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Editor Speaks……

At moments of historical tension, humanity turns instinctively to two forces: power and reflection. Power seeks to dominate events; reflection seeks to understand them. Our present global climate marked by wars, regional conflicts, rising nationalism and deepening mistrust remind us that while power may redraw borders, only reflection can reshape the moral imagination of humankind. It is within this realm of reflection that literature becomes not merely relevant but indispensable.

War remains one of the gravest tests of civilization. The thunder of artillery and the rhetoric of division often create the illusion that violence is inevitable. Yet history preserves another tradition: the quiet, persistent resistance of the human spirit expressed through words. From poems written in trenches to novels born in exile, literature reminds us that the most enduring battles are fought not on battlefields but within the conscience of humanity.

In times of conflict, literature performs vital tasks. It preserves memory against the erasures of propaganda. It restores voice and dignity to those whom war reduces to statistics. Most importantly, it cultivates empathy, the rare ability to see the world through the eyes of another. Where political language often divides, literature reconnects the human experience.

At this critical moment in the twenty-first century, the responsibility of writers, scholars and thinkers becomes even more significant. Literature does more than mirror reality. Through narrative, metaphor and reflection, it exposes the moral consequences of violence and opens imaginative pathways toward reconciliation and peace. In doing so, it nurtures what may be called an ethical imagination, awareness that humanity ultimately shares a common destiny.

For *Rock Pebbles*, which has sustained a dialogue of ideas for over three decades, this responsibility remains central. By offering a space for diverse voices, critical inquiry and creative expression, the journal seeks to contribute modestly to a culture of understanding rather than hostility. Nevertheless, Literature reminds us - despite turbulence, the human story endures with imagination and hope.

- Editor

CONTENTS

Page

Editorial ii

Criticism - (pp. 07 - 251)

Nature, Culture, and Colonial Ecology in AmitavGhosh's *The Ibis Trilogy*:
A Postcolonial Ecocritical Study
Nishikant Dattatray Babar & Imran Pathan 07

Beyond Regional Borders: The Role of English Translation
in Nationalising Odia Dalit Narratives
Sonali Sarangi 14

Cultural Transformation and Self Exploration in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's
The Mistress of Spices: A Literary Scrutiny
N. Gunasekaran & M. Natarajan 31

The Role of Context in Interpreting Literariness
in Khaled Hosseini's *And The Mountains Echoed*.
Mahaboob Unnisha Sulthani M. & Naveen Kumar K. 39

Caste, Gender, and Resistance in Indian Dalit Women's Fiction:
A Critical Appraisal of *The Grip of Change, When I Hit You,* and *Sangati*
Bikash Chandra Behera 46

The Self in Exile: A Diasporic Reading of
Agha Shahid Ali's *Postcard from Kashmir*
Niraj Kumar Singh 61

Constitutional Morality and Social Democracy: Revisiting Ambedkar
Chittaranjan Bhoi 68

Between Faith and Family: An Analysis of Patriarchal
Structures and Gender Roles in Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp*
Najmul Hasan 74

From Domestic Containment to Mythic Assertion: A Comparative Study
of Women's Agency in the Narratives of Banu Mushtaq and Devdutt Pattanaik
Payel Dutta 85

The Role of the Minor and Peripheral Characters in Rewriting
Moral Agency in Keerthik Sasidharan's *The Dharma Forest*
Anirban Chatterjee 97

The Space of Kitchen and its Significance in the Life of a Woman:
A Reading of Select Novels representing Food and Confinement
Monali Ghosh Dastider 107

Beyond Silence: Mapping Human Rights Discourses in Select Assamese Novels
Ankita Choudhury 117

Cultural Crossroads: Analyzing Colonial and Post-Colonial Narratives
Bhawna Verma & Piyushbala 123

The Manipulation of Reality: Memory, History
and Language in George Orwell's *1984*
Reena Chatterjee 131

Ecocentrism, Adi Folklore, and Identity: Ecological Sustainability
in Selected Poems from Mamang Dai's *The White Shirts of Summer*
Anup Kumar Rakshit 140

Growth and Development of the Nepali Language
in the Darjeeling Region with Special Reference to
Padre Ganga Prasad Pradhan and Paras Mani Pradhan
Sushma Rai & Anira Phipon Lepcha 150

Illusory Nature of the Human Attitude in Ayn Rand's *The Beginners*
S. Arun Pragadhesh & C. Bharathi 156

Linguistic Communalism as a Threat to Regional Identity with Special
Reference to the Constitutional Protection of Linguistic Diversity in India
Jayanta Boruah & Dhrubajyoti Das 161

Chakravarti Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata*: Exploring Uniqueness
in Indian Culture, Philosophy, Morality and Aesthetics
Harekrushna Barik & Kalikinkar Pattanayak 167

Rhythm, Ritual, and Rhetoric: An Ethnomusical Study of
Pahariå Songs in Translation
Sourav Singha 174
The Postmodern Literary Ensemble: A Theoretical Study of
Select Postmodern Texts
Abdul Mubid Islam 183
Urban Dreamscapes: Space, Identity, and Belonging
in *All We Imagine as Light*
Aruna S. Ajayan 193
Edith Wharton and the Silent Architecture of Race
Shivashree Chail 205
The Eastern Roots in American Transcendentalism:
Indian Thought in Emerson and Thoreau
Jaya Nalini Ekka 214
Universal Human Concerns and Post-Apartheid Realities
in Nadine Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present*
Sarita Chauhan & **Kusum Tripathi** 223
Voices from the Periphery: Reading Gopinath Mohanty's *Harijan*
Soumya Sangita Sahoo 229
Women and Food in Indira Goswami's
The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker
Chandrima Sen 235
Re-rooted or Permanently Exiled? : A Study
on the Quest for Identity and Dalit Aesthetics
in Subodh Sarkar's Poem *I Am Krishnokoli Mahato*
Sayani Ray 243
Poetry - (pp. 252 - 256)
Beyond the Mirror - **Prachi Verma** 252
Determination - **Hemanta Kumar Dash** 252

United on Paper! - **Pratiksha Karn** 252
Slithering into Silence - **Debendra Kumar Bauri** 253
Winter in Kanjipani - **Bimbadhar Behera** 254
Shun the War - **Anirudha Nanda** 254
From Where to Here - **Swatee Sripada** 255
Sharing - **Saroj K. Padhi** 255
Far from the Truth - **Gajanan Mishra** 256
Endless Love - **Rajat Kumar Satapathy** 256

Subscription Form 30 & 60

CRITICISM

Nature, Culture, and Colonial Ecology in AmitavGhosh's*The Ibis Trilogy*: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Study

Nishikant Dattatray Babar

Imran Pathan

This paper offers a postcolonial ecocritical reading of AmitavGhosh's*The Ibis Trilogy—Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2015)—by examining the interwoven relationships among colonial power, environmental transformation, and cultural dislocation in the nineteenth-century Indian Ocean world. Set against the historical backdrop of British imperial expansion and the opium trade, the trilogy reveals how colonial capitalism functioned not merely as an economic system but as an ecological regime that reshaped landscapes, waterways, and human–nature relations. Drawing upon postcolonial ecocriticism, environmental justice theory, and Anthropocene discourse, this study argues that Ghosh reframes imperial history as an ecological crisis characterized by slow violence, environmental degradation, and forced migration. Through representations of monoculture agriculture, riverine and maritime ecologies, and displaced communities, the novels foreground the agency of nonhuman forces and marginalized voices. The trilogy challenges Eurocentric narratives of progress by revealing the colonial origins of contemporary environmental crises and by emphasizing ethical interconnectedness between nature and culture. Ultimately, *The Ibis Trilogy* emerges as a significant literary intervention in environmental humanities, urging a rethinking of history, ecology, and responsibility in an age of ecological uncertainty.

Keywords: Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Colonial Ecology, Environmental Justice, AmitavGhosh, The Ibis Trilogy, Nature and Culture

1. Introduction

The contemporary world faces escalating environmental challenges, including climate change, biodiversity loss, soil depletion, and water scarcity. These crises have compelled scholars across disciplines to interrogate their historical foundations rather than treating them as isolated or purely modern phenomena. Increasingly, environmental degradation is understood as the product of specific political and economic systems, most

notably colonialism and imperial capitalism. Colonial expansion fundamentally altered ecosystems across Asia, Africa, and the Americas through extractive economies, monoculture agriculture, and the large-scale reorganization of land and water. These ecological changes were accompanied by social displacement, cultural erosion, and the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems.

Literary studies have responded to these concerns through ecocriticism, a field that examines how texts represent nature and human–environment relationships. While early ecocriticism focused largely on Euro-American nature writing, later scholarship exposed its limitations, particularly its neglect of colonial histories and global inequalities. This shift gave rise to postcolonial ecocriticism, which foregrounds environmental issues shaped by empire, capitalism, and uneven power relations. This approach highlights how ecological harm disproportionately affects colonized and marginalized communities and emphasizes the ethical dimensions of environmental injustice.

Within this critical framework, AmitavGhosh occupies a central position. His fiction consistently explores the intersections of history, migration, globalization, and ecology. *The Ibis Trilogy*, set during the height of British imperial dominance and the opium trade, traces the movement of people, commodities, and ecological consequences across the Indian Ocean world. While much criticism has focused on the trilogy's historical scope and linguistic diversity, its ecological vision remains underexplored. This paper argues that Ghosh reimagines colonial history as an ecological catastrophe whose effects continue into the present. By situating environmental degradation at the core of imperial enterprise, *The Ibis Trilogy* offers a powerful critique of modernity, progress, and development.

2. Theoretical Framework: Postcolonial Ecocriticism and Environmental Justice

postcolonial ecocriticism integrates insights from environmental studies and postcolonial theory to examine how colonialism reshaped both landscapes and cultural perceptions of nature. Scholars such as Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin argue that empire was inherently ecological, transforming land, labor, and nonhuman life into resources for metropolitan profit. Colonial environments were often portrayed as empty or underutilized, legitimizing exploitation and dispossession.

A key concept informing this analysis is Rob Nixon's notion of "slow violence," which describes environmental harm as gradual, cumulative, and frequently invisible. Unlike spectacular disasters, slow violence unfolds over time through soil erosion, deforestation, pollution, and displacement, disproportionately affecting the poor. In colonial contexts, such violence was embedded in everyday administrative practices and economic policies, making it appear normal or inevitable.

Environmental justice scholarship further emphasizes that ecological harm is historically uneven and socially stratified. Indigenous and marginalized communities bear the brunt of environmental damage while benefiting least from economic gains. These insights

align closely with Ghosh's depiction of colonial India, where ecological exploitation and social inequality operate together.

The study also engages with debates on the Anthropocene, which call for rethinking history in light of humanity's geological impact. Critics within postcolonial studies caution that attributing environmental damage to "humanity" risks erasing colonial responsibility. Ghosh's historical fiction counters such universalizing narratives by grounding ecological crisis in specific imperial practices, particularly those tied to global trade and capitalist expansion.

3. Colonial Agriculture and Environmental Exploitation

One of the trilogy's most compelling ecological critiques emerges through its portrayal of colonial agriculture, especially the forced cultivation of opium in northern India. In *Sea of Poppies*, Ghosh depicts how British policies transformed diverse agrarian landscapes into monoculture zones designed to serve imperial interests. Traditional subsistence farming, guided by seasonal rhythms and local ecological knowledge, was displaced by cash-crop production, undermining food security and ecological balance.

Opium cultivation exemplifies environmental imperialism. Farmers were coerced into growing poppy on their most fertile land, often through debt and administrative pressure. This system depleted soil nutrients, reduced biodiversity, and made communities vulnerable to famine. Ghosh presents these changes not as abstract processes but through the lived experiences of peasants whose livelihoods and cultural ties to the land are systematically eroded.

The ecological damage of opium farming is inseparable from human suffering. The land becomes a site of exploitation, mirroring the commodification of labor under colonial capitalism. This slow, accumulating harm aligns with Nixon's concept of slow violence, as environmental degradation unfolds gradually, normalized within imperial governance.

Importantly, Ghosh foregrounds the destruction of indigenous ecological knowledge. Practices such as crop rotation and mixed farming are dismissed in favor of colonial "scientific" agriculture, illustrating epistemic violence alongside ecological damage. Female characters like Deeti embody this loss, as the disruption of land parallels their social and bodily oppression. Through such narratives, Ghosh links environmental exploitation to caste, gender, and class hierarchies.

The global dimensions of ecological harm are also emphasized. Opium grown in Indian fields fuels international trade, connecting local environmental destruction to global capitalist networks. This perspective reveals how colonial agriculture laid the groundwork for modern environmental crises associated with industrial farming and globalization.

4. Rivers, Oceans, and Maritime Ecologies

Water plays a central ecological and symbolic role throughout *The Ibis Trilogy*.

Rivers and seas are not passive settings but active agents shaping historical events and human destinies. In *Sea of Poppies*, the Ganges River is portrayed as both sacred lifeline and colonial trade route. Traditionally sustaining agricultural and cultural life, the river is increasingly appropriated for imperial commerce, transporting opium and indentured laborers.

This transformation reflects colonial tendencies to reduce nature to economic utility. From a postcolonial ecocritical perspective, such exploitation disrupts long-standing relationships between communities and waterways. Ghosh contrasts indigenous reverence for rivers with colonial instrumentalism, highlighting the cultural and ecological consequences of this shift.

The ship *Ibis* itself symbolizes colonial maritime ecology. As a floating microcosm of empire, it carries people, commodities, and ecological repercussions across oceans. While representing imperial mobility, the ship remains vulnerable to winds, tides, and storms, underscoring the limits of human control over nature.

In *River of Smoke* and *Flood of Fire*, the Indian Ocean emerges as a dynamic ecological space shaped by monsoons and currents. These natural forces dictate trade routes and disrupt imperial schedules, challenging linear narratives of progress. Ghosh's emphasis on environmental unpredictability reveals how colonial ambitions were contingent upon ecological systems beyond human mastery.

Maritime ecologies also expose the hidden environmental costs of early globalization. Transoceanic trade contributes to ecological disruption, from resource depletion to the spread of invasive species. Though subtly portrayed, these themes anticipate contemporary concerns about global shipping and environmental sustainability.

By granting agency to nonhuman forces—storms, tides, monsoons—Ghosh destabilizes anthropocentric history. Water becomes a participant in historical processes, aligning the trilogy with posthumanecocritical thought. Rivers and oceans thus function as sites where ecological exploitation, cultural encounter, and resistance converge.

5. Displacement, Culture, and Ecological Trauma

Ecological degradation in *The Ibis Trilogy* is closely linked to displacement and cultural trauma. Colonial agricultural policies destabilized rural economies, compelling peasants to migrate as indentured laborers to distant colonies. These movements represent not only geographic displacement but also the severing of ties to ancestral land, ecological knowledge, and cultural identity.

Characters such as Deeti, Kalua, and Neel experience environmental and social marginalization simultaneously. Their connections to soil, rivers, and crops are integral to their sense of self. Forced migration disrupts these relationships, producing what can be understood as ecological trauma—the psychological and cultural impact of environmental loss.

Water again serves as a metaphor for this trauma. Rivers and oceans enable migration while also symbolizing vulnerability and alienation. The same waterways that sustain life become conduits of exploitation, reflecting the ambivalent role of nature under colonialism.

Language and memory play crucial roles in preserving cultural identity amid displacement. Ghosh's multilingual narrative resists colonial homogenization, foregrounding linguistic diversity as a form of cultural resilience. The erosion of local languages parallels the loss of indigenous ecological knowledge, reinforcing the interconnectedness of environmental and cultural damage.

Gendered dimensions of ecological trauma are also evident. Women often bear the compounded effects of land loss, labor exploitation, and social subjugation. Deeti's story illustrates how environmental disruption disproportionately affects women within patriarchal and colonial structures.

Despite pervasive trauma, the trilogy also depicts resilience. Displaced communities adapt by preserving rituals, oral histories, and ecological practices, suggesting that colonialism could not entirely erase cultural and environmental agency.

6. Resistance, Indigenous Knowledge, and Nonhuman Agency

While exposing colonial violence, *The Ibis Trilogy* also highlights resistance at multiple levels. Indigenous ecological knowledge persists despite displacement, embodied in traditional farming practices, water management, and seasonal awareness. These knowledge systems challenge colonial assumptions of superiority and efficiency.

Cultural practices—songs, rituals, languages—serve as tools of resistance, maintaining identity amid ecological and social disruption. Ghosh's narrative strategy itself becomes an act of resistance by centering marginalized voices and experiences.

Nonhuman agency further complicates colonial narratives. Crops fail, storms disrupt voyages, and monsoons defy imperial planning. These ecological forces undermine human dominance and emphasize interdependence. By portraying nature as an active historical agent, Ghosh aligns with contemporary ecocritical calls to decenter the human.

Through these layers of resistance, the trilogy articulates an environmental ethics grounded in justice, responsibility, and interconnectedness. Postcolonial ecocriticism thus becomes not only an analytical framework but also an ethical stance.

7. Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh's*The Ibis Trilogy* offers a profound reimagining of colonial history through an ecological lens. By depicting monoculture agriculture, disrupted waterways, forced migration, and environmental degradation, the trilogy reveals that imperial capitalism was fundamentally an ecological enterprise. Environmental harm and social injustice emerge as inseparable processes rooted in colonial power.

At the same time, the novels emphasize resilience through indigenous knowledge, cultural memory, and nonhuman agency. Ghosh challenges dominant narratives of progress and modernity, exposing their ecological costs and ethical limitations.

