It is only during this time that we can find literature in the modern Marathi Language, as compared to the older Maharashtri Prakrit Language.

Bhakti poetry spans from the thirteenth century to the seventeenth century CE. It has had a significant impact on the modern Marathi literature, as well as the modern Marathi understanding of faith, God and religion.

The Bhakti poets wrote poetry in the form of Abhangas. Abhangas are generally short devotional pieces of poetry that are complete in themselves, usually written in the meter similar to that of an Ovi, with four line stanzas with rhyming couplets.

Bhakti poetry is deeply rooted in regional culture and tradition. The poems use traditional motifs and themes, which are relatable to the Marathi audience, but may sound confusing or even nonsensical to a non-Marathi reader. However, the themes expressed in the poetry are universal, and hence, have been translated into several languages.

The Abhangas of these Bhakti poets have been widely translated into English as well. Collections of translated Abhangas have been written and published since the early nineteenth century and continue into contemporary times.

The translation of these Abhangas involves the translation of traditional motifs, symbols and metaphors in a way that would be understood by non-Marathi readers, minimally compromising on the meaning of the Abhanga.

However, it is very difficult to translate traditional motifs and their symbolic meanings in a foreign language. Thus, part of the meaning is often lost in translation.

Here, we will be using the example of 'The Ant Who Swallowed the Sun' a collection of Abhangas translated into English by Neela Bhagwat and Jerry Pinto. We will examine the way in which the translators have translated traditional motifs, symbols and metaphors, and how the limitations of language play a role in limiting translation of cultural symbols.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Janabai's Abhangas have been studied extensively, both individually and as part of the larger corpus of Bhakti literature. These studies involve readings from various perspectives, including, but not limited to caste, social stigma, religion, and philosophy.

As stated before, we also see that Janabai's work is extensively translated. We can also see instances where the translated works are used to study Janabai's work and life. However, we hardly see any work based on the comparison between the original material and the translation of any Marathi Bhakti literature.

The theory of Domestication and Foreignization, that was first put forth by Friedrich Schleiermacher and later expanded by Lawrence Venuti is used throughout the paper to understand how the translation tries to bridge the gap between the two cultures.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study will use the method of a close textual analysis of the original Marathi Abhangas as well as the English translations by Neela Bhagwat and Jerry Pinto.

It will proceed to identify the traditional cultural motifs, symbols and metaphors used in the Abhangas and study the corresponding words or phrases used in translation. It will then closely examine the synonymous words used and find the subtle differences between the original Marathi meaning and the translated English meaning, and try to see whether or not the emotional and metaphysical meanings of the Abhanga are translated into English.

The study will then go on to determine whether the English substitutes are able to address the multiple shades of meaning that are present in the original Marathi work.

The study will conclude by looking at the overall impact and meaning of the translated Abhanga, and comparing it with the original.

IV. OVERVIEW

Janabai was born in the lower caste, and was given to Namdev's house as a maidservant at the age of six, after the death of her mother. She worked in his house throughout her life. Her Abhangas are a clear reflection of her lived reality. She interacts with Vitthala in a variety of ways, sometimes calling him a mother, sometimes a lover, and sometimes even scolding and cursing him. Her relation with Vitthala is close and intimate, and it keeps changing throughout her life.

Janabai's poetry is has a bold, unashamed voice, using stark and striking imagery which is not always pleasant, sometimes even using swear words in her poetry. Her poetry often expresses anger and dissent, while also showing her close relationship with her God. Her poetry is both emotionally charged and philosophically meaningful.

We can see that the translated text selected also uses a very distinct voice. The translators, use a free verse form, which is very different from the Abhanga form, which uses the form of an Ovi.

In older translations, we see that the visual style of the translation is kept similar to that of the Abhanga, or a simpler, traditional English meter and rhyme scheme is used. Some translations also remain completely prosaic and do not bother with poetic form at all.

In this study, selected Abhangas are used in order to allow for a deeper, detailed textual evaluation. These will be used as a sample to examine how the limitations of language and the traditions and culture it is rooted in and is part of affects translation into a foreign language.