By situating contemporary environmental crises within colonial histories, *The Ibis Trilogy* contributes significantly to postcolonial ecocriticism and environmental humanities. It demonstrates literature's capacity to illuminate the historical roots of ecological injustice and to foster a more responsible, interconnected understanding of nature and culture in an era of global environmental uncertainty. ■

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Beyond Regional Borders: The Role of English Translation in Nationalising Odia Dalit Narratives

Sonali Sarangi

Translation of regional literature into English has emerged as a crucial cultural practice in multilingual nations like India, where literature written in indigenous languages often remains confined to specific linguistic communities. This paper examines translation as a mode of national integration through a focused study of firstOdia Dalit autobiography *KharsuanruKulabiri* written by Nishakar Das and translated into Englishby Akhtar Jamal Khan and ZeharaJabeen entitled *From Kharsuan to Kulabari*with a foreword by NilakanthaRath. The paper argues that the English translation enables marginalized Dalit voices to enter national and global discourses, thereby destabilizing dominant narratives shaped by elite historiography. It also examines how the translator preserves the tone and tenor of the original Odia text while making it accessible to a wider readership. By foregrounding lived experiences, everyday struggles, cultural practices, and resistance strategies of a fringe community, the autobiography functions as a counter-history that challenges imposed identities and caste-based silencing. The paper further explores autobiography as an act of self-writing, language as resistance, personal memory as collective testimony, and the text's role as social intervention within postcolonial identity politics. Through this analysis, the paper demonstrates how translation facilitates empathy, awareness, and cultural dialogue, making it a powerful instrument of national integration.

Keywords: Dalit Autobiography; Odia Literature; English Translation; Nationalization of Regional Narratives; Caste and Identity; Subaltern Life-Writing; Translation Studies; Postcolonial Literature; Cultural Mediation; Counter-Historiography; Dalit Consciousness; Indian Multilingualism, National Integration, Counter-History, Language as Resistance, Postcolonial Identity Politics

Introduction: Odia Autobiographical Tradition

Odia is recognised as one of the Indian classical languages. Odia literature has been written since the fifteenth century AD. Poetry, short stories and novels are some of the popular literary genres. But the genre of autobiography evolved quite late. To be precise, with the coming of Fakir Mohan Senapati's*AtmajivanaCharita* (Autobiography) in 1917, there began a trend in Odisha to write one's life story. In the meantime, several

autobiographies have been written by writers, politicians, social reformers, bureaucrats, lawyers, artists, sportspersons, and academics. These autobiographies are mostly written by the upper caste men and women who are privileged to speak to the world. However, Dalits, Adivasis and other marginalised sections of Odia society had not attempted to write their life stories as education was not available to them earlier due to the stringent Hindu caste laws. As mentioned earlier, Fakir Mohan's *AtmajivanaCharita* is considered to be the first Odia autobiography. Even before Fakir Mohan, RadhanathRai seems to have published a part of his autobiography titled *Atmanibedana* (1907). Since Rai did not publish a full-fledged autobiography, Fakir Mohan's *AtmajivanaCharita* is considered as the first Odiaautobiography. Fakir Mohan must have found it difficult to write his autobiography as there was no precedence before him. In fact, in the preface to his autobiography, Fakir Mohan mentions that he does not know how to write an autobiography. He attempts to write his autobiography because many of his friends requested him to write one. He hopes that after him, more and more people will write their autobiographies in Odia.

True to Fakir Mohan's belief today there are a considerable number of Odia autobiographies available in the market. After Fakir Mohan's *Atmajivana Charita* some of the outstanding Odia autobiographies which need to be mentioned here are: Gobinda Chandra Mishra's *Jatiya Jibanara Atmabikasha* (1940), Harekrushna Mahatab's *Sadhanara Pathe* (1949), Baishnaba Pani's *Pani Kabinka Atmakahani* (1955), Godabarisha Mishra's *Ardhashatabdira Odisha O Tahinre Mo Sthana* (1958), Nilakantha Das's *Atmakatha* (1963), Adhiraj Mohan Senapati's *Drushtipata* (1965), Ramakrushna Nanda's *Jibana Taranga* (1969), Surendra Dwibedi's *Agasta Biplaba* (1972), and Kalicharan Patnaik's *Kumbhara Chaka* (1975), Sita Devi Khadanga's*Mora JibanSmruti* (1978), Ramadevi Choudhuri's *Jibana Pathe* (1984), Gopinath Mohanty's *Srotaswati* (1992), Manmohan Chaudhury's *Kasturi Mruga Sama* (1995), Annapurna Maharana's *Amrutara Anubhav* (2005), Nishakar Das's *Kharasuanru Kulabiri* (2006), Basant Kumar Satpathy's *Manepade* (2008), Pratibha Ray's *Padmapatrare Jeebana* (2014) , and Sourindra Barik's *Bata Chalu Chalu* (2018) among others. If the list of autobiographies given above is any indication, only a few Odia women have written their autobiographies as compared to their male counterparts. There is only one Dalit autobiography so far. The reason, of course, is not so difficult to understand. Education for lower castes, Dalits and women was restricted before India's independence. Because of caste discrimination and patriarchal traditions, Odia women and Dalits were not privileged to write their autobiographies earlier. Therefore the autobiography written by Nishakar is pretty significant. Let us look into their autobiography.

From ***Kharasuan to Kulabiri*** in Brief :

As mentioned earlier, Nishakar Das's *Kharasuan ru Kulabiri* (2005) is the first Odia Dalit autobiography which has been translated into English by Akhtar Jamal Khan and ZeharaJabeen as *From Kharasuan to Kulabiri*(2006).It is a short autobiographical account of the author as a Gandhian social worker. Having been influenced by the Gandhian ideology, Nishakar joined the Bhoodan movement and got involved in the welfare

programmes of Dalits and Adivasis in the Koraput regions of Odisha. Nishakar, in his autobiography, recollects the various events of his life, which suggest that being a Dalit it is not so easy to work in public because he has to face caste humiliations almost daily. In his autobiography Nishakar even writes that once he was beaten so severely that he was about to die. Nishakar writes all these not to gain any sympathy from his readers but to put the record straight that in a casteinfested society like India what is most dangerous is the caste prejudices. But Nishakar as a Sarvodaya activist, is determined to continue his works even at the cost of his life. At the end of his autobiography, he writes,

> GopabandhuChaudhury, Ramadevi, Manmohanbhai, Chuniapa, SaratGuruji, MalatiChaudhury, Nabakrushna Chaudhury have made me what I am today. Most of them are dead. Their love and blessings still guide me and, till the end of my life, I shall go on working for the sarvodaya movement and for establishing gram swaraj. This is the goal I have set myself. I have recounted some of the important events of my life. In spite of all the difficulties I face, I continue the struggle. As a sarvodaya activist I have discharged my duties with sincerity from the beginning till today. (54-55)

Nishakar was born in a village on the bank of the river Kharusuan in the Singhbhum District in 1997 then a part of odisha (before formation of SwatantraUtkal). Hebelongs to the Pana Vaishnava, a Dalit community of the coastal Odisha. Because they are the followers of Vaishnavism, the PanaVaishnavas consider themselves superior to the other Dalit communities. Nishakar's father was the community priest responsible for performing rituals during births, marriages and deaths. But the priestly job never gave a steady income. So the family members, including Nishakar's father, had to work as labourers to earn their livelihood. Nishakar's family was very poor. So it was difficult to survive. He writes,

> Our life was full of hardship. Often we had to make do with a little rice, water, salt and green chillies. We had watered rice for breakfast and watered rice for lunch. We had boiled rice at night; sometimes we ate cakes made of rice. Our lot improved only when the three of us were able to earn our livelihood. (15)

Nishakar was the youngest among three brothers. When he was still a child his father passed away. So his elder brother took charge of family responsibilities. Nishakar was sent to school hoping that after his study he would get a government job and help the family. But Nishakar took seven years to complete his class three and finally became a drop-out. He joined his brothers as a labourer. Nishakar recollects that untouchability was practiced in the school even by the teachers. He recollects:

> Those days, the sabarnas did not touch anyone who belonged to pana, kandara and gokha castes. We sat apart from the others at the chatsali. The abadhana, if he wished to punish us, would throw the cane at us, he would not touch us even while beating us. When the cane touched our clothes, we would take it back to the teacher and keep it away from him. I recall another significant

> incident. Perhaps, I was six or seven years old at the time. We had completed our studies with the abadhana and had just enrolled ourselves in the village school. On the way to our school, a young brahmin boy of our village named Dibakar Das, used to accompany us. If ever we walked close to him, he would jump over our shadows. The brahmins reasoned that, not only our persons, but our very shadows defiled them. Caste prejudices relating to untouchability were very strong at that time. (19)

Following the caste system the upper castes have hatred towards the lower castes and Dalits. Throughout his autobiography, Nishakar documents the various instances of caste atrocities perpetuated by the upper castes towards Dalits on whimsical grounds. He recollects an incident when an educated Dalit young man was beaten by a zamindar just because he was wearing a new dhoti and carrying an umbrella. Nishakar writes,

> Untouchables like panas and kandaras were not allowed to carry umbrellas, wear shoes or nice white dhotis while walking down village roads. They were scared of being beaten by landlords. The period of British rule and that of the rajas and zamindars can be described as an age of darkness ... There was a young man of kandara caste ... He passed his matriculation examination from Jajpur high school. He went to visit relatives, wearing a nice dhoti and carrying an umbrella. As he passed through Sundarpur village, the khandayatzamindar of Sundarpur, who was talking to his friends, noticed him. He enquired about him, and was told by those who knew him, 'He is an untouchable boy from Olai village. He has returned after passing his matriculation examination.' The zamindar called him over and said,
>
> You wretch, don't you know that this is the village of Sundar Ray, the zamindar? How dare you walk down our village path wearing a dhoti and carrying an umbrella?' They thrashed him, made him take off his dhoti and wear a torn one instead, broke his umbrella and sent him back home ... (20-21)

Nishakar writes that with the change of time, caste practices are also changing. But caste prejudices are still going firm and strong. As a Gandhian who believes in truthfulness, nonviolence and peace in everyday life, he wants the upper castes to shun caste prejudices and treat the lower castes and Dalits as fellow human beings. He observes,

> The untouchable community has changed its habits, customs and dress since my childhood. But the intolerant, conservative attitude of the other castes in society has caused the infamous barriers dividing castes to grow stronger in villages in all fields. Last year, I went to our village, Singhapur. I heard from children that the harijans are still not allowed to get a haircut at the hair-cutting shops in the bazaar. However, young men from the untouchable community and those belonging to other castes sit together and eat. But the fear ingrained within the upper castes has kept caste prejudices alive. (53-54)

Nishakar's autobiography documents the changes the Odia society witnessed over the years. Being a Gandhian, Nirakar advocates ethical and moral principles while working among the people of various castes and communities in Odisha. He devotes his life working among the rural and tribal people of Koraput, Odisha so that people can live in peace and prosperity. Nishakar's vision to restructure rural and tribal villages of Odisha through Gandhian principles is praiseworthy.

Autobiography as Counter-History

One of the most significant aspects of NishakaraDas's autobiography is its function as counter-history. Official histories often celebrate nationalism and progress while erasing the everyday realities of caste oppression faced by Dalit communities. Das's narrative challenges this erasure by foregrounding lived experience as historical evidence.

In the Odia original, Das records the practice of segregation in school with stark simplicity: "ଆମକୁ ଶ୍ରେଣୀର ଏକ ପାଶେ ବସାଯାଉଥିଲା । ଆମ ଛୁଆଁ ଲାଗିଲେ ଶିକ୍ଷକ ମୁହଁ ଘୁଞ୍ଚାଇ ଦେଉଥିଲେ" (Kharsuan ru Kulabiri).

This experience is rendered in the English translation as:

> The so-called upper-caste children sat together, while we—Pan, Kandara, and Gokha—were made to sit separately, as if our presence itself would pollute the classroom. (*From Kharsuan to Kulabiri*)

Placed side by side, the Odia and English versions reveal how translation transmits not only meaning but also affect. The quiet, matter-of-fact tone intensifies the violence of caste normalization, transforming personal memory into counter-history accessible beyond the regional sphere.

Regional Dalit Life-Writing and the Constraints of Linguistic Isolation

Dalit autobiographies occupy a distinctive position within Indian literature. Unlike elite autobiographical traditions that often celebrate individual achievement, Dalit life-writing foregrounds collective suffering, structural violence, and historical exclusion. However, when such narratives remain confined to regional languages, their political and epistemic force is significantly curtailed. Gail Omvedt emphasises that Dalit writing is foundational to reimagining Indian nationalism itself, precisely because it exposes the caste structures that underlie the nation's democratic claims. She writes:

> Dalit movements and writings represent not merely a protest against caste oppression but an alternative vision of Indian society. These writings question the foundations of social hierarchy and demand a rethinking of nationalism itself from the perspective of those historically excluded from it (Omvedt 18).

In Odisha, Dalit autobiographical writing has historically struggled for recognition even within regional literary cultures, which are often dominated by upper-caste aesthetics and

themes. *Kharsuanru Kulabiri* challenges this marginalisation by asserting the experiential authority of a Dalit subject whose life unfolds in spaces typically excluded from literary representation. Yet without translation, the text risks remaining locked within a linguistic enclave. English translation thus becomes the means through which regional Dalit experience enters wider interpretive circuits, enabling the narrative to function as part of a national discourse on caste and social justice.

Schooling, Humiliation, and Social Conditioning

Education emerges in the autobiography as a contradictory space—both a site of humiliation and a potential means of empowerment. Das recalls how caste discrimination was reproduced within educational institutions.

In Odia, the author reflects:

"ପାଠଶାଳା ଆମକୁ ପଢ଼ିବା ପୂର୍ବରୁ ଆମ ସ୍ଥାନ ଶିଖାଇଦେଲା" ।

The English translation captures this internalized hierarchy:

> School taught us our place in society long before it taught us letters. We knew where to sit, when to speak, and when to remain invisible.

The parallel articulation demonstrates how caste is learned through discipline and silence. Translation preserves the psychological depth of humiliation, allowing non-Odia readers to engage with the emotional and ethical dimensions of caste-based exclusion.

Education, Poverty, and Collective Sacrifice

The pursuit of education in Das's life is inseparable from economic hardship and collective sacrifice. The Odia text foregrounds communal effort behind individual progress:

"ମୋ ପଢ଼ା ପାଇଁ ଘରର ଲୋକେ ଭୋକ ସହିଲେ"

This sentiment is powerfully echoed in the English translation:

> My brothers and relatives gave small portions of their meagre earnings so that I could continue my studies. Education, for us, was never free—it was paid for with hunger.

Here, translation functions as ethical witnessing, exposing the structural inequities hidden beneath narratives of merit and mobility.

Translation as Discovery: Re-mapping Literary and Social Knowledge

Translation not only expands readership but also transforms the epistemological status of a text. Meenakshi Mukherjee conceptualises translation as an act of discovery that reconfigures both the source text and the receiving culture.

She observes:

> Translation is not merely a transfer of a text from one language to another; it is an act of discovery in which the receiving culture encounters unfamiliar histories, social relations, and literary forms, thereby expanding its own imaginative and critical horizons. In this process, the translated text often acquires new meanings and functions that exceed its original context (Mukherjee 5–6).

The English translation of *Kharsuanru Kulabiri* performs precisely this work of discovery. For readers unfamiliar with Odisha's caste hierarchies, agrarian relations, and local idioms of humiliation and resistance, the translated text opens up an unfamiliar social world. At the same time, the translation invites national readers to recognise parallels between Das's experiences and Dalit histories elsewhere in India. Translation thus enables a double movement: it preserves regional specificity while facilitating comparative understanding, allowing the Odia Dalit experience to resonate within a broader national framework.

The Politics of Translation and the Ethics of Representing the Subaltern

Translation becomes ethically charged when it involves subaltern voices. GayatriChakravortySpivak famously warns against translations that appropriate or domesticate the subaltern voice for elite consumption. In "The Politics of Translation," she writes:

> Translation is not simply a matter of conveying meaning. It is an intimate act of reading that demands surrender to the rhetoricity of the original text. Without such intimacy, translation risks appropriating the voice of the subaltern rather than enabling it to speak. The task of the translator is therefore an ethical one, involving responsibility to the language, history, and vulnerability of the original speaker" (Spivak 190–91).

The translators of *From Kharsuan to Kulabiri* negotiate this ethical terrain by retaining the narrative's testimonial urgency and affective intensity. The translation does not soften descriptions of caste violence or rural deprivation to suit metropolitan sensibilities. Instead, it confronts readers with discomfort, thereby preserving the political force of Das's narrative. In this sense, the translation exemplifies what Spivak calls an "ethical intimacy" with the original text, allowing the Dalit subject to speak across linguistic boundaries without being silenced or aestheticised.

Language as Resistance

Language itself becomes a form of resistance in Das's autobiography. Written in a plain, oral-inflected Odia register, the narrative rejects elite literary aesthetics in favour of experiential truth.

The author explicitly asserts this position in Odia:

"ମୁଁ ଯାହା ଦେଖିଛି ସେଇ କଥା ଲେଖୁଛି । ସତ୍ୟ କହିବାକୁ ସୁନ୍ଦର ଭାଷା ଦରକାର ନାହିଁ" ।

The English translation retains this defiant simplicity:

> I am writing what I have seen and lived. If my words are harsh, it is because life was harsher.

By preserving the non-ornamental voice of the original, the translation resists aesthetic domestication and allows Dalit speech patterns to challenge dominant literary norms.

Dalit Autobiography as Counter-History

Dalit autobiographies fundamentally challenge dominant historiography by foregrounding experiences systematically erased from nationalist narratives. AnupamaRao argues that Dalit texts disrupt linear narratives of Indian modernity:

> Dalit narratives force a rethinking of Indian modernity by foregrounding caste as a fundamental axis of power. They reveal how democratic ideals coexist with entrenched social hierarchies, producing a fractured modernity that cannot be understood without attending to caste (Rao 12–13).

In *From Kharsuan to Kulabiri*, Das documents the everyday mechanisms through which caste is reproduced—segregated labour, ritual humiliation, denial of education—while also tracing moments of resistance and political awakening. The English translation ensures that these counter-histories are incorporated into national academic and literary discourse, challenging celebratory narratives of Indian progress.

Gender, Community, and Translational Responsibility

Translation of Dalit narratives must also attend to internal differences within marginalised communities. J. Devika highlights the importance of gender-sensitive translation:

> Translating marginalized voices involves negotiating power relations embedded in language. The translator must remain attentive to how gender, caste, and class shape narrative voice and reception, lest translation reproduce the very hierarchies it seeks to dismantle (Devika 180).

The English translation of Das's autobiography retains the voices of women and community elders, ensuring that Dalit life is not represented as a homogeneous experience. This attentiveness strengthens the text's political significance and ethical credibility.

Personal Memory as Collective Testimony

Although autobiographical in form, *From Kharsuan to Kulabiri* consistently transforms personal memory into collective testimony.

In the Odia narrative, Das observes:

"ମୋ ଜୀବନ କଥା ମୋର ଏକ ନୁହେଁ, ଏହା ଆମ ସମସ୍ତଙ୍କର" ।

The English version universalizes this insight:

> My story is not mine alone. It belongs to everyone who grew up learning fear before hope.

Translation amplifies this collectivization of memory, enabling regional suffering to be recognized as part of the national social fabric.

Translation, Radicalism, and Literary Activism

PriyamvadaGopal situates translation within traditions of Indian literary radicalism:

> Radical literary practices in India have often relied on translation to build solidarities across regions, enabling oppressed groups to recognise shared histories of resistance and imagine collective futures (Gopal 67).

The translation of *Kharsuanru Kulabiri* exemplifies this radical potential. By enabling cross-regional circulation, translation transforms literature into a form of activism that challenges caste hierarchies and fosters political solidarity.

Towards a Shared Dalit National Consciousness

Dalit identity in India has emerged historically through shared narratives of oppression and resistance. Eleanor Zelliot observes:

> Dalit identity emerged through the articulation of common experiences of oppression, articulated through writings, speeches, and movements that crossed regional boundaries and forged a sense of collective political consciousness (Zelliot 3).

English translation plays a crucial role in this process by enabling narratives like *From Kharsuan to Kulabiri* to participate in a national Dalit discourse, reinforcing collective identity while preserving regional distinctiveness.

English as Link Language and the Nationalisation of Dalit Testimony

English occupies a complex position in India's cultural economy. While it is associated with colonial power, it also functions as a link language that enables communication across regions. Pramod K. Nayar notes that Indian English literature and translation play a crucial role in constructing national literary space:

> Postcolonial English in India functions as a link language that allows regional histories to circulate across linguistic boundaries, creating a shared yet contested national

> literary space. It does not erase difference but enables comparison, dialogue, and political recognition (Nayar 42).

Through English translation, *From Kharsuan to Kulabiri* becomes legible as part of a pan-Indian Dalit archive. The narrative no longer represents only an Odia experience but contributes to a collective understanding of caste oppression across India. Translation thus nationalises Dalit suffering and resistance, transforming individual memory into shared political testimony.

The question of language in India is inseparable from the question of power. To understand how *From Kharsuan to Kulabiri* functions within national discourse, it is necessary to examine the position of English within the Indian linguistic hierarchy. English is both a colonial inheritance and a postcolonial instrument. It carries the legacy of imperial domination, yet it has also become a language of mobility, higher education, legal discourse, and inter-regional communication. This paradox gives English a unique position in mediating regional narratives to national audiences.

When Nishakar Das wrote Kharsuanru Kulabiri in Odia, the text participated in the internal dynamics of Odia literary culture . Its immediate audience consisted primarily of Odia readers who were already familiar with local caste configurations, agrarian relations, and regional histories. Within that context, the autobiography intervened in Odia Dalit discourse by articulating lived experiences of humiliation, poverty, and Gandhian activism. However, its impact beyond Odisha remained limited until its translation into English.

The transformation into *From Kharsuan to Kulabiri* is therefore not a simple expansion of readership; it is a structural repositioning. English, functioning as a link language, connects linguistic regions that might otherwise remain mutually inaccessible. India's federal structure acknowledges linguistic diversity, yet that diversity can create silos. Tamil readers may not read Odia; Marathi readers may not read Malayalam. English becomes the medium through which these silos communicate.

Pramod K. Nayar argues that Indian English literature has created a shared yet contested national literary space. This space does not erase regional difference but allows narratives from different linguistic traditions to circulate within a common discursive framework. The English translation of Das's autobiography inserts Odia Dalit experience into that shared framework. It becomes comparable with Marathi Dalit autobiographies like Joothan, Tamil Dalit narratives like Karukku, and Hindi Dalit testimonies of social exclusion.

The act of translation thus performs nationali'ation in a specific sense: it renders the regional legible as national. Before translation, NishakarDas's narrative may be perceived as an Odia experience of caste. After translation, it becomes recognizable as part of a broader Indian pattern of caste oppression. The school segregation episode—where Dalit children sit apart and their shadows are considered polluting resonates with documented practices

across India. The violence against the Kandara youth for wearing a white dhoti and carrying an umbrella echoes similar accounts from other regions where self-respect is punished as transgression.

English translation enables these resonances to become visible. Without a common linguistic medium, such comparative recognition would require multiple translations across regional languages, a far less likely scenario. English functions as nodal point—a convergence space where regional Dalit narratives encounter one another and generate collective consciousness.

However, the nationalisation of Dalit testimony through English also raises concerns. English has historically been associated with elite education and urban privilege. One might ask whether translating Dalit narratives into English risks re-centering elite readership. Does the text become accessible primarily to academics and urban middle-class readers rather than to marginalized communities themselves?

This tension cannot be ignored. Yet it must be contextualized. Dalit political movements across India have often strategically embraced English as a language of empowerment. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar himself mastered English to challenge Brahmanical dominance within legal and constitutional frameworks. English offered access to modern political vocabulary, rights, equality, democracythat could contest caste hierarchy. In this sense, English is not merely colonial residue; it is also instrument of counter-hegemonic articulation.

The translation of Kharsuanru Kulabiri into English continues this strategic appropriation. It does not abandon Odia; the original text remains. Instead, translation supplements the original by expanding its communicative range. The Dalit experience narrated by Nishakar Das becomes available to scholars of postcolonial studies, translation theory, and social history who may not know Odia. This availability matters because academic discourse shapes national understanding. When universities include translated Dalit autobiographies in curricula, they institutionalize marginalized histories within formal knowledge systems.

Nationalisation through translation also reshapes the concept of Indian literature itself. For decades, Indian literature in English was dominated by elite, urban, often upper-caste voices. The inclusion of translated Dalit autobiographies disrupts that dominance. It complicates the canon. It forces English-language literary space to confront narratives of structural injustice.

The politics of recognition operates here at two levels. First, the Dalit subject gains recognition beyond regional boundaries. Second, the Indian nation is compelled to recognize internal hierarchies that challenge its self-image as democratic and egalitarian. Translation becomes an instrument of ethical accountability.

In *From Kharsuan to Kulabiri*, the narrative of hunger—"watered rice for breakfast and watered rice for lunch"acquires new significance in English. It becomes evidence within national debates on poverty and caste. The Gandhian commitment expressed at the end of the autobiography"I shall go on working for the sarvodaya movement and for establishing gram swaraj" enters conversations about rural reform and ethical activism beyond Odisha. Translation amplifies thematic reach.

English as link language also facilitates interdisciplinary engagement. Sociologists may analyze caste relations described in the text. Historians may situate the Bhoodan movement within regional contexts. Literary scholars may examine narrative voice and testimonial structure. Political theorists may evaluate the relationship between Gandhianism and Dalit assertion. Translation thus multiplies interpretive communities.

Yet nationalisation is not homogenisation. The specificity of Odia caste categories—Pana, Kandara, Khandayat—remains intact in translation . These terms resist flattening into generic categories. They preserve regional texture even as the narrative circulates nationally. This balance between specificity and accessibility is crucial. Without specificity, translation would erase difference. Without accessibility, it would fail to circulate.

The role of English in shaping empathy must also be considered. When readers encounter humiliation narrated in a language they understand, affective identification becomes possible. Empathy, however, must not be reduced to sentimentality. The purpose of nationalising Dalit testimony is not to evoke pity but to generate structural awareness. The translated narrative invites readers to recognize caste as systemic injustice rather than isolated cruelty.

English translation also positions the text within global circuits. International scholars studying subalternity, human rights, and postcolonial identity may access the narrative through English. This global visibility can strengthen national accountability. When caste discrimination is discussed internationally, it pressures domestic institutions to respond.

At the same time, translation into English does not dissolve regional identity. The narrative remains anchored in specific landscapes; riverbanks, villages, Koraput regions. These geographies are not abstracted. Translation carries them into English without displacing them. The title itself retains place names: Kharsuan, Kulabiri. This retention signals that nationalisation does not erase locality; it reframes it.

Another dimension of English as link language is temporal mediation. Younger generations who may not read Odia fluently but are educated in English-medium institutions can access the narrative. Thus, translation bridges generational linguistic shifts within India. It ensures that Dalit histories are not lost as language preferences evolve.

The concept of national integration often evokes administrative unity or political federalism. Literary national integration operates differently. It depends on shared stories.

Translation enables stories from Odisha to be read in Delhi, Chennai, Mumbai, and beyond. It fosters mutual recognition among communities separated by language.

However, national integration through translation must avoid assimilationist logic. The goal is not to subsume regional voices into a uniform national identity. Rather, it is to create a dialogic national space where differences coexist. *From Kharsuan to Kulabiri* contributes to such a dialogic space. It speaks from Odisha but resonates across India.

In this sense, translation functions as a bridge rather than a filter. It carries the weight of caste humiliation without reducing it. It transmits Gandhian aspiration without romanticizing it. It communicates poverty without aestheticizing it.

Ultimately, English as link language in this context performs three interrelated roles:

It expands readership across linguistic boundaries.
It integrates regional Dalit testimony into national literary and academic discourse.
It facilitates comparative and global engagement without erasing specificity.

The nationalisation of Dalit testimony through translation is therefore not merely literary. It is political. It reshapes how the Indian nation understands itself. It insists that narratives from riverbanks in Odisha are as central to national identity as metropolitan stories. It compels recognition that democracy remains incomplete while caste humiliation persists.

By translating KharsuanruKulabiri into English, the narrative travels beyond regional borders. In doing so, it challenges the nation to confront its fractures and to reimagine integration not as uniformity but as ethical listening.

Personal Memory as Collective Archive and the Reimagining of the Nation

One of the most powerful aspects of *From Kharsuan to Kulabiri* is that it refuses to remain a purely individual narrative. Although structured as autobiography, the text persistently dissolves the boundaries between "I" and "we." Nishakar Das does not present his life as exceptional or heroic in isolation; rather, he situates it within the shared conditions of his community . His hunger is communal hunger. His humiliation is communal humiliation. His struggle is inseparable from collective endurance. This transformation of personal memory into collective archive is central to the political force of the narrative and becomes even more significant when the text enters national circulation through translation.

Autobiography, in its classical Western form, often emphasizes individuality, self-fashioning, and psychological interiority. Dalit autobiography, however, frequently reconfigures this model. The self becomes representative rather than singular. The narrative voice speaks not merely for personal catharsis but for historical correction. In *From Kharsuan to Kulabiri*, the repeated emphasis on community life, caste segregation, agrarian hardship, and social humiliation indicates that the text is less about individual development and more about documenting structural conditions .

This shift from individual memory to collective testimony is politically significant. Collective memory resists erasure. When humiliation is remembered collectively, it becomes archive. When archive becomes accessible through translation, it becomes national evidence. The English translation therefore transforms regional memory into part of the national documentary consciousness.

Consider again the school segregation episode . On the surface, it appears as a childhood recollection. Yet when read in English within national discourse, it becomes historical record of caste discrimination within educational institutions. The narrative does not require statistical data; lived testimony itself functions as evidence. Translation ensures that such evidence is not confined to Odia-speaking audiences but becomes part of broader debates on caste and education in India.

Similarly, the episode of the Kandara youth beaten for wearing a white dhoti and carrying an umbrella is not presented merely as anecdote. It symbolizes the violent policing of dignity. The umbrella, a simple object, becomes emblem of aspiration. The assault reveals that caste hierarchy depends on controlling visibility. By narrating this event in English, the translation converts local memory into national metaphor. The event now speaks beyond Sundarpur village; it becomes emblematic of caste-based humiliation across India.

The transformation of memory into archive through translation has implications for how the Indian nation imagines itself. Nations often construct identity through heroic narratives—freedom struggles, constitutional milestones, developmental achievements. Dalit autobiographies introduce counter-memory. They reveal that beneath national triumph lies ongoing inequality. Translation amplifies this counter-memory, forcing it into national conversation.

At the same time, NishakarDas's narrative does not end in despair. His commitment to GandhianSarvodaya and gram swaraj introduces an ethical dimension to collective memory. The archive is not solely accusatory; it is aspirational. Memory becomes foundation for reconstruction. The narrative insists that change is possible, though difficult.

The collective dimension of the autobiography is also evident in its depiction of rural social networks. The family's shared poverty, the community's participation in rituals, and the interconnectedness of caste groups demonstrate that the self is embedded within relational structures. Translation carries these relational textures into English, enabling readers to perceive Dalit life not as isolated victimhood but as complex social world.

This collective archive challenges dominant historiography that often privileges elite documentation. State records may not register humiliation in village classrooms. Official reports may not document umbrellas broken in acts of caste enforcement. Autobiographical testimony fills these gaps. When translated, it becomes accessible to historians, sociologists, and policymakers. It complicates official narratives with experiential truth.

The concept of national Integratio" must therefore be reconsidered. Integration cannot be achieved merely through administrative unification or economic development. It requires shared acknowledgment of injustice. Translation contributes to this acknowledgment by enabling stories from marginalized communities to circulate widely. When readers across linguistic regions encounter NishakarDas's testimony , they participate in a form of ethical listening. Such listening is foundational to democratic solidarity.

The role of translation in constructing Dalit national consciousness is particularly important. Dalit identity in India has emerged through networks of shared narratives, speeches, and movements crossing regional boundaries. English serves as connective medium through which these narratives encounter one another. *From Kharsuan to Kulabiri* becomes part of a larger constellation of Dalit autobiographies that collectively articulate structural injustice.

Through translation, Odia Dalit experience is no longer peripheral to national Dalit discourse. It stands alongside narratives from Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, and elsewhere. This inclusion broadens the map of Dalit history. It reveals diversity within shared struggle. It prevents regional marginalization within Dalit studies itself.

The chapter must also address the emotional dimension of collective archive. When memory becomes shared, it can generate both solidarity and discomfort. English readers unfamiliar with caste brutality may experience shock. Yet such shock is productive if it leads to critical reflection. The translation does not shield readers from discomfort; it exposes them to it. The stark description of watered rice meals and the humiliating commands of the zamindar confront readers with embodied inequality.

Another important dimension is temporality. Memory recorded in autobiography bridges generations. Younger readers encountering the English translation may not have witnessed overt untouchability in their own lives. Yet through narrative, they inherit awareness of historical injustice. Translation thus ensures continuity of memory across linguistic and generational shifts.

The reimagining of the nation from"the margins depends on such continuity. If national identity is constructed solely from dominant narratives, it remains incomplete. Inclusion of translated Dalit autobiographies forces revision of national self-understanding. It insists that democracy must be evaluated not only by constitutional text but by lived experience.

In *From Kharsuan to Kulabiri*, the journey from Kharsuan to Kulabiri symbolizes personal movement across space . Translation extends that journey beyond Odisha. The narrative now travels across India and potentially beyond national borders. Each new reader becomes participant in collective archive.

This expansion also raises questions about the future of translated Dalit narratives. Translation must continue not as isolated event but as sustained practice. More regional Dalit texts need translation to create fuller national archive. Without systematic translation, certain regions remain underrepresented. The success of *From Kharsuan to Kulabiri* demonstrates the transformative potential of such work.

Conclusion: Translation as National and Ethical Intervention

The English translation of *Kharsuanru Kulabiri* demonstrates that translation is not a secondary literary activity but a central cultural and political practice in India. By enabling an Odia Dalit autobiography to circulate beyond regional borders, translation nationalises Dalit experience, transforming local memory into shared testimony. Drawing on translation studies, postcolonial theory, and Dalit scholarship, this paper has argued that English translation functions as an ethical intervention that challenges dominant histories, fosters solidarities, and reimagines Indian nationalism from the margins. In doing so, translation emerges as a crucial tool in the ongoing struggle for social justice and cultural recognition. ■

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Cultural Transformation and Self Exploration in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*: A Literary Scrutiny

N. Gunasekaran

M. Natarajan

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Mistress of Spices*is a compelling literary work that explores the intricate nature of the immigrant encounter and the profound influence of spices, serving as a metaphorical representation of cultural and personal development.This research delves into the intricacies of the bargaining sessions, shedding light on the adept manner in which the author integrates Tilo's past as an immigrant and spice mistressand identities is conducted via the use of postcolonial, feminist and cultural studies approaches in interdisciplinary study. This study explores the process by which the protagonist navigates the intersection between her conventional cultural background and her evolving sense of self in an unfamiliar country, using the transformative powers of various spices. Through the use of spices, which serve as symbols of empowerment and resistance, she is able to establish a profound connection with her consumer base while simultaneously preserving her ethnic identity.This study offers fresh insights into Divakaruni's portrayal of cultural negotiation. It explores themes such as identity development, cultural adaptation and the transformative influence of cultural heritage in the context of diasporic challenges. The results of this research validate the enduring significance of the novel as a work of literature that provokes contemplation on the intricate interplay between immigration and cultural identity. The characters of the diaspora engage in a process of identity formation that entails negotiation. The author effectively showcases the coexistence of Indian and American societies by situating the main characters of the story at a point where these two cultures intersect.The exploration of self-definition and self-doubt constitutes essential topics. The book explores the extent to which an individual's identity is shaped by factors such as their ethnic, cultural, national, religious and racial background.