The three selected Abhangas are:

1. Ganga geli sindhupasi
2. Doicha padar ala Khandevari
3. Are Vithya Vithya

V. ANALYSIS OF TEXTS

5.1 Ganga Geli Sindhupasi

Ganga geli Sindhupasi expresses the feeling of being spurned by god. Janabai expresses her helplessness, comparing herself with the river rejected by the sea. She ends the Abhanga by leaving everything in the hands of Vitthala.

Janabai uses symbols that are traditionally used in Marathi poetry such as the river and the sea. The mother and the child, and fish and water are also common motifs found in Bhakti poetry across India.

In the third line of the Abhanga, Janabai uses the words Jala and Jalaachara. Jala means water, while Jalaachara may be translated as fish.

However, the exact words used for fish and water in Janabai's Abhanga are 'Jala' meaning water and 'Jalachara' meaning 'that which lives in the water' which can, of course, be interpreted as fish. However, the use of Jalachara brings out the dependence of the fish on the water, a subtlety that is impossible to bring out in English.

The last line of the Abhanga is 'Pahije te Uddharile', translated as 'Save me if you wish'.

The word 'uddharile' also has a lot of connotative meanings. It comes from the root word Uddhar. Uddhar literally means to raise up. In the context of Bhakti, it is generally used to signify salvation. Uddhar here, means to raise up beyond the human condition. Much like the word salvation in English, Uddhar is generally used in spiritual terms, though it has a multifaceted meaning.

In the case of the first phrase, Jalachara, the translators have used the word fish. We can see that this makes the translation much easier to understand and appreciate, and makes it less technical and more emotive, though it makes the meaning less accurate.

A similar problem is seen with the word Uddhar. The translators use the word 'save' as the English alternative. However, once again, we see that there is no real English alternative, except for the word 'salvation' which is, though not exact, close. However, we can see that the verb form of Salvation is save, which has a slightly different meaning in modern English language.

Overall, we can see that while the emotional impact of the Abhanga and the translation remain similar, the exact meaning changes slightly to make way for the emotional impact.

5.2 Doicha padar ala khandevari

Let us now consider the second Abhanga, 'Doicha padar ala khandevari'.

This Abhanga is written against the patriarchal and brahmanical society that Janabai lived in. Material wealth, knowledge and even devotion was refused to women and shudras. Janabai was marginalized both as a woman and as a Shudra.

Here, Janabai insists that she will break all the bondages of society and devote herself to Vitthala with or without the approval of society. The Abhanga evokes a feeling of rebellion, and yet, it is filled with devotion and love for Vitthala. It is, at the same time expressing dissent and devotion.

The very first line of the Abhanga itself is very culturally specific. Doicha Padar ala Khandevari can literally be translated as the 'Veil of my head dropped to my shoulders'. However, this has a more significant connotative meaning.

All decent Marathi women in the medieval period were supposed to wear the padar, or veil over their head. Not wearing the veil over the head showed that the woman was indecent, probably a prostitute. Thus, the veil falling to te shoulders signifies that Janabai has decided to let go of all concepts of decency and has no concern for what the world would think of her. Janabai, thus, does not care about that people will think of her as she wanders bareheaded in the crowded market.

The second line, 'Haati gheun Tala, khandyavar veena' also shows Janabai's devotion to Vitthala. These are the instruments typically associated with the Bhakti movement, seen with many Bhakti saints. Carrying these instruments was often seen as a marker of a devotee of Vitthala. They were also most used in the Kirtans, which formed a large part of worship.

The fact that she holds a Tala and Veena is what distinguishes Janabai from a common woman in the market. It shows her motive for the way she is acting.

One of the most difficult phrases to translate in this Abhanga is 'Mangatavar tel ghaalaa tumhi'. This is an idiom used in Marathi, meaning, 'to be angry at someone.' Here, Janabai says, you can be angry at me, I do not care.