Keywords: Culture, Identity, Postcolonial, Immigrant, Transformation

Introduction

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni has emerged as a significant figure in the realm of Indian English writing and the critical examination of diasporic experiences. The personalities

of immigrants, as projected, have a proclivity for being ensnared in a state of liminality, whereby their inner conflict of being simultaneously in two distinct realms is heightened. She is mostly revered for her innovative narrative style, her lyrical sensitivity, her depiction of women characters within diverse socio-cultural contexts and her exceptional capacity to transcend many barriers that impede the notions of assimilation and integration.

The examination of diaspora necessitates the consideration of negotiating culture and identity, specifically cultural identity. This chapter aims to analyse the degree to which migrants are involved in the negotiation process, the specific stage in their life when they experience the pressure to negotiate and how this negotiation is portrayed in Divakaruni's fiction. In his work titled "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall presents a critical analysis of the notion of cultural identification. He posits that cultural identity may be comprehended from two distinct perspectives: the first being the ascriptive viewpoint of similarity and the second being the perspective of dissimilarity. As per the first perspective on the matter, cultural identity may be seen as the manifestation of collective historical encounters and the adoption of shared cultural norms and values (223).

The central topic of analysis in *The Mistress of Spices*is on the negotiation of cultural identity and the experiences of individuals who identify with hyphenated subjectivities. Divakaruni's work centres on the migration of the principal characters to America, their challenges in adapting to the new cultural milieu and their navigation of their Indian and American identities. During the negotiating process, the construction and adoption of the hyphenated identity of an Indian-American is observed and analysed. Divakaruni's compositions purposefully include the amalgamation of culture and identity. In the novel, Tilo, a protagonist of first-generation immigrant background, embodies the struggle between her ancestral culture and the civilization she has adopted as her own.

The concept of home has a prominent position throughout *The Mistress of Spices.* Tilo's residence is situated inside the confines of her spice emporium. She was compelled to depart from her own nation, although she is determined to remain in her symbolic abode - the spice emporium. Drawing inspiration from Robin Cohen, the concept of home may be understood as the "site of origin or settlement, encompassing local, national, or transnational spaces, as well as an imagined virtual community" (Cohen, Global Diasporas, 10). The concept of place of origin often pertains to the nation state, whereas the notion of place of residence often refers to the adopted country. The term "virtual community" encompasses the online platforms that facilitate enhanced global communication and foster a sense of belonging, even within social media networks. The concept of home may now be experienced via the use of technologies such as Skype or video calling. However, virtual spaces of this kind are often unable to fully capture the authentic character that a physical home may convey. The sensory experience of soil, olfactory perception and the sense of familiarity associated with home are likely to evoke stronger emotional responses in physical dwellings rather than virtual ones. Avtar Brah provides an analysis of the emotional significance

associated with the concept of home in her work titled "Cartographies of Diaspora." She asserts:

What is the location of one's place of residence? On one hand, the concept of 'home' holds a mythical significance as a desired location within the diasporic imagination. In this context, the designated location is perceived as an irreversible destination, despite the potential for physical exploration of the geographical region considered to be the point of departure. Conversely, home also encompasses the personal encounter with a specific area. The sensory experiences included by the subject include auditory perceptions, olfactory sensations, thermal conditions and particulate matter. These encompass the auditory stimuli, such as noises, as well as olfactory stimuli, such as scents. Additionally, they encompass the thermal conditions, including heat and dust, as well as the atmospheric conditions associated with warm summer nights, or the exhilaration brought about by the first snowfall. Furthermore, they encompass the chilling winter evenings, as well as the melancholy grey skies that manifest throughout the daytime. These phenomena are influenced by historically specific everyday social relations. The user's text does not contain any information to rewrite in an academic manner.

The connotations attributed to an individual's residence consist of uncomplicated yet spatial visual representations and distinct emotional experiences. The longing for a sense of home is a manifestation of the diasporic imagination, wherein this desire is intricately linked to a deep yearning and nostalgia for the displacement from one's native land. A yarning for the homeland makes it tough for the immigrants to adapt with the new cultural aesthetics of the host nation which in turn leaves its imprint on their identity building. The book focuses on India as the primary setting, where the protagonist Tilo and many other immigrant characters originate. Throughout the narrative, the author explores the attempt to transplant this home on the American continent, portraying a range of experiences in the process.

A diasporic individual undergoes relocation and transitions between several cultural environments. The individual's sense of dispersion and displacement is heightened via the interaction of memory and longing - recollections of the homeland that has been lost and a yearning to be embraced and establish a fresh sense of self in the recently inhabited territory. The concept of homeland is characterised by a profound emotional intensity and a sentimental sadness that seems to possess a near-universal quality when measured in terms of feet. This emotional depth associated with the motherland appears to be nicely revealed by the author. The motherland is viewed as the cultural hearth which the immigrants tend to move. Tilo's profound emotional connection with her birthplace is powerfully shown via her empathy for fellow Indians residing in America.

Fusing threads of dream, pain, displacement, alienation, battle with identity and assimilation in the altered circumstances by the immigrant characters, the book, *The Mistress of Spices,* provides a multi-layered portrayal of the diasporic experiences in America. The

experience of feeling displaced is evident in Tilo's life from an early stage. So, the idea of displacement as a location of 'identity' is a concept Tilo learns to live with, long before she is able to spell it. Being distributed from one place to another for several times, she tends to fulfil the immigrants' yearning to experience a closeness with the homeland via her magical skills in the spice store. Her dispersion from home is for several occasions. She regards the spice business as her sole home where she cultivates and studies the cultural characteristics of her origin. With the exception of her deliberate choice to seek shelter in Oakland, all previous dispersals were involuntary and without her permission.

After being forcibly taken by pirates from her hamlet and subsequently from her homeland, Tilo finds herself on an island after her liberation from the oppressive control of the pirates. She demonstrates exceptional proficiency in harnessing the mystical properties of the spices native to her homeland, honing her skills under the tutelage of the venerable Old Mother. Through her adeptness, she endeavours to aid others in trouble. Moreover, from a critical standpoint, the pirates might be likened to the colonisers who exploited India and her resources throughout the era of colonisation.

Tilo's successful subjugation of the pirates might be seen as a symbolic representation of the long-desired emancipation of the colonised population from their oppressors. Not only does she triumph over her adversaries, but she also demonstrates a high level of proficiency in the domains of command and leadership. The individual exercises autonomy in decision-making. Following her extensive training as a proficient practitioner of spices, Tilo makes a conscious decision to go to Oakland, situated in the United States of America. She articulates her sentiment towards this decision by stating, "Even prior to verbalising it, I possessed an inherent awareness of its appellation, Oakland, the alternative metropolis adjacent to the Bay. A place that belongs to me" (55). According to the Old Mother, Tilo's life would undergo a profound transformation at the new location. The individual makes a futile attempt to persuade Tilo to reconsider her selection, expressing, "Oh Tilo... I am compelled to grant your request, but I implore you to carefully contemplate. It would be more advisable for you to select an Indian settlement or an African market town, or any other location across the globe, such as Qatar, Paris, Sydney, Kingston Town, or Chaguanas" (55). Throughout the narrative, it becomes evident that the Mother'sscepticism was founded on justifiable grounds.

Tilo is the proprietor of a spice emporium located in Oakland. This establishment offers clients a wide array of Indian spices, including both commonplace and unusual varieties. Notably, the spices available possess unique properties attributed to their mystical origins. These spices are said to possess healing qualities, capable of alleviating the many afflictions experienced by individuals in their unfamiliar surroundings. The spice store serves as a microcosm of India. It is intriguing to note that Tilo's assistance is limited to Indian immigrants, as advised by the Old Mother, resulting in her being referred to as "the architect of immigrant dreams" (28). The first maternal figure issued a cautionary statement to the

protagonist, emphasising the importance of their purpose, which is to assist those belonging to their own group exclusively. In contrast, individuals from other groups are advised to seek assistance elsewhere (68). Tilo diligently fulfils her responsibility of safeguarding her own species via various means. The spice business functions as Tilo's place of residence, providing her with a sense of comfort and familiarity. The shop houses a comprehensive collection of spices from her ancestral land. As she describes, by standing at the room's centre and rotating, one can behold every Indian spice that has ever existed, including those that have been forgotten. These spices are meticulously arranged on the store's shelves, rendering this establishment truly unique and unparalleled in the world. (3) Therefore, the spices serve as catalysts for establishing a connection between immigrant persons and their country of origin.

Individuals often choose to migrate from their country of origin because they are unable to satisfy their own aspirations and needs. Upon arriving in a foreign area, they adopt a positive mindset with the intention of realising their previously unmet ambitions. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that individuals may encounter less hospitable conditions in their new surroundings, where they are often seen as outsiders. The thought of anticipating an excessively pleasant existence in the host country might be considered surrealistic. History is replete with countless narratives of diaspora, wherein the experiences of immigrants are characterised by segregation, victimisation, oppression, as well as racial, ethnic and religious discrimination within the host country. These discriminatory practises are not limited solely to the governing institutions of the hostland, but are also perpetuated by ordinary citizens of that nation. The diasporic community, particularly the South Asian diasporic group, had significant challenges in the United States after the 9/11 terrorist assault.

The immigrants, who are often seen as being caught in a state of uncertainty, have their identity examined and understood primarily via the rigid perspectives of race, nationality and religion in such instances. According to Walker Conner's article titled "The Impact of Homeland Upon Diasporas," the author asserts that diasporas are often seen as individuals who exist on the fringes of society. Despite potentially being accepted and even treated well throughout their prolonged presence, they are nevertheless regarded as outsiders by the native population (Conner 26). Conner's perspective in *The Mistress of Spices*is situated within the backdrop of Tilo's introspective contemplation, whereby she envisions the tumultuous stream of ideas afflicting the anguished immigrants residing in America.

Tilo exhibits empathy for people that occupy a lower socio-economic status, such as Haroun, a professional driver, Lalita, the wife of Abuja and Jagjeet, a Punjabi youngster who struggles to assimilate into American culture. Individuals who find themselves in distress seek for Tilo for resolution and solace and she consistently provides them with assistance and support. The spice store serves as a microcosm of India, providing a sense of familiarity and solace for every immigrant to openly express their struggles. The immigrants express

their anticipation for a potential resolution that may be provided by the proprietor of the spice business. Therefore, Tilo's existence in the United States is entirely dedicated to the welfare of her compatriots and, therefore, her country of origin. However, a dilemma emerges over her allegiance to her own people when she forms an emotional bond with an American individual.

The ability of Tilo to provide healing to immigrants and her connection with Raven is accomplished via the use of magical practices. In her article, Gita Rajan highlights the manner in which Divakaruni combines traditional and contemporary interpretations of America to construct a multifaceted and diverse narrative that encompasses various aspects of lived reality, including factual information, cultural practices, superstitions, historical events, social norms, moral values and ideological perspectives (220). Tilo seems to be associated with a bygone era of enchantment and her outward appearance resembles that of an elderly woman. However, inside this antiquated persona, Tilo nurtures the efficacy of modern comprehension. The author demonstrates an understanding of the emotional distress experienced by the earlier wave of immigrants, as well as the subsequent generation's fervent attempts to assimilate into American culture, sometimes at the expense of their traditional practices. The Indian immigrants with whom Tilo interacts in the host country have diverse characteristics, however they share a similar inclination towards assimilation. One of the primary focal points emphasized. Divakaruni's decision to appoint Tilo as the proprietor of the spice-shop might be seen as a deliberate reversal of the metaphorical trade of spices historically associated with the colonisers. The spice business, conversely, functions as Tilo's place of residence. The individual in question has a tendency to maintain a sense of security and comfort by metaphorically carrying her dwelling place with her at all times, so seeking refuge inside its safe confines during the whole of each day.

Despite being restricted to using her healing magical abilities only on those within her own group and cultural background, Tilo surpasses these limitations and develops romantic feelings for Raven, a Native American individual seeking spiritual comfort. The individual has a sense of betrayal upon discovering that his mother had withheld her authentic Native American heritage from him. Tilo begins to develop empathy for his difficulties and derives satisfaction from his companionship. The protagonist voluntarily immerses herself in Shampati's fire in order to undergo a physiological transformation, transitioning from an elderly woman to a youthful and aesthetically pleasing appearance. She contemplates relinquishing her role as a mistress in order to indulge in sensual gratification with her American partner. Tilo's choice to abandon a multitude of individuals in their respective circumstances and embark on a fresh existence in an unfamiliar realm with her romantic partner is disrupted when the catastrophic occurrence of an earthquake compels her to recognise the imperative nature of her presence among her own people, rendering her unable to forsake them for the sake of an American companion. Raven demonstrates a level of deference for Tilo's choice, since both individuals have a profound appreciation for the alluring persona that the other embodies.

Finally, a convergence of Eastern and Western cultures is achieved via the coupling of Tilo and Raven, resulting in Tilo bestowing upon her daughter the name Maya, which encompasses both Indian and American influences. The work explores the evolution of the protagonist's identity, as she transitions from being seen as an unattractive individual called Nayan Tara to embodying the auspicious and prosperous persona of Bhgyavati. Eventually, she adopts the name Maya, which symbolises her desire to bridge the gap between the two nations she holds dear. Nevertheless, the intricacy around the concept of home, country and its inhabitants remain prevalent. The place Tilo goes to cannot be classified as India in a geographical sense, but rather as India abroad. This refers to her spice business, which serves as a symbol of India and attracts troubled Indians who pay their respects. Within the narrative of the book, Tilo expresses to Haroun the notion of her potential homecoming, accompanied with the contemplation of whether a true path of return exists (282). This uncertainty is not an extraordinary one; instead, it is a prevalent inquiry that tends to trouble newcomers in various ways. Tilo acquires the ability to effectively manage her dual identities only via the process of bargaining. The protagonist is unable to disassociate herself from her Indian identity, while the character Raven is unwilling to abandon Tilo. The anticipated amalgamation of selves is postulated in their forthcoming merger. The American Indian Raven perceives a parallel in the Indian American Tilo. Prior to embracing the fundamental and diverse characteristic of the American, Tilo contemplates distancing herself from him. However, like to a rhizome, she ultimately becomes connected with him.

Conclusion

Thus, this paper explores a crucial and inevitable aspect of the process of negotiating diasporic identity. Through the process of embracing change and adapting to new circumstances, individuals within the diaspora continually generate and perpetuate their identities. The diaspora experience is characterised by the acknowledgment of essential variety and diversity, rather than being defined by essence or purity. It is shaped by a conceptualization of 'identity' that embraces and thrives on difference, rather than rejecting it. This is shown by the phenomenon of hybridity. Tilo has an awareness of the distinctions she must confront, prompting her to navigate a course of unity with her dual identities as an Indian and an American. ■

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The Role of Context in Interpreting Literariness in Khaled Hosseini's *And The Mountains Echoed*.

Mahaboob Unnisha Sulthani M.

Naveen Kumar K.

Language, like barren woods transformed into verdancy through rain, regains its aesthetic vitality when approached through contextual meaning rather than mechanical dissection. Contemporary literary criticism, however, often treats language as a static object, examined primarily through form, structure, and linguistic classification, thereby distancing readers from the experiential and emotional essence of the text. This paper challenges such reductive approaches by proposing a meaning-oriented reading that emphasizes simplicity, context emotional resonance over excessive theoretical complexity. Through a close reading of a sentence: "Everyone loved you, no one me, and why? What had I done? (81)" from Khaled Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed*, the study demonstrates that literary meaning can be accessed without exhaustive plot analysis or structural mapping. The sentence under consideration conveys neglect, longing, and emotional pain in a manner that is immediately intelligible within its context. By foregrounding surface meaning and affective clarity, this paper argues that language is not an inherently complex entity but a communicative medium whose significance emerges naturally through contextual understanding. The study ultimately seeks to reaffirm the accessibility of literary language and to re-orient critical practice toward meaning rather than mechanical analysis.

Keywords: Surface-level meaning, Context, Literariness, Meaning construction

Introduction

All living species possess distinctive modes of expression through which they communicate affective states; however, human beings occupy a unique position due to their highly developed capacity for language. Among the various forms of learning imparted during childhood, language acquisition occupies a central role, as human life is inconceivable without it. Language enables not only the expression of thought but also the comprehension of others' perceptions and emotional states. While communication may initiate interaction, it is understanding that completes it. Meaning, therefore, functions as the core mechanism through which language becomes intelligible and responsive, making it indispensable to interpretation.

Over time, language has been studied and classified into numerous categories such as dialects, pidgins, creoles, sociolects, and multilingual forms. With the emergence of globalization, digital communication and socio-material practices, linguistic inquiry has further expanded to include constructed languages, tonal systems, technical and academic registers, business discourse, and internet slang. Despite this diversity, linguists consistently emphasize the role of context–situational, social, temporal, and cultural–in interpreting meaning across linguistic forms.