As this Abhanga is filled with phrases and idioms that are specifically relevant to Marathi culture, it is difficult to translate into English, as the English language comes from a different culture, and hence, uses completely different religious imagery. The limitations of language become apparent in the translation of this Abhanga.

The first line is translated as 'I have left my veil drop to my shoulders'. This is able to capture the meaning of the sentence exactly, but lacks the socio-cultural understanding that is implied by the veil falling to the shoulders. However, it is easily understood, even by non-Marathi readers, as veiling as a form of modesty is practiced in several cultures.

In the translated version of the Abhanga, the translators transcribe the word Veena as it is. This is something Lawrence Venuti refers to as foreignization, as it forces the reader to try to understand the culture around the source material. The Veena is a stringed instrument often associated with Sarasvati. It has cultural significance in Indian culture, as it is the instrument associated with Sarasvati, the goddess of wisdom. It is also closely associated with the Bhakti tradition in Maharashtra, as the Veena is traditionally used by the kirtankars.

Hence, it would be almost impossible to translate the cultural significance of the word Veena in English, without destroying the poetic aspect of the translation. Using the name of any other stringed instrument would be a mistranslation. Thus, we see that the word Veena is directly transcribed, and not translated into any English word.

Finally, we come to the idiom, 'Mangatavar tel lava tumhi' The translator has translated this as 'Anoint my wrists with oil.' While this translates the literal meaning quite clearly, it fails to address the connotative meaning, which is more relevant in this Abhanga.

It is here that the cultural context that the two languages bring matters so much. In the Christian tradition, anointing someone is considered a holy act. It is performed by priests,

and signifies closeness to God. In fact, the messiah in the Judeo-Christian traditions is referred to as the anointed one.

Anointing wrists with oil is part of the Christian tradition, and is used by devotees to feel closer to God, or to observe certain devotional rites.

However, in the Indian tradition, we barely see the concept of being anointed. The action of anointing wrists with oil thus, has no cultural significance in the original text in Marathi.

In Marathi, when Janabai uses the phrase 'Mangatavar tel lava tumhi' it is through a feeling of disregard for the society. It has little to do with being closer to God.

Thus, when the phrase is translated as 'Anoint my wrists with oil' there is a cultural meaning associated with the translated phrase in the target language. While the literal translation of the phrase would be similar, the connotative meaning changes completely in such a translation. While the original phrase signifies dissent and rejection of the norms of society, the translated text signifies devotion and closeness to God. This changes the meaning of the entire phrase which forms an important part of the Abhanga.

Janabai ends the Abhanga by saying that she is Keshava's whore, and that she was coming to destroy his home.

In general, the overall essence of the Abhanga is maintained through the translation, though we can often see that the specific lines have different connotative meanings. However, though the emotional impact of the Abhanga is close, though not the same, we cannot say at all that the meaning of the text remains the same. Though the translators have translated the Abhanga word for word, it is unable to capture the cultural meaning that are hidden in the Abhanga.

5.3 Vithya Vithya, Moolamaayechyaa kartya

The final Abhanga in this paper is 'Vithya Vithya'. This Abhanga is based on the concept of Ninda Stuti. Understanding this concept alone might be difficult for non-Indian readers.

Ninda Stuti is a way of praising a god by insulting him, it is a way to humanize god, to make him relatable. In insulting god, the devotee creates a bond of trust, love and friendship, which allows such informal dialogue. Here, Janabai swears and curses at Vitthala, but she only has te right to do it because she loves him so deeply.

Janabai calls Vitthala by the name Vithya, which is a familiar, informal manner of address, which can be used as an insult. She goes on to call him the Moolamaayechya Kartya. The term Moolamaayaa refers to the principle of illusion, which is considered primordial in Indian mythology.

Janabai uses the word Kartya to define the relationship Vitthala has with this primordial power. Kartya, in colloquial Marathi, refers to a misbehaved child. Thus, Janabai calls Vitthala the misbehaved son of the primordial illusion.