Context, however, is not a singular or fixed concept but a broad analytical field within linguistics. It refers to the linguistic and extra-linguistic elements that surround an utterance and influence its interpretation. At the grammatical level, context assists in resolving ambiguity, identifying referents, and recognizing implied meanings. Linguistics approaches to context have evolved from syntactic analysis, which focuses on sentence structure, to pragmatic frameworks that consider speaker intention and listener expectation. Discourse analysis further extends this scope by examining meaning across extended texts rather than isolated sentences. More recently, multi-modal studies have explored how non-verbal elements such as images and emojis contribute to meaning-making in digital environments.

Departing from these expansive contextual frameworks, the present study focuses on the internal flow of textual language–specifically, how words, phrases, and co-text interact within a text to generate meaning without reliance on external situational factors such as setting, shared background knowledge, or speaker roles. The paper foregrounds the significance of surface-level understanding as a foundational mechanism through which meaning is accessed and literary experience is realized. By emphasizing surface meaning, the study argues that language need not be treated as an opaque or overly complex system but as an accessible medium through which literary aesthetics and emotional resonance can be directly apprehended.

Textual Analysis:

Khaled Hosseini's *And the Mountains Echoed* (2013), his third novel, belongs to the genre of historical fiction presents a wide-ranging portrayal of human lives shaped by geography, war, and displacement. Unlike his earlier novels, this work moves across villages, cities, and foreign countries, depicting the contrasting cultures and behaviours of people rooted in different localities. The novel's fragmented structure, multiple characters, and shifting perspectives offer insight into the complexity of human relationship and reflect Hosseini's dynamic narrative technique. Across its chapters, the novel engages with themes such as sibling love, betrayal and separation, broken promises, emotional neglect, unfulfilled desires, social inequality, irreparable memory, and the enduring violence of war. Though many characters fail to live the lives they desired, they ultimately accept the alternatives imposed upon them, finding limited comfort within constrained choices.

A clear example of surface meaning and psychological context can be observed in the following passage:

> He is not a criminal. Everything he owns he has earned. In the nineties, while half the guys he knew were out clubbing and chasing women, he had been buried in study, dragging himself through hospital corridors at two in the morning, forgoing leisure, comfort, sleep. He had given his twenties to medicine. He had paid his dues. Why should he feel badly? This is his Family. This is his life. (193)

The opening sentence, “He is not a criminal,” does not suggest literal criminality such as theft or murder. Instead, it functions as a defensive assertion, indicating the character’s internal struggle with guilt. The sentences that follow emphasize hard work, sacrifice, and personal discipline, presenting a justification for his present choices. Through references to long years of study, exhaustion, and delayed pleasure, the character affirms his moral legitimacy and attempts to absolve himself of wrongdoing.

The statement “He is not a criminal” reflects the character’s need to justify himself rather than a factual claim. This thought, followed by “why should he feel badly?”, reveals inner disturbance instead of confidence. Although the language appears firm on the surface, it suggests an uneasy conscience. The passage points to a failure to fulfill a moral responsibility, and the emotional tone carries suppressed guilt. Rather than facing this discomfort directly, the character comforts himself by recalling his sacrifices and emphasizing his commitment to his career and family.

This paragraph is uttered by Idris, who returns to Kabul with his brother Timur to reclaim their father’s house. During his visit, Idris encounters the devastation caused by war and learns about Roshana, a nine-year-old girl who has lost her family to brutal violence and requires urgent medical intervention. Moved by her suffering, Idris promises Amra, the nurse caring for Roshana, that he will finance the child’s surgery. However, after returning to California, professional obligations and domestic comforts gradually distance him from this commitment. Although reminders in the form of email disturb his conscience, he ultimately deletes them and resumes his life with his family.

The quoted passage emerges at this moment of moral evasion. Isolated from its broader narrative, the language itself reveals self-justification, emotional suppression, and psychological defensiveness. Without requiring detailed plot knowledge, the sentences communicate guilt and inner disturbance through the direct and uncomplicated structure. This confirms that literary meaning can be accessed through surface-level understanding, where emotional context is embedded within the language itself rather than concealed in complex narrative design.

Another instance of surface-level emotional meaning can be observed in the following passage: “At last, she makes her choice. She turns around, drops her head, and walks towards a horizon she cannot see. After that, she does not look back anymore. She knows that if she does, she will weaken(81).” The passage presents a moment of decision

marked by physical movement rather than verbal explanation. Phrases such as “drops her head” and “does not look back anymore” indicate emotional burden and inner resistance. The act of moving forward without looking back suggests a painful resolve, while the awareness that looking back would cause weakness reveals psychological strain rather than confidence. The meaning emerges clearly through gesture and action, allowing the reader to sense emotional conflict without contextual explanation.

This passage reflects the psychological turmoil of a character who acts against inner hesitation and emotional attachment. The language remains simple and direct, yet it conveys tension, loss, and emotional sacrifice. Even without knowledge of the character’s identity or circumstances, the reader can grasp the weight of the decision and the effort required to sustain it.

Within the broader narrative, the character is Parwana, who leaves her disabled twin sister Masooma in the desert at her sister’s insistence in order to move forward with her life. While the narrative context deepens the ethical and emotional significance of the act, the passage itself already communicates the core emotional meaning. The psychological conflict is embedded within the language and action of the text, demonstrating that literary meaning can be accessed at the surface level before recourse to complex narrative detail.

> That there was in her life the absence of something or someone, fundamental to her own existence. Sometimes it was vague, like a message sent across shadowy byways and vast distances, a weak signal on a radio dial, remote, warbled. Other times it felt so clear, this absence, so intimately close it made her heart lurch. (215)

The selected passage articulates a profound sense of lack, foregrounding an absence that quietly structures the subject’s emotional life. It insists not on a remembered loss, but on an intimate emptiness, an unnamed figure whose absence nonetheless feels essential to her existence. The phrase “fundamental to her own existence” functions as a crucial clue, signalling that what is missing is not incidental but constitutive of her emotional life. This lack oscillates between vagueness and sudden proximity, sometimes indistinct, at other moments intensely felt. This instability suggests an intimate emotional bond whose presence is registered only through its lack. At the surface level, meaning emerges through this warbled transmission: the subject senses that someone, essential is missing, but the identity of that absence remains unresolved. Thus the sentence allows the reader to experience absence as an emotional signal before it becomes a narratively articulated fact. The narrative context reveals a character struggling to retrieve traces of a person lodged deep within memory, without whom her life remains incomplete. The evocation of nostalgia naturally aligns the passage with a psychological framework, as longing emerges prior to conscious knowledge of its sources.

This emotional experience belongs to Pari, who grows up in Paris with her adoptive mother, Nila, a woman of striking beauty even in her forties; at fourteen, Pari bears little

physical resemblance to her, a contrast that subtly intensifies her sense of dislocation, while gazing at old photographs of her deceased adoptive father, Wahdati, Pari experiences an indistinct sensation of lack, an absence she cannot name or locate, unaware that she was adopted at the age of four, she believes Wahdati and Nila to be her biological parents, remaining ignorant of her true origins: her biological father was Saboor, and her mother died shortly after childbirth. The responsibility of caring for the infant Pari automatically fell on Abdullah, her elder brother, only six years old, who embraced this role with profound devotion and found purpose in her presence and growth. Pari's adoption thus violently disrupts an authentic bond formed in early innocence. Although Pari was too young to consciously retain memories of this separation. The emotional residue of that attachment persists, and whenever she experiences loneliness within the Wahdati household, her psyche instinctively reaches toward the faint traces of Abdullah, registering his absence without conscious recognition.

> There are strains between us. We were quarreling. Quite a lot, which was a novelty for him. He wasn't accustomed to being talked back to, certainly not by women. We had rows over what I wore, where I went, what I said, how I said it, who I said it to. I had turned bold and adventurous, and he even more ascetic and emotionally austere. We had become natural opponents. (237)

This passage communicates its meaning clearly at the surface level without requiring prior narrative knowledge. The language itself signals an antagonistic interpersonal relationship marked by conflict, control, and resistance. Phrases such as "he wasn't accustomed to being talked back to" and the explicit listing of restriction over dress, movement, and speech immediately establish a power imbalance rooted in gendered authority. The female speaker's transformation–"I turned bold and adventurous"–is placed in direct contrast to the male figure become "ascetic and emotionally austere," indicating ideological divergence rather than momentary disagreement. Even without identifying the precise relationship between the two figures, the passage, unmistakably conveys a quarrel between a dominant male and resisting female, where patriarchal control is challenged and emotional distance intensifies. Thus, the surface-level meaning is accessible through linguistic cues alone: domination, rebellion, and relational fracture are embedded directly in the diction and syntax of the passage.

Where examined alongside the broader narrative context–revealed through Nila Wahdati's interview–the surface meaning is not altered but reinforced. Her strained relationship with her authoritarian father, shaped by rigid social norms in Kabul and his insistence on discipline, her freedom, confirms what the passage already communicates independently. However, this contextual knowledge is not necessary to grasp the fundamental meaning of the excerpt; the conflict gendered control, and emotional opposition are already legible at the surface level through language itself.

> Children in new clothes, carrying henna baskets overflowing with flowers, trailed by *shahnai* and *dohol players*… the saying of prayers, and the blessing of the union. The offering of gifts. The two of them gazing at each other beneath a veil embroidered with gold thread, feeding each other a spoonful of sweet *sherbet* and *malida*. (75)

A similar mechanism operates in the passage describing the marriage scene. Here, cultural meaning emerges immediately through sensory imagery and ritual markers. Without narrative explanation, the reader can identify a ceremonial union rooted in tradition, community, and religious practice. Elements such as henna, blessings, music, shared sweets, and embroidered veils function as cultural signifiers that situate the event within a Muslim marriage context. The emotional tone–celebratory, intimate, and ritualistic–is embedded in the imagery itself, allowing meaning to be grasped instantly at the surface level.

Only upon consulting the broader context does the reader learns that this scene unfolds within Parwana's disheartened stream of consciousness, as she imagines Masooma's marriage to Saboor, the man she loved silently. Yet, once again, this psychological framing deepens but does not generate the meaning. The surface-level language already conveys union, festivity, and emotional intensity; the broader narrative merely explains why this imagery carries pain rather than joy for Parwana.

Conclusion

Context is a critical element in language comprehension; without sufficient contextual clues, extracting the intended meaning of a text can appear challenging. However, this research paper demonstrates that complete contextual information is not always indispensable for meaningful interpretation. By deliberately withholding crucial details such as character identity, situational background, and narrative motivation, this study examined whether surface-level textual clues alone could generate coherent and intelligible meaning.

The analysis reveals that surface knowledge–derived from immediate linguistic, emotional, and cultural signals embedded in the text–possesses a significant interpretative capacity. Even in the absence of explicit information regarding who is speaking or why, the selected passages retain coherence, emotional clarity, and interpretive stability. The consistency observed between interpretations drawn without contextual pointers and those later reinforced through fuller narrative disclosure confirms that surface-level meaning functions independently rather than dependently.

Furthermore, the paraphrasing of passages with and without contextual reinforcement corroborates the categories of context inferred directly from the text itself. Conflict, domination, longing, ritual, and emotional absence emerge as intelligible meanings not through extended narrative explanation but through diction, metaphor, tone, and culturally legible imagery. In this sense, broader context operates as a secondary layer of validation, affirming meanings that are already perceptible at the textual surface.

This observation has broader implication for literary interpretation, discourse analysis, and pedagogical approaches to reading. It suggests that reader are capable of responsibly deriving substantial meaning from textual surfaces alone, and that meaning-making is not suspended in the absence of complete background knowledge. Consequently, surface-level meaning should not be regarded as preliminary or insufficient, but as a legitimate and productive mode of interpretation within language and literary studies. ■

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Caste, Gender, and Resistance in Indian Dalit Women's Fiction: A CriticalAppraisal of *The Grip of Change, When I Hit You,* and *Sangati*

Bikash Chandra Behera

Dalit women's fiction in English constitutes one of the most radical and transformative literary interventions in contemporary Indian literature. Emerging from the margins of caste society, these narratives do not merely depict suffering but interrogate the structures that produce it. This research examines the intersections of caste, gender, and resistance in three foundational texts: *The Grip of Change, When I Hit You, and Sangati*. Through close textual reading grounded in Dalit feminist theory, subaltern studies, and Ambedkarite thoughts, this study argues that Dalit women's fiction constructs a counter-discourse to Brahminical patriarchy by foregrounding embodied experience, testimonial narration, and collective memory. These works demonstrate that caste oppression cannot be separated from gendered violence and that resistance must emerge from within the lived realities of Dalit women. By examining the narrative strategies, representations of body and labor, and the politics of voice in these texts, this paper establishes Dalit women's fiction as a site of epistemic resistance that redefines Indian feminist thought.

Keywords : Dalit Feminism; Brahminical Patriarchy; Intersectionality; Subaltern Voice; Caste and Gender; Narrative Resistance; Ambedkarite Thought; Testimony; Collective Memory; Dalit Fiction

Chapter I

Theoretical Framework: Dalit Feminism, Intersectionality, and the Politics of Voice

Any meaningful analysis of Dalit women's fiction must begin with the recognition that caste and gender are inseparable structures of power within the Indian social order. Dalit women occupy a location shaped simultaneously by caste-based exclusion and patriarchal control. Their marginalization is not additive but intersectional. Although the term "intersectionality" was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the context of Black feminist legal theory, its explanatory power is particularly relevant to the lived realities of Dalit women. In India, caste functions as a system of graded inequality, as B. R. Ambedkar famously argued, where oppression is layered and internalized across social strata. Within

this structure, Dalit women experience what SharmilaRege calls a “different voice” emerging from their specific socio-political location (Rege 13).

Rege’s formulation that “Dalit women talk differently” is not a metaphorical claim but an epistemological one. Dalit women’s speech emerges from a history of silencing. Their narratives confront a double erasure: first by upper-caste historiography, and second by mainstream Indian feminism that has often centered upper-caste, urban, middle-class women. Rege insists:

> The specificity of Dalit women’s location demands a rethinking of feminist theory in India. Their experiences of caste humiliation, sexual violence, and economic exploitation cannot be subsumed under a generalized category of ‘woman’ (Rege 23).

This rethinking requires a shift from universalist feminism to Dalit feminism, which foregrounds caste as foundational to gendered experience. Dalit feminism critiques Brahminical patriarchy—a term articulated by Uma Chakravarti to describe the interlocking systems of caste purity and patriarchal control. According to Chakravarti:

> Brahminical patriarchy operates through the control of women’s sexuality to maintain caste boundaries. Endogamy and notions of purity and pollution are sustained through strict regulation of women’s bodies (Chakravarti 579).

If upper-caste women are controlled to preserve purity, Dalit women are exploited to reinforce pollution. Their bodies become sites of caste assertion. Sexual violence against Dalit women is not incidental; it is structural. This insight is central to the works of P. Sivakami, MeenaKandasamy, and Bama, whose fiction repeatedly depicts how caste power manifests through bodily violation.

GayatriChakravortySpivak’s provocative question, “Can the subaltern speak?” (Spivak 271), has often been interpreted pessimistically. Spivak suggests that when the subaltern speaks, her voice is either co-opted or rendered unintelligible within dominant discourse. However, Dalit women’s fiction complicates this assertion. The subaltern not only speaks but writes. Authorship becomes a form of self-representation that challenges mediation. In these texts, narration is not passive description; it is testimony. The act of writing transforms the subaltern from object of discourse to subject of history.

Dalit literature as a whole has long been recognized as literature of protest. Rooted in Ambedkarite ideology, it seeks social transformation rather than aesthetic neutrality. Ambedkar’s call to “educate, agitate, organize” provides ideological grounding for Dalit writing. Literature becomes a tool of agitation. Yet Dalit women writers extend this project

by exposing patriarchal domination within Dalit communities themselves. They refuse to romanticize Dalit masculinity. Their critique is internal as well as external.

Gopal Guru observes that Dalit women face “triple marginalization”—as Dalits, as women, and as poor (Guru 45). This triple burden shapes narrative voice. Unlike upper-caste feminist texts that may focus primarily on gender, Dalit women’s fiction situates gender within caste hierarchy. Their oppression is public and private, structural and intimate. This duality is visible across the three novels examined in this study.

Language plays a crucial role in the politics of voice. Bama’s conversational Tamil idiom (translated into English by Lakshmi Holmström) retains oral cadences that resist literary elitism. Sivakami’s realism foregrounds political debate and ideological conflict. Kandasamy employs fragmentation and metafiction to reflect psychological rupture. Each writer disrupts dominant literary forms, signalling that aesthetic innovation itself can be resistance.

Dalit women’s fiction must also be situated within subaltern historiography. Traditional Indian history has often erased the experiences of marginalized communities. Through storytelling, Dalit women reconstruct collective memory. Bama’s Sangati is particularly significant in this regard, as it chronicles everyday incidents that mainstream narratives deem insignificant. These micro-histories challenge the macro-histories of caste society.

The body emerges as a recurring motif. It is through the body that caste is inscribed—through labour, sexual exploitation, physical violence, and hunger. Dalit women’s fiction reclaims the body from objectification. It becomes both evidence of oppression and instrument of defiance. Writing about bodily experience breaks taboos surrounding sexuality and violence, thereby destabilizing notions of purity.

Another key theoretical lens is Ambedkarite feminism. Ambedkar recognized that caste survives through control over women’s reproduction. In Annihilation of Caste, he argued that “caste is endogamy, and endogamy is maintained by controlling women” (Ambedkar 47). Dalit women writers extend this insight by revealing how endogamy intersects with sexual exploitation.

Thus, the theoretical framework for this study rests upon:
Dalit feminist theory (Rege, Guru)
Brahminical patriarchy (Chakravarti)
Subaltern studies (Spivak)
Ambedkarite critique of caste

Within this framework, the selected novels can be read as layered narratives that articulate caste violence, gendered subjugation, and emergent resistance. They are not merely stories but interventions in public discourse. Each novel responds differently to the question of voice: Who speaks? For whom? And to what effect?

The subsequent chapters will demonstrate that *The Grip of Change* exposes the contradictions within Dalit political leadership; *When I Hit You* transforms autobiographical trauma into literary rebellion; and Sangati constructs collective feminist consciousness through community storytelling. Together, these texts exemplify how Dalit women's fiction moves from silence to articulation, from marginality to centrality.

Dalit women do not seek inclusion within oppressive structures; they demand structural transformation. Their writing is therefore not assimilationist but insurgent. It calls into question the moral legitimacy of caste society and challenges feminism to confront its caste blindness.

In conclusion, Dalit women's fiction operates at the intersection of testimony and theory. It embodies lived experience while generating conceptual frameworks. By situating caste and gender within the politics of voice, these narratives redefine Indian literary modernity. They demonstrate that literature can serve as a site of resistance, memory, and radical imagination.

Chapter II

Caste, Political Power, and Patriarchal Contradictions in *The Grip of Change*

The complexity of Dalit feminist discourse becomes sharply visible in *The Grip of Change*, a novel that refuses simplistic binaries of oppressor and oppressed. P. Sivakami's narrative intervenes in two dominant frameworks: the upper-caste discourse that reduces Dalit women to passive victims and the internal Dalit patriarchal discourse that assumes male leadership as emancipatory. The novel dramatizes how caste oppression and gender subordination intersect, revealing that liberation from caste does not automatically dismantle patriarchy.

The opening episode of the novel establishes the brutal materiality of caste violence. Thangam, a young Dalit widow, is sexually exploited by an upper-caste landlord. Her vulnerability is shaped not merely by gender but by caste location. Sivakami writes:

> She knew the touch was not desire but domination. His hands did not tremble with affection; they pressed with the assurance of ownership. In that moment she understood that her body was not hers—it was a field upon which caste inscribed its right. (Sivakami 19)

This passage makes explicit that sexual violence is an assertion of caste authority. Thangam's body becomes symbolic terrain. The landlord's assault is not an isolated act of lust but a demonstration of hierarchical entitlement. The metaphor of the body as "field" invokes agrarian imagery, reinforcing how caste society treats Dalit laboring bodies as property.

The community's reaction further exposes structural injustice. Instead of confronting the landlord, village elders debate the implications for collective honour. The language of shame shifts responsibility onto Thangam. Sivakami captures this displacement:

> They spoke of honour as though it were a clay pot she had dropped. They did not speak of the man who had pushed her to the ground. In their murmurs, her silence was guilt. (Sivakami 27)

Here, honour becomes a patriarchal tool. Dalit women carry the burden of communal reputation while being denied protection. This dynamic aligns with Uma Chakravarti's argument that caste is maintained through regulation of women's bodies (Chakravarti 579). Even among the oppressed, patriarchal logic persists.

The entry of Kathamuthu, a prominent Dalit leader, introduces political complexity. He intervenes ostensibly to secure justice for Thangam. At first glance, he appears as a champion of the oppressed. However, Sivakami gradually dismantles this heroic image. Kathamuthu's activism is intertwined with self-interest and male authority. The narrative observes:

> He spoke of justice in the language of thunder, yet his gaze lingered not on the wrong but on the woman. Even as he condemned the landlord, he measured the cost of her loyalty. (Sivakami 42)

This layered portrayal reveals that resistance to caste oppression does not automatically produce gender equality. Kathamuthu's public rhetoric contrasts sharply with his private conduct. By bringing Thangam into his household under the pretext of protection, he replicates structures of control. The "rescue" becomes another form of containment.

The title *The Grip of Change* operates ironically. While political change is invoked through Dalit mobilization, the "grip" signifies the tenacity of patriarchal power. Thangam's relocation to Kathamuthu's house places her within a new hierarchy. Sivakami writes:

> She had moved from one courtyard to another, but the walls felt the same. In the landlord's house she had been prey; in Kathamuthu's she was obligation. Neither space allowed her breath. (Sivakami 76)

This metaphor of suffocation emphasizes continuity rather than rupture. The structures of caste and patriarchy intertwine so tightly that superficial change cannot dismantle them.

Sivakami's critique extends to Dalit political discourse itself. Public meetings, fiery speeches, and symbolic protests appear throughout the novel. Yet these performances often sideline women's voices. During one gathering, Thangam attempts to speak but is interrupted. The narrator remarks:

> Her words were swallowed by slogans. The men spoke of revolution, but they did not hear the tremor in her voice. Revolution had a timetable; her pain did not. (Sivakami 89)

This passage reveals how collective struggle can marginalize individual suffering. The tension between ideological agenda and lived experience becomes central to the novel's feminist intervention.

Critics such as Gopal Guru argue that Dalit women "talk differently" because their oppression cannot be fully articulated within male-centered political frameworks (Guru 48). Sivakami dramatizes this theoretical insight. Thangam's consciousness evolves as she recognizes that neither upper-caste benevolence nor Dalit male leadership guarantees autonomy.

Economic dependency further complicates her position. As a widow, Thangam lacks financial security. Her labor—both domestic and agricultural—sustains households without granting authority. Sivakami depicts the invisibility of such labor:

> Her hands were cracked from work, yet no one counted the hours she bent over the earth. The grain in their plates carried her sweat, but gratitude never found her name. (Sivakami 103)

This emphasis on labor situates Dalit women within materialist feminist analysis. Their exploitation is not solely sexual but economic. The intersection of caste-based occupational hierarchy and gendered division of labor intensifies marginalization.

The generational dimension of patriarchy emerges through younger female characters who observe Thangam's predicament. Some internalize submission; others question it. Sivakami uses dialogue to illustrate ideological conflict:

> "Why must we bow?" the girl asked.
> "Because the world is heavy," the older woman replied.
> "Then let it fall," she said quietly. (Sivakami 128)

This exchange signals emergent resistance. The younger generation refuses fatalism. Change, though constrained, becomes imaginable.

Sivakami also interrogates sexual double standards. Kathamuthu's extramarital interest in Thangam is rationalized as political necessity, whereas Thangam's reputation remains fragile. The hypocrisy reflects what Dalit feminist scholars identify as internal patriarchy. SharmilaRege notes that Dalit women's testimonies "expose contradictions within progressive movements" (Rege 34). The novel embodies this exposure.

The narrative structure reinforces feminist critique. Unlike linear heroic tales, *The Grip of Change* adopts shifting focalization. Readers witness Thangam's interior thoughts

alongside political debates. This dual perspective destabilizes patriarchal narrative authority. By granting Thangam introspective space, Sivakami ensures that her subjectivity is not eclipsed by male activism.

Resistance in the novel is gradual rather than dramatic. Thangam begins to question her dependence on Kathamuthu. She contemplates economic self-reliance and emotional autonomy. In a pivotal reflection, she thinks:

> If I am always protected, I will never learn to stand. If I remain grateful, I will never be free. Protection is only another word for possession.(Sivakami 151)

This insight encapsulates the novel's feminist core. Liberation requires dismantling possessive structures within oppressed communities.

The closing movements of the novel emphasize ambiguity rather than triumph. Political struggles continue; caste hierarchies persist. Yet Thangam's evolving consciousness represents ideological transformation. She is no longer merely victim or beneficiary but critical subject.

Through sustained realism, Sivakami constructs a narrative that refuses sentimental resolution. The novel insists that Dalit emancipation must integrate gender justice. Without confronting patriarchy, caste resistance remains incomplete.

As the narrator reflects:

> Change does not loosen its grip easily. It clutches at old habits, at comfortable hierarchies. Only when we pry open each finger—caste, power, pride—can we breathe. (Sivakami 172)

This metaphor encapsulates the novel's argument: transformation requires deliberate dismantling of entrenched structures.

In conclusion, *The Grip of Change* exposes the layered realities of Dalit women's lives. It demonstrates that caste oppression cannot be understood without examining gendered exploitation. By critiquing both upper-caste domination and internal patriarchy, Sivakami articulates a distinctly Dalit feminist perspective. Her novel challenges readers to reconsider political leadership, community solidarity, and the meaning of justice. The "grip" of oppression is multifaceted, but so too is the possibility of resistance.

Chapter III

Intimate Violence, Authorship, and Linguistic Resistance in *When I Hit You*

If *The Grip of Change* exposes the contradictions within Dalit political leadership and rural caste patriarchy, *When I Hit You* turns inward to examine intimate violence within the modern, urban, educated milieu. MeenaKandasamy's novel complicates the assumption

that caste oppression is always rural, visible, and external. Instead, it reveals how caste privilege and patriarchal control operate within marriage, intellectual spaces, and the private sphere. The novel insists that domestic violence is not merely personal tragedy but political structure.

The unnamed narrator marries a university professor who identifies as a Marxist and progressive intellectual. His ideological language masks authoritarian control. Early in the marriage, he begins isolating her from friends and family, policing her speech and movements. The narrator reflects:

> He wanted to edit my life the way he edited my sentences. He circled my friendships in red, crossed out my phone calls, inserted silences where laughter used to be. I was a manuscript in his hands, and he believed revision meant ownership. (Kandasamy 34)

The metaphor of editing underscores the link between language and power. Control over discourse becomes control over identity. The husband's ideological rhetoric—invocations of revolution and class struggle—contradicts his domestic tyranny. Kandasamy thus interrogates the gender-blindness of leftist politics in India.

The narrator's alienation intensifies as physical violence accompanies psychological abuse. She describes a moment of assault:

> When he hit me, it was not the pain that startled me but the certainty in his arm. There was no hesitation, no tremor of doubt. The blow arrived as if rehearsed, as if history itself had taught him how to strike.(Kandasamy 71)

The phrase "history itself had taught him" signals structural continuity. Patriarchal violence is inherited behaviour, not isolated impulse. Though the novel Centres marital abuse, its implications extend to caste hierarchy. The husband's caste privilege remains implicit but pervasive; his authority draws from social capital.

One of the novel's most radical gestures is its self-reflexive engagement with writing. The narrator is a writer, and her husband attempts to silence her creative expression. He demands ideological conformity, criticizing her work as "bourgeois" or insufficiently revolutionary. In response, she asserts:

> Writing was the only territory he could not occupy. Each sentence I shaped was a border he could not cross. He could bruise my body, but he could not confiscate my metaphors. (Kandasamy 112)

Here, authorship becomes resistance. The novel itself enacts this defiance. By narrating abuse in graphic detail, Kandasamy refuses erasure. The confessional mode transforms

trauma into testimony. Unlike Thangam in *The Grip of Change*, whose voice struggles within communal politics, Kandasamy's narrator claims narrative centrality.

The title *When I Hit You* is itself subversive. It reframes violence from the perspective of the abused woman. The conditional "when" suggests inevitability—violence is routine, cyclical. Yet it also signals potential reversal: when she hits back, whether physically or narratively. The act of storytelling becomes symbolic retaliation.

Kandasamy's prose style is fragmented, nonlinear, oscillating between memory and reflection. This fragmentation mirrors psychological rupture. The narrative often shifts from present tense immediacy to retrospective analysis. In one passage, the narrator describes dissociation:

> I watched myself from the ceiling as he raged below. The woman on the floor was mine and not mine. Survival demanded distance. To endure, I had to become narrator instead of victim.(Kandasamy 95)

The transformation from victim to narrator marks a reclaiming of subjectivity. Spivak's question about the subaltern's capacity to speak finds concrete articulation here. The narrator does not wait for validation; she writes herself into history.

Caste remains an undercurrent in the novel's portrayal of intellectual elitism. The husband's academic position grants him institutional authority. His dismissal of the narrator's emotional experience as irrational echoes broader patterns of silencing marginalized voices. The novel critiques what SharmilaRege identifies as the erasure of caste in mainstream feminist and leftist discourse (Rege 42). The husband's progressivism fails to address structural inequality within his own marriage.

Sexual violence within marriage is depicted with unflinching detail. The narrator describes coercive intimacy:

> Consent dissolved into fear. My body stiffened, but he called it resistance. He translated my silence into agreement. In his dictionary, marriage erased the need for permission. (Kandasamy 128)

This passage exposes the myth of marital consent. Patriarchy institutionalizes access to women's bodies. The novel aligns with Dalit feminist critiques that highlight how women's sexuality is regulated through both caste and marriage.

Isolation intensifies the narrator's vulnerability. Cut off from external support, she contemplates self-doubt. Yet even in despair, she clings to language:

> If I could not speak aloud, I would write in secret. If I could not publish, I would preserve drafts like contraband. Words were my witnesses. (Kandasamy 147)

The metaphor of contraband evokes criminalization of expression. Writing becomes clandestine survival strategy.

Unlike conventional narratives of escape, *When I Hit You* does not romanticize liberation. Leaving the marriage is fraught with fear, stigma, and uncertainty. The narrator's departure is less triumphant than necessary. She observes:

> Freedom did not feel like fireworks. It felt like stepping into sunlight after years underground. My eyes hurt. My skin burned. But I could breathe. (Kandasamy 182)

The sensory imagery underscores ambivalence. Liberation involves adjustment and vulnerability.

Kandasamy's novel also challenges readers to reconsider authorship as collective resistance. By publishing her story, the narrator aligns personal narrative with broader feminist struggle. Domestic abuse becomes emblematic of systemic misogyny. The text resonates with Gopal Guru's assertion that marginalized women must articulate their own experiences rather than rely on mediated representation (Guru 50).

In contrast to the communal framework of Sangati, which we will examine next, *When I Hit You* foregrounds individual consciousness. Yet this individualism is political. The narrator's voice contests both patriarchal marriage and literary decorum. She rejects sanitized narratives of suffering, insisting on graphic realism.

The novel's engagement with digital communication—emails, social media—situates violence within contemporary technology. Surveillance extends into cyberspace. The husband monitors online interactions, weaponizing ideology against autonomy. Thus, patriarchy adapts to modernity; it is not relic but evolving structure.

Ultimately, *When I Hit You* presents language as battlefield. Control over narrative equates to control over reality. By seizing authorship, the narrator dismantles the myth of silence. She speaks not only for herself but for women whose stories remain suppressed.

In conclusion, Kandasamy's novel expands Dalit feminist discourse into the intimate sphere. It demonstrates that caste privilege, intellectual elitism, and patriarchal domination intersect within marriage. Through confessional narrative and stylistic fragmentation, the text enacts resistance. If Sivakami exposes contradictions in political activism, Kandasamy exposes contradictions in progressive masculinity. Together, these novels reveal that resistance must operate both publicly and privately.

Chapter IV

Collective Memory, Community Feminism, and Everyday Resistance in Sangati

While *The Grip of Change* interrogates political patriarchy and *When I Hit You* dissects intimate violence within marriage, Sangati shifts the focus toward collective

experience. Unlike the other two novels, which center primarily on individual female protagonists, Sangati constructs a communal narrative. The very title—meaning "events" or "happenings"—signals multiplicity. Bama's text resists linear storytelling and instead assembles episodes, anecdotes, and oral testimonies that together compose a social history of Dalit women's lives.

The narrative voice in Sangati is at once personal and communal. The unnamed narrator recounts stories of women from her village—grandmothers, mothers, widows, young girls—whose experiences collectively articulate the burdens of caste and gender. Early in the text, Bama writes:

> From the time we are born, we are taught that we are less. Less pure, less worthy, less human. The upper-caste streets swallow us only as servants. Even our laughter must know its limits. (Bama 11)

This opening declaration situates humiliation as a lifelong conditioning. The language of "less" underscores internalized inferiority imposed by caste society. Unlike individual-centred narratives, Bama emphasizes structural repetition. Each generation inherits the same burdens.

The daily labour of Dalit women occupies a central place in the novel. Agricultural work, domestic service, childcare, and household management converge into relentless toil. Bama observes:

> Our women rise before dawn, their feet touching cold earth that does not belong to them. They bend over fields owned by others, harvest crops they will never taste, and return home to cook with what remains. (Bama 43)

This passage highlights economic exploitation intertwined with caste hierarchy. Landlessness perpetuates dependency. The women's labour sustains both upper-caste landlords and their own families, yet recognition remains absent.

Bama's depiction of childhood reveals early socialization into inequality. Dalit girls are denied educational opportunities, expected to contribute to household income. The narrator recounts:

> The boys could roam freely, their mischief forgiven. We girls learned quickly that our bodies were responsibilities. We walked with eyes lowered, our steps measured, as though the ground itself judged us. (Bama 57)

Gendered discipline shapes bodily comportment. The metaphor of the ground judging them evokes omnipresent scrutiny. Dalit girls internalize caution as survival strategy.

Sexual vulnerability remains a recurring theme. Upper-caste men exploit Dalit women with impunity, confident that social structures will protect them. Bama narrates an incident:

> He called her inside under the pretence of work. When she returned, her face was pale, her sari dishevelled. No one asked questions. We all knew the script, and silence was the only language allowed. (Bama 72)

The phrase "we all knew the script" suggests normalized violence. Silence becomes communal coping mechanism. Yet Bama's act of writing disrupts that silence. By documenting such incidents, she converts whispered knowledge into public testimony.