However, some older uses of the word Kartya also give it a second meaning. Kartya also means a Brahmin who performs last rites.

Hence, we see a twofold meaning of the same word, both having incredibly philosophical roots. The beauty of the Abhanga lies in the fact that it can be interpreted both ways and still be correct. On one hand, the Abhanga states that Vitthala is the son of, and hence, is created by illusion. On the other hand, he also performs the last rites of the illusion, thus making his devotees see the ultimate reality.

Thus, even while fighting with Vitthala on the surface, Janabai reveals a deeper philosophical side to her Abhanga.

She goes on to describe how his wife is left widowed, but eternally wed. She even describes his funeral procession, saying that time itself will weep at his funeral. She concludes by describing herself hurling curses at him. These images too, have philosophical depths that are hidden in metaphors.

Vitthala's wife is Prakriti, the primordial personification of matter. As he loses his state of Nirguna, of being formless, she is left a widow. However, the essence of Vitthala is describe as timeless, and hence, she will be eternally wedded to him, and so, is described as wearing the 'chooda' or wedding bangles.

This particular Abhanga is characterized by the feeling of rage towards Vitthala, which is rarely seen in the Bhakti tradition. However, if we look a little deeper into its meaning, we can see that it has philosophical connotations not seen in te first glance.

It is in such a case that translation becomes extremely challenging, as the text contains not just culturally specific motifs, but also has multiple layers of meaning.

We can see several culturally specific motifs in the text of this Abhanga. The first being 'Moolamaayaa' Maya is the principle of illusion, which allows us to experience the world as separate from God. However, it is rarely considered harmful. Rather, it is considered something that is necessary to develop the correct perspective on the world. Maya is also worshipped as a goddess in her own right.

Raand and randki are considered swear words even today. Though Raand is used as a colloquial term for whore in modern times, its original meaning is widow. However, the word remains derogatory.

The word Madhe literally means corpse, specifically a corpse that is ready for cremation.

The concept of Kaala is also not completely translatable into English. Kaala is usually translated as time, but it is also used as a word meaning death.

In the translation, we can see that 'Moolamaayaa' is translated as the eternal mother. While is translation is not wrong, it is not complete, as Moolamaayaa has multiple meanings which cannot be captured in any single English word or phrase. The English translation is unable to capture the aspects of being illusory.

Similarly, Kartya is translated as prodigal son. However, the meaning of Kartya and prodigal son are very different. The phrase 'prodigal son' means a son who squanders his wealth and leaves home. Kartya on the other hand refers to a misbehaved child.

The second meaning of the word is not translated at all in English. The double meaning is impossible to translate in one word.

The prodigal son also has a cultural history attached to the phrase. The parable of the prodigal son appears in the bible. Hence, when the translators use the term Prodigal son, it carries with it its own history, separate from the source text.

The translation is also unable to capture the contradictory meaning in the second line of the Abhanga. The first part of the line says that the widow is abandoned, at the same time, the very next line calls her Janmasavitri. Savitri is a term used for a devoted life. Janmasavitri is a term used for a woman who never sees widowhood. It is also indicative of the bride of God, who cannot know widowhood as her husband is immortal. She is described in the original Abhanga as wearing bangles, which only married women are traditionally allowed to wear.

However, the translation completely ignores this contradiction. It simplifies it, by translating 'Janmasavitri chooda lyali' as 'her bangles wither.' This fails to capture any of the multiple meanings of the Abhanga, and does not even fit the literal or metaphorical meaning of the terms.

While the emotional impact is preserved in the translated work, we can see that the layered meaning and wordplay found in the original is not seen at all, as it is very difficult to communicate these in a foreign language.

When we look at all the examples seen here, it becomes clear that the act of translation is difficult when translating texts like Abhangas, which are filled with cultural symbolism and multiple meanings.