Humour emerges as unexpected resistance. Despite hardship, women share jokes and gossip, subverting despair. The narrator reflects:

> If we did not laugh, we would drown. Laughter was our rebellion. It cracked through sorrow like lightning splitting the sky. (Bama 88)

This metaphor of lightning suggests sudden illumination. Humour functions as emotional resilience and subtle defiance.

Unlike the isolated narrator of When I Hit You, Bama's voice is embedded in collective identity. She frequently uses the pronoun "we," emphasizing solidarity. This communal consciousness aligns with Dalit feminist thought that foregrounds shared struggle over individual heroism. As SharmilaRege argues, Dalit women's narratives often challenge the individualist bias of mainstream feminism by highlighting community-based resistance (Rege 62).

Education becomes central to Bama's vision of transformation. The narrator repeatedly urges young girls to pursue schooling as pathway to dignity:

> Study well, we tell them. Books are doors. If you push them open, you may find a world where no one calls you by your caste name. (Bama 101)

The metaphor of books as doors resonates with Ambedkarite emphasis on education as liberation. Literacy disrupts inherited hierarchies.

Religion also plays complex role. As Dalit Christians, the community in Sangati faces discrimination within church structures. Bama critiques the hypocrisy of religious institutions:

> They preach equality before God, yet seat us at the back.
> Even in prayer, caste follows us like shadow. (Bama 119)

This observation broadens critique beyond Hindu caste society to institutional Christianity, revealing persistence of hierarchy across domains.

Marriage and domestic expectations reinforce patriarchy within the Dalit community. Women endure drunken husbands, domestic violence, and economic irresponsibility. Yet Bama does not depict women as passive sufferers. In one episode, a woman confronts her abusive spouse:

> She stood before him, hands on hips, and shouted that she would no longer cook for a man who squandered his wages on liquor. The neighbours gathered, astonished. For once, her voice rose louder than his. (Bama 136)

This moment of confrontation exemplifies everyday resistance. It may not dismantle systemic patriarchy, but it asserts dignity.

Bama's narrative structure itself is political. By privileging episodic storytelling and oral cadence, she challenges canonical literary forms dominated by upper-caste aesthetics. The translation into English retains conversational rhythm, resisting polished refinement. This stylistic choice asserts authenticity.

Collective memory functions as counter-history. Through stories passed down by grandmothers, the community preserves knowledge of past injustices and survival strategies. The narrator reflects:

> Our elders remember insults like scars. They recount them not to wound us but to warn us. Memory is armour. (Bama 149)

The metaphor of armour suggests protective function. Remembering becomes defensive strategy against repetition.

Unlike the bleak ambivalence of *The Grip of Change* or the psychological intensity of When I Hit You, Sangati ends on cautiously hopeful note. Bama envisions a future where Dalit girls claim agency:

> We are not destined to bow forever. One day, our daughters will walk with heads held high, their steps unmeasured, their laughter unrestrained. (Bama 158)

This prophetic tone affirms transformation through collective consciousness.

In conclusion, Sangati articulates Dalit feminism as communal praxis. Resistance manifests not only in dramatic revolt but in everyday acts—education, solidarity, humour, confrontation. By chronicling ordinary lives, Bama elevates marginalized experiences into historical record. The novel demonstrates that voice is not singular but shared; it echoes through generations.

Conclusion

This study has examined how *The Grip of Change, When I Hit You, and Sangati* collectively articulate a powerful Dalit feminist discourse that confronts the intertwined structures of caste and patriarchy. Across different narrative settings—rural political struggle, urban marital confinement, and communal village life—these texts demonstrate that Dalit women's oppression is both structural and intimate, public and private.

In *The Grip of Change*, Sivakami exposes the contradictions within Dalit political activism, revealing that resistance to caste without dismantling patriarchy remains incomplete. Thangam's evolving consciousness underscores the necessity of gender justice within emancipatory movements. In When I Hit You, Kandasamy relocates violence to the domestic sphere, showing how progressive rhetoric can mask patriarchal domination. Here, authorship itself becomes resistance; writing transforms trauma into testimony. Meanwhile, Sangati expands the scope from individual experience to collective memory, portraying everyday acts of resilience among Dalit women whose solidarity challenges both caste hierarchy and internal patriarchy.

Together, these works answer the theoretical question of whether the subaltern can speak. They demonstrate that Dalit women not only speak but write, theorize, and reconstruct history from their lived realities. Their fiction dismantles Brahminical patriarchy by centering embodied experience and by refusing silence. Ultimately, Dalit women's writing in English redefines Indian feminist discourse, insisting that any meaningful struggle for gender equality must confront caste as foundational. Through voice, memory, and narrative resistance, these authors transform literature into a site of social critique and transformative possibility. ■

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The Self in Exile: A Diasporic Reading of Agha Shahid Ali's *Postcard from Kashmir*

Niraj Kumar Singh

The literature of Diaspora emerges from a deep sense of displacement, up-rootedness, loss, nostalgia, alienation and fractured identity. Agha Shahid Ali (1949-2001), one of the most important figures of the Indian diaspora, articulates these concerns with lyrical intensity and emotional precision. Born in Delhi, India, Ali grew up in Kashmir, shuttling between Srinagar, Jammu and the Indian Capital. Ali has got diverse cultural background that incorporates Muslim, Hindu and Western Traditions. His poem *Postcard from Kashmir* serves as a poignant reflection on exile, memory, and the fragmentation of the self. As we know that diasporic literature is deeply concerned with the themes of displacement, nostalgia, and the crisis of identity experienced by the individuals living away from their homeland.

This paper attempts to examine the poem*Postcard from Kashmir* as a representation of the self in exile, focusing on how Ali articulates diasporic identity through memory, symbolism, and emotional fragmentation. The paper aims to show that the poem is not merely a personal lament of the poet but a universal expression of the diasporic experiences at large.This paper very meticulously explores how the poem represents the diasporic self as caught between physical separation and emotional attachment to the homeland. Through a close reading of the poem, supported by postcolonial and diaspora theories, the paper examines how Kashmir is transformed into a symbolic, miniature image, revealing the poet's fractured sense of belonging. The paper argues that Ali's poem powerfully captures the psychological trauma of exile and the enduring struggle to negotiate identity in a diasporic condition.

Keywords: Diaspora, Exile, Identity, Memory, Kashmir, Nostalgia

The traumatic experience of exile has long been a central concern of diasporic literature. Writers living away from their ancestral soils often grapple with a profound sense of loss, dislocation, and identity crisis. Diaspora does not merely involve physical displacement; it also entails emotional and psychological estrangement, where the self struggles to reconcile past memories with present realities. In this context, poetry becomes a powerful medium for articulating the pain of separation and the longing for belonging.AghaShahid Ali (1949–2001) holds a prominent place in contemporary diasporic

literature. Born in Kashmir and later settled in the United States, Ali carried his homeland within his poetic imagination throughout his life. His poetry reflects an intense engagement with the themes of exile, nostalgia, violence, and loss. *Postcard from Kashmir*is regarded as his one of the most evocative poems, succinct yet deeply moving in its portrayal of the diasporic condition.

According to Emmanuel S. Nelson, the members of the Indian diaspora share a diasporic consciousness and sensibility generated by a complex network of historical connections, spiritual affinities and unifying cultural memories – manifests itself in varying degrees in the literary productions of our communities around the world. The word 'Diaspora' comes from the Greek word diaspeiro which means 'to disperse' or 'to scatter about.' It refers to the displacement of people from their original homeland to the places across the globe. The term 'diaspora', originally used for the Jewish externment from their homeland, is now applied as a "metaphoric designation" for expatriates, refugees, exiles and immigrants. The Indian diaspora which is one of the most vibrant and dynamic in the world is one of the largest diaspora in the world. Diasporic or expatriate writing deals with native culture, language and identities. In literature diasporic writers are those who always struggle to capture, synchronize and affirm the trauma resulted from the forced migration. They attempt to find out the relation and contrast between their homeland and the territory which they dispersed into. The sense of loss, the memory of 'home' and the pain of being alienated to a new land and culture haunt them. Thus they attempt to assimilate with the new culture of a new land. In simple words diaspora literature is the works that are written by authors who live outside their native land. 'Diaspora' means living away from one's own country or migration from one country to another which is completely applicable to Agha Shahid Ali.

Agha Shahid Ali was born in Kashmir to a prosperous and highly educated Muslim family in 1949. He completed his graduation from the University of Kashmir, and M.A in English from the University of Delhi and moved to the United States of America to carry out his doctorate in English. He earned his doctoral degree from Pennsylvania State University in 1984. Ali had an active academic career. He is the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including Guggenheim and Ingram-Merrill fellowships. In 1987 he began teaching at Hamilton College in New York, and later moved to the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, where he served as the director of the MFA creative writing program. He also taught at the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College and was a visiting professor at Princeton University and in the Graduate Creative Writing Program at New York University. He held teaching positions at nine universities and colleges in India and the United States.

He spent only his childhood in Kashmir as after completing his graduation he had to leave Kashmir for higher studies. When he moved to the USA, his brother Agha Iqbal was already there and their sister joined them later. But their parents continued to live in Kashmir. He came across different cultures directly or indirectly such as Hindu cultures

from his birth land India, Islamic culture from his religion Islam and Christian culture from his diasporic land USA. Agha Shahid Ali's life and work were similarly affected by his state of being in "exile" as it is always an undesired state for every human being even though he was self-exiled; he had diasporic consciousness about his motherland. He considered himself a "triple exile" from Kashmir, India and United States. During his stay in America, he was constantly haunted by the memories of his motherland so he visited his motherland Kashmir frequently in order to get connected with his parents, friends and relatives. This very feeling of loss, memory of 'home' and the pain of being alienated to a new land and culture is beautifully expressed in all his poems.

Diaspora studies emphasize the complex relationship between homeland, memory, and identity. William Safran defines diaspora as a ''condition characterized by dispersal, collective memory of the homeland, and a sense of alienation in the host land''. For diasporic writers, identity is shaped by absence rather than presence.Stuart Hall argues that cultural identity in diaspora is not fixed or essential but continuously constructed through memory and representation. Identity becomes a process rather than a stable entity. Homi K. Bhabha's concept of "unhomeliness" further illuminates the diasporic condition, wherein individuals feel estranged both from their homeland and their place of residence.These theoretical perspectives are crucial for understanding *Postcard from Kashmir*. The poem reflects a self that exists in a liminal space—emotionally anchored to Kashmir yet physically distant from it—resulting in a fragmented and unsettled identity.

Agha Shahid Ali's poetry is inseparable from his Kashmiri identity. Although he spent much of his life in America, Kashmir remained the emotional core of his work. His poems frequently return to images of homeland, loss, and longing, transforming personal memory into collective history.Ali's diasporic sensibility is marked by a deep awareness of political and cultural displacement. Unlike celebratory narratives of migration, his poetry emphasizes exile as a condition of grief. In *Postcard from Kashmir*, Ali expresses the emotional cost of living away from home, revealing how exile reshapes the self and its sense of belonging.The central image of the poem—the postcard—functions as a powerful symbol of diasporic loss. The opening lines,

> Kashmir shrinks into my mailbox,
> my home a neat four by six inches

immediately establish the theme of reduction. The vastness of Kashmir is compressed into a small, tiny, flat image, symbolizing how exile diminishes the lived reality of the homeland. The physical shrinking of place mirrors the emotional contraction experienced by the diasporic self.

The postcard represents a mediated connection to home. It offers a visual reminder but lacks depth, sound, and immediacy. This mediation underscores the poet's alienation, as his relationship with Kashmir is now indirect and symbolic rather than lived and experiential.

The poem *Postcard from Kashmir* reflects intense feelings and sentiments of the poet who is far away from his home. The poem is also about the gradual fading of home memories over the time. Agha Shahid remembers his past experiences in Kashmir and expresses a sense of loss, isolation, nostalgia, sense of belongingness and recollection in this poem. The postcard that comes from 'home' shift the poet's imagination to that far distant territory that he has left, but is trying his best to keep his charm and aroma by his imagination. It is the nostalgia for which an exile has to contend and the emotion is so difficult to understand that he feels utterly out of balance. He is physically elsewhere, yet intellectually and emotionally, he is always at his heart's 'house',i.e. Kashmir, India. The attachment to Kashmir-his homeland is summed up in the poem, *Postcard from Kashmir* as the poet says:

Kashmir shrinks into my mailbox

My homea neat four by six inches.
I always loved neatness.
Now I hold the half-inch Himalayas in my hand

The pain and trauma of separation from home are further illustrated thus as the pot says:

This is home.
And this is the closest
I'll ever be to home

In *The Half-Inch Himalayas*, the poet expresses his anguish and frustration that the home, he describes throughout the poem, can never be seen again. The imagery he uses in his poetry indicates his loss; time and remembrance make his home insubstantial. Ali uses a significant picture to reflect his dissatisfaction that the distance between past and present is unbridgeable. The 'physical spacing' or alienation is often necessary to produce a sense of homelessness and nostalgia. Such poets develop an intense feeling of association towards their homeland. Ali often wrote about the sense of longing for his homeland as well as his lasting feeling of isolation after he moved to the United States of America.

Along with his traumatic experience in exile, Ali also brings abeautiful picture of his native Kashmir. Ali's poems are pregnant with deep emotions and personal feelings and at the same time they also reflect his universal experience of his exile. His poems are autobiographical in nature with hints of exile and his Kashmiri identity. His poetry captures Kashmir and American landscapes with conflicting feelings of exile, displacement, and in the later poems loss, disease, and death. Agha Shahid Ali's analysis of the world of cultural experience expresses complex and symbolic imagery, leading to the creation of majestic picture influenced by multicultural experience in his poems.

In the poem *Postcard from Kashmir,* he beautifully depicts the sense of nostalgia by giving an apt postcard image of an absent landscape. Agha Shahid Ali was from Kashmir, where he was nurtured and raised. He experienced Kashmiri culture, but composed this

poem as an Indian-American poet. *Postcard from Kashmir*creates sense of belongingness in the poet's mind which makes him uneasy. The poet hardly realizes the reality of exile when he discovers that only a 10*15cm photograph of Kashmir's legacy remains, suggesting that he is unable to recreate it in his mind. Remembrance and photographs can never be the substitute of the real life of being in his own hometown. The postcard received by the speaker is just a representation of what it used to be like. The postcard not only arouses nostalgia in him but also increases his homesickness. He turns out to be in a pensive mood and starts brooding over Kashmir.

Although the poet feels alienated and dejected yet he depicts Kashmir in a joyful and positive manner. Despite the confusion and uncertainty, he admires Kashmir, the Himalayas, and the river Jhelum. Ironically Kashmir was at the center of the conflict and the most flashing point in India. The poet belongs to Kashmir and is proud of it which means he still holds a unique position for Kashmir and India. He admires the magnificence of Kashmir and its closeness that makes him hold it to close his heart. The poet keeps on thinking about his motherland, Kashmir. On maps, or in dreams and visions, Agha Shahid Ali sees the water of the Jhelum as clear and blue green color. However, he finds that the real sights and conditions of his homeland Kashmir contradict his imagination.

The poem *Half-Inch Himalayas*, records the poet's attempts to recover the past without clinging to it. "Half-Inch Himalayas'' is strong title for the collection because it represents India and it is an important part in Indian history, culture and life. Geographically it is the dignity of India, a rich mixture of multicultural experiences. Agha Shahid Ali interacted various community groups of society and gained diverse knowledge that makes his life and shaped his art. The poet's main purpose is to elude the hard embrace of past by training and highlighting the resilience of memory. The poem deals with the issue of exile and chronicles an important phase in the poet's journey from the Indian Diaspora. Exile is a common situation that poet creates due to detachment from his subcontinent. The origin of the holy river Ganga is in the Himalayas. Sutlej, Sind, Ravi, Jhelum and Bias originated in the heart of the Himalayas. The Kashmir is an earthly paradise located in the Himalayas. Possibly due to racism and religious dispute between Muslims and Hindus, Ali finds this place inconvenient and inhospitable. One more key interpretation attributed to this title is that Agha Shahid Ali lives in USA and feels isolated and connected to his homeland. He visualizes longitude of the Himalayas using the length of the word "Himalaya'' or its location on the world map.

Memory plays a central role in the construction of diasporic identity. In *Postcard from Kashmir*, memory is both sustaining and painful. While it keeps the homeland alive in the poet's imagination, it also intensifies the awareness of loss. Nostalgia, therefore, is not comforting but traumatic.Ali's portrayal of memory reveals its dual nature. The postcard preserves an idealized image of Kashmir, but this aestheticization erases the complexities of lived experience. The poet's longing is thus marked by an awareness that memory can never fully restore what has been lost.

The crisis of identity in Postcard from Kashmir emerges from the poet's inability to reconcile his past with his present. The line,

> This is home. And this the closest
> I'll ever be to home

captures the paradox of diasporic existence. The postcard is simultaneously home and not home. The poet recognizes that physical return is impossible, and emotional return is equally unattainable.The self in exile exists in a state of perpetual negotiation—between belonging and alienation, memory and reality. This fractured identity reflects the broader diasporic experience, where the sense of self is shaped by displacement and longing rather than stability.Although rooted in the specific context of Kashmir, *Postcard from Kashmir* transcends its geographical boundaries. The poem talks to a universal diasporic condition, resonating with anyone who has experienced displacement and loss. Ali transforms personal grief into a collective narrative, making the poem relevant to global discussions on exile and identity.