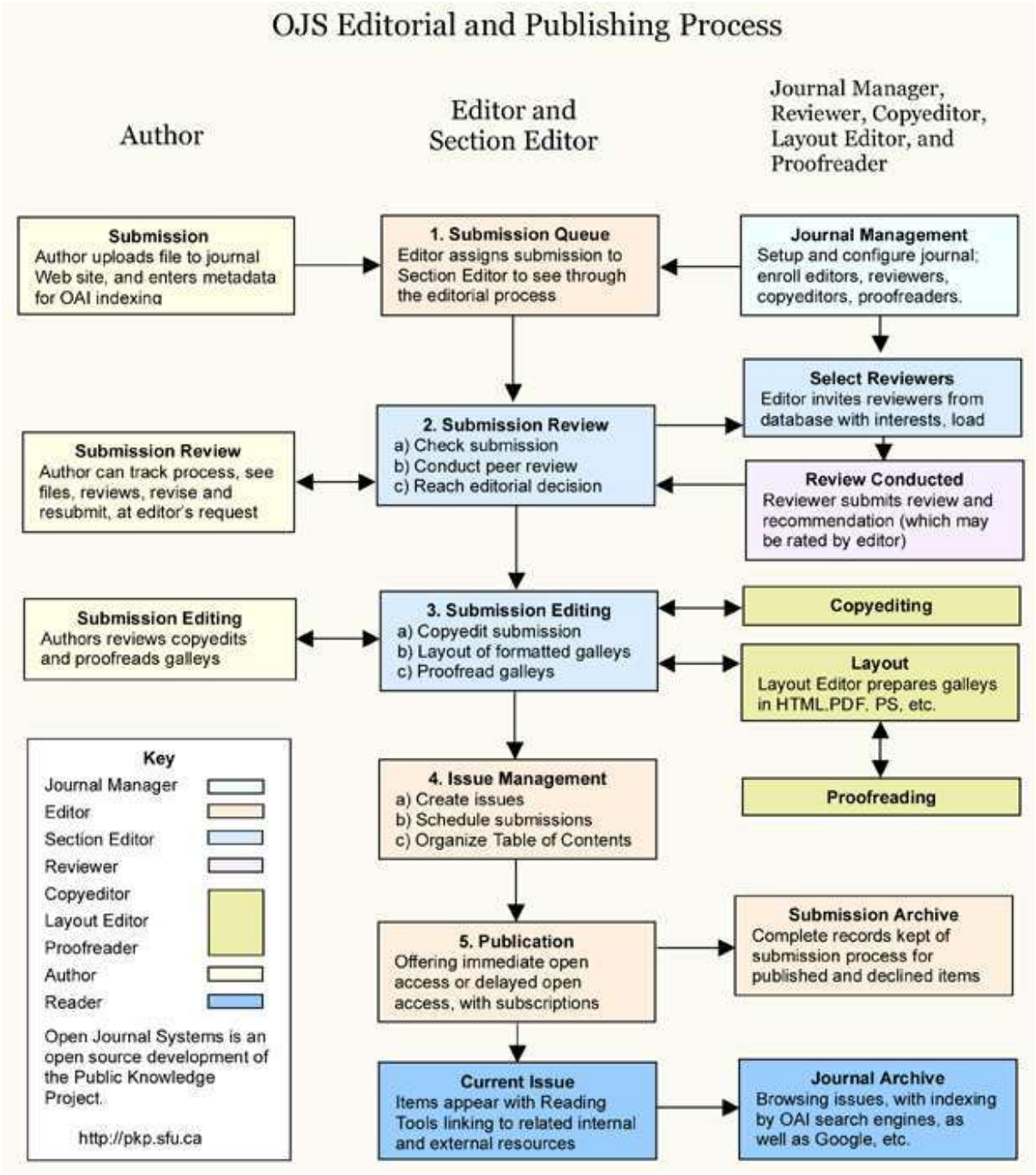
The limitations of language become quite clear in this case. The development of a language is rooted in a culture, and does not occur separately. Thus, cultural symbols are directly transferred to language as well. The two languages here, Marathi and English, come from different cultural backgrounds, and thus, certain words and phrases cannot be translated into English without changing the meaning of the Abhanga itself.

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