Thus, *Postcard from Kashmir* is a powerful poetic exploration of exile and diasporic identity. Through the metaphor of the postcard, Agha Shahid Ali articulates the emotional trauma of displacement, the fragility of memory, and the fragmentation of the self. The poem reveals that exile is not merely a physical separation from homeland but a lifelong psychological condition that reshapes identity.By foregrounding the self in exile, Ali gives voice to the silent suffering of diasporic individuals. His poem stands as a poignant reminder of the enduring human need for belonging and the profound loss that accompanies displacement.His poems that capture his sense of loss and association, memories, remembrance, and imagination also made up his identity. Agha Shahid Ali's powerful creation helped him to create a national awareness on an international scale. If his poetry can reflect the feelings of displacement and homelessness, his imagination can overcome uprooting and help him invest in an international attitude.

To conclude the paper, it is quite evident from the above discussion that Agha ShahidAli,throughout his life, felt diasporicconsciousness about his homeland Kashmir which he has very beautifully expressed in his actual life as well as through his literary work. His "triple exile" from Kashmir, India and the United States exposed him to the different cultures and traditions. His multicultural and multilingual background has thoroughly shaped his life and instills in him diasporic consciousness. Thus, his poems are the true record of his feeling of loss, trauma, nostalgia, the memory of 'home' and the pain and suffering of being alienated/separated to a new land and culture. ■

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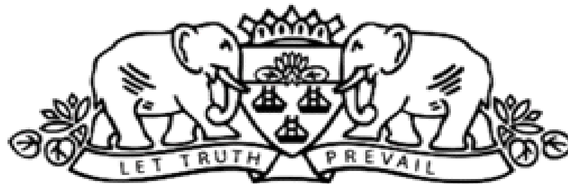

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Constitutional Morality and Social Democracy: Revisiting Ambedkar

Chittaranjan Bhoi

The idea of constitutional morality has acquired renewed theoretical and practical significance today as the democracies across the globe have been facing majoritarian populism, identity polarization and institutional attrition. In the Indian context, the concept is most forcefully articulated in the thought of B. R. Ambedkar, the principal architect of the Constitution of India. Ambedkar believed that constitutional morality went far beyond mere adherence to procedures or respect for institutional limits. For him, it represented a deeper normative ethos, an ethical commitment essential to nurturing and sustaining democratic life within a profoundly hierarchical society. He considered constitutional morality as a mediating principle between formal constitutionalism and substantive social transformation. Anchored in the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, his vision of social democracy delivered the moral philosophy through which constitutional governance could acquire emancipatory content.

This article argues that Ambedkar's constitutional morality must be understood as a transformative constitutional scheme rather than a merely interpretive doctrine. Drawing upon his interventions in the Constituent Assembly and his writings and speeches on casteism, it demonstrates that constitutional morality operates simultaneously at three levels - as a constraint on arbitrary power, as a commitment to minority rights and institutional integrity and as a pedagogical instrument aimed at reshaping social consciousness. In Ambedkar's framework, the Constitution is not a passive legal text but a dynamic instrument for dismantling graded inequality and cultivating fraternity as the precondition of democratic stability. By situating his thought in dialogue with contemporary constitutional jurisprudence and theories of transformative constitutionalism, the article emphasize the continuing normative force of Ambedkar's constitutional philosophy for plural democracies confronting structural injustice and democratic backslide.

Keywords: Constitutional Morality, Social Democracy, Indian Constitution, Equality, Fraternity, Transformative Constitutionalism

Introduction

The power of constitutional democracy depends not only on institutional design but also on the moral dispositions of citizens and public officials. The designers of modern constitutions avowed that written texts alone cannot secure justice or liberty. In India, this

insight was articulated with exceptional clarity by B. R. Ambedkar. Ambedkar's warning that India was "entering a life of contradictions" - political equality coexisting with social and economic inequality remains a powerful reminder of the fragility of democratic experiments in deeply hierarchical societies.

Ambedkar's concept of constitutional morality was borrowed partially from the classical liberal tradition, especially the writings of George Grote who used the term to describe civic virtue in ancient Athens. Yet Ambedkar transformed the concept to suit India's historical realities. He is of the opinion that constitutional morality required a commitment to the spirit of the Constitution, respect for procedures, minority rights, institutional integrity and the rule of law. However, he went a step ahead and pronounced that constitutional morality was inseparable from social democracy. It demanded not only institutional compliance but also social transformation.

This article argues that Ambedkar's constitutional morality is best understood as a bridge between legal constitutionalism and social revolution. It is a doctrine that binds state power to ethical principles and simultaneously seeks to reshape society's moral foundations.

Intellectual Genealogy of Constitutional Morality

The phrase "constitutional morality" did not originate in India. George Grote described it as a sentiment of respect and obedience to constitutional forms and procedures necessary for democratic governance. In Western liberal thought, constitutional morality emphasized restraint, respect for institutional boundaries and fidelity to legal norms.

Ambedkar adopted the phrase but reinterpreted its meaning. In the Constituent Assembly debates, he emphasized that constitutional morality "is not a natural sentiment" and must be cultivated. Unlike societies with long democratic traditions, India was emerging from colonial rule and centuries of social stratification. Thus, constitutional morality could not rely on inherited civic habits; it required deliberate nurturing through education, institutional practice and public culture.

Ambedkar's intellectual influences were diverse. His education at Columbia University under John Dewey introduced him to pragmatism and participatory democracy. Dewey's emphasis on democracy as a mode of associated living shaped Ambedkar's belief that democracy must impart social relationships. Furthermore, Ambedkar's engagement with liberal constitutionalism, socialist critiques of capitalism and Buddhist ethics contributed to a complex and original philosophy.

Thus, Ambedkar's constitutional morality was not merely derivative - it was a creative adaptation that integrated liberal proceduralism with a radical democratic agenda. affective foundation of constitutional morality, binding citizens to one another beyond legal obligation. Thus, constitutional morality required internalizing the values of social democracy within everyday social relations. It demanded a transformation in social attitudes, not merely

compliance with constitutional text. Democracy, for Ambedkar's, was ultimately a mode of associated living that had to permeate the structure of society itself.

Caste, Inequality, and the Limits of Formal Constitutionalism

Ambedkar's disparagement of caste in works such as *Annihilation of Caste* highlights the structural obstacles to constitutional morality. He argued that caste was not merely a division of labor but a division of laborers, sustained by religious sanction and social custom. By institutionalizing graded inequality, caste fractured society into insulated compartments, rendering the very idea of common citizenship precarious. Such a social order was fundamentally incompatible with the democratic premise of equal moral worth. Indeed, constitutional morality confronted not simply political authoritarianism but deeply embedded social authoritarianism.

In societies marked by entrenched hierarchy, formal equality before law may coexist with substantive inequality. Ambedkar recognized that constitutional morality demands active state intervention to rectify historical injustices. Neutrality in the face of structural disadvantage would merely perpetuate inherited privilege. This rationale underlies provisions for affirmative action and protective discrimination in the Indian Constitution. Such measures were not exceptions to equality but instruments for realizing it in substantive terms. The Constitution, in this sense, embodied a commitment to corrective justice rather than procedural minimalism.

Ambedkar's approach anticipates contemporary debates on substantive equality and transformative constitutionalism. He rejected the notion that the Constitution should merely codify existing social arrangements; instead, it should serve as an instrument of social reconstruction. For him, constitutionalism entailed a forward-looking project aimed at dismantling structures of domination and fostering conditions for equal citizenship. The legitimacy of the constitutional order depended not only on procedural regularity but on its capacity to redress systemic injustice. Thus, constitutional morality functioned as both a normative constraint and a transformative aspiration, orienting the state toward the realization of social democracy.

Constitutional Morality and Transformative Constitutionalism

Modern constitutional theory emphasizes the transformative potential of constitutions. In India, the judiciary has invoked constitutional morality in cases involving minority rights, gender equality, and social justice. While judicial interpretations vary, the invocation of constitutional morality reflects Ambedkar's enduring influence.

Transformative constitutionalism seeks to move societies from unjust pasts toward egalitarian futures. Ambedkar's vision aligns closely with this framework. He considered Indian Constitution as a vehicle for dismantling oppressive structures and fostering social democracy.

However, Ambedkar also urged that constitutional morality must be cultivated among citizens, not merely enforced by the judiciary system. Overreliance on judicial activism without social transformation may produce fragile gains.

Contemporary Relevance

In the twenty-first century, constitutional democracies face challenges from populism, religious majoritarianism and economic inequality. These pressures often manifest in the erosion of institutional autonomy, the delegitimization of dissent and the reconfiguration of constitutional norms to suit dominant political interests. Ambedkar's insights remain strikingly relevant in such a climate of democratic anxiety. His emphasis on fraternity counters divisive politics by foregrounding shared constitutional belonging over sectarian identity. His insistence on constitutional methods underscores the importance of institutional integrity, procedural restraint and respect for opposition within democratic life. At a time when extra-constitutional mobilization and majoritarian mandates are frequently invoked to justify institutional bypassing, Ambedkar's framework reaffirms that constitutional democracy depends upon disciplined adherence to normative limits. His thought thus provides both a critique of democratic backsliding and an account of normative vocabulary for institutional renewal.

Beyond India, Ambedkar's synthesis of constitutionalism and social justice offers valuable lessons for plural societies grappling with historical injustice, racial stratification, and systemic exclusion. His philosophy suggests that durable democracy requires both procedural fidelity and substantive equality. Constitutional endurance, in this view, is inseparable from the capacity of legal structures to confront entrenched hierarchies rather than accommodate them. Ambedkar's integration of anti-discrimination principles with democratic constitutionalism anticipates contemporary debates on structural inequality and inclusive citizenship. In societies marked by deep diversity, constitutional morality functions as a mediating ethic that balances majority rule with minority protection. His approach underscores that democratic legitimacy is not secured merely through electoral authorization but through the continuous realization of equal moral worth. In this sense, Ambedkar's constitutional philosophy transcends its immediate historical context and speaks to global struggles over the meaning and future of democracy itself.

Critical Reflections

While Ambedkar's framework is compelling, it raises questions about feasibility and implementation. Can constitutional morality be effectively cultivated in deeply polarized societies? Does state-led social reform risk paternalism? How should conflicts between majority preferences and minority rights be resolved?

Ambedkar's thought does not provide simple answers but it offers guiding principles. His emphasis on deliberation, institutional checks and balances, and moral education suggests a balanced approach combining legal enforcement with social engagement.

Critics often view constitutional morality as vague overlook its normative power. As a guiding ethos, it shapes interpretive practices and public discourse. Yet its elasticity also risks politicization. Safeguarding its integrity requires anchoring it in the Constitution's text and Ambedkar's egalitarian vision.

Conclusion

Revisiting Ambedkar reveals that constitutional morality is not merely a canon but a comprehensive ethical project. It is a normative orientation that binds institutional design to moral transformation and democratic responsibility. For Ambedkar, constitutional morality and social democracy were mutually reinforcing ideals - each incomplete without the other. Political democracy without social transformation would degenerate into contradiction, producing formal equality alongside entrenched social subordination. On the other hand, social reform without constitutional safeguards could lapse into disorder or majoritarian coercion. Ambedkar thus envisioned a constitutional order in which law mediates social conflict while simultaneously cultivating egalitarian dispositions among citizens. His project was neither purely procedural nor utopian; it was a calibrated attempt to reconcile stability with structural change.

Ambedkar's enduring contribution lies in integrating liberal constitutionalism with a radical commitment to equality and fraternity. He reimagined constitutionalism not as a device for limiting power alone but as a framework for redistributing dignity and restructuring social relations. His thought challenges contemporary democracies to look beyond formal institutions and cultivate the moral foundations necessary for justice. It underscores that constitutional texts cannot sustain themselves unless animated by civic virtue and collective commitment to equal citizenship. In foregrounding fraternity as the affective core of democracy, Ambedkar expanded the moral vocabulary of constitutional theory. His philosophy insists that democratic legitimacy depends not simply on electoral authorization but on the continuous realization of substantive equality.

In an era marked by democratic regression and social fragmentation, Ambedkar's vision offers both caution and hope. It cautions against the complacent belief that constitutional endurance is guaranteed by institutional architecture alone. At the same time, it offers hope by affirming the transformative capacity of constitutional principles when internalized and practiced. Constitutional morality, understood as a lived commitment to liberty, equality and fraternity remains indispensable for sustaining social democracy. Its relevance lies in its insistence that democracy is as much a moral achievement as it is a political arrangement. By situating justice at the intersection of law and social life, Ambedkar provides a normative compass for plural societies seeking to reconcile diversity with democratic unity. ■

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Between Faith and Family: An Analysis of Patriarchal Structures and Gender Roles in Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp*

Najmul Hasan

Banu Mushtaq, a lawyer, activist, and writer from Karnataka, is a prominent voice in the Bandaya Sahitya (protest literature) movement, which foregrounds the struggles of marginalized communities, including Dalits, labourers, and women. Her short stories explore themes of womanhood, agency, and resistance within entrenched patriarchal structures. Through nuanced portrayals of Muslim women's lives in southern India, Mushtaq captures their emotional and psychological struggles shaped by social conventions and gendered power hierarchies. The 'lamp' becomes a compelling metaphor for the inner light of consciousness and resilience that continues to flicker despite systemic oppression. This paper undertakes a close reading of selected stories to explore key thematic arguments, particularly those related to gender, identity, and resistance. It argues that these narratives not only critique the socio-cultural mechanisms that sustain the subjugation of women but also foreground women's capacity for self-renewal and empowerment. Furthermore, the narratives offer a nuanced representation of Muslim women's lives, enabling readers from other religious and cultural backgrounds to engage with lesser-known social realities and thereby challenge entrenched ignorance and prejudice.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Gender, Identity, Resistance, Muslim Society,

Literature has been a soft but effective medium that provides a space where the tales of the hearts are narrated freely, unthreatened by any external intrusion. It has greatly benefited marginalized and underrepresented communities who were historically less allowed the space to articulate and explain their lives and traumas under the caste and gender based hierarchies. Banu Mushtaq is one such writer who has chosen to tell the untold, assess the un-assessed, and present a deep, realistic picture of society, particularly Muslim society. Mushtaq, a lawyer, activist, and writer from Karnataka, began writing as part of the *Bandaya Sahitya* (protest literature) movement, which aimed to give voice to marginalized communities, including Dalits, laborers, and women. Mushtaq*'s lifelong engagement with the domestic worlds of Muslim women in southern India populated her short story collection Heart Lamp. Originally written in Kannada between 1990 and 2003 and translated into*

English by Deepa Bhasthi in 2024, the selected stories depict households marked by anger, violence, and deprivation. The collection made literary history by becoming the first short-story book to win the International Booker Prize in 2025.

Heart Lamp chronicles the everyday lives of women in patriarchal communities of southern India, foregrounding the struggles, resilience, and lived realities of Muslim women. Through vivid and often witty narratives rooted in real experiences, the collection explores gender inequality, family tensions, and patriarchal oppression. While the stories vary in context and tone, they are unified by a common thread: the structurally inferior status of women within a patriarchal Muslim society and the quiet strength with which they sustain their communities. Bhasthi writes in her epilogue to *Heart Lamp*:

> Mushtaq does not see herself writing only about a certain kind of woman belonging to a certain community … women everywhere face similar, if not the exact same problems, and those are the issues that she writes about. The particulars may be different, but at the core is a resistance to being controlled, 'tamed', or disallowed the exploration of our full potential. (Rao)

Feminist writings are directed at changing existing power relations between women and men in society. These power relations structure all areas of life, the family, education, and welfare, the worlds of work, culture, and leisure where women enter as individual that already has a pre-existing rules and practices. Feminist consciousness is concerned with education, equality of opportunity, the social provision of childcare, and the right to choose freely whether and when to have children. Banu Mushtaq boldly expresses discriminatory social policies of patriarchy and questions the so-called *natural* social function assigned to wife and mother.

The stories in *Heart Lamp* are set within a series of distinct Muslim families across southern India, particularly Karnataka, and primarily focus on the lives and fates of women, especially those who are dependent on their male counterparts. Mushtaq's work resonates with the writings of Saadat Hasan Manto and Ismat Chughtai, both of whom fearlessly depicted the social, moral, and familial complexities of their time. Like them, Mushtaq artistically exposes the deep-rooted injustices, emotional turmoil, and systemic marginalization faced by women within patriarchal structures. Her stories, much like Manto's raw realism and Chughtai's bold feminist insight, confront social hypocrisy and give voice to the silenced experiences of women struggling against oppression and societal constraints.

The first story of the collection "*Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal*" opens with a solid critique of Industrial life where humans are living like machines without sensory feelings. The industrial progress and mercenary nature of human beings have killed the peace and harmony of humans and their surroundings. The protagonist reveals:

From the concrete jungle, from the flamboyant apartment buildings stacked like matchboxes to the sky, form the smoke-spewing, horn-blaring vehicles that were always

moving, day and night, as if constant movement was the only goal in life, then from people, people, people – people with no love for one another, no mutual trust, no harmony, no smiles of recognition even- I had desperately wanted to be free from such a suffocating environment.” (7)

She suggests that, in various ways, industrial setups and technological advancements have ushered in a post-human condition in which human lives are deeply affected and shaped. Now, begins the universally debated concept i.e., what is the identity and status of a wife for husband? A wife is usually the one who stays at home; she is not part of office, she is like a servant. But the narrator, being a modern female, doesn't give any elevated status to her husband, where she is subsidiary. Banu critiques the identity and role of husband not only in Islam but also in all patriarchal structures where 'Pati is God on earth' and the wife will never be able to repay the debt she owes him. Further, she highlights traditional norms in which women are treated as servants:

> If he is a drunkard, or a womanizer, or if he harasses her for dowry everyday- even if all these 'ifs' are true, he is still the husband. No matter which religion one belongs to, it is accepted that the wife is the husband's most obedient servant, his bonded labourer. (8)

Her husband's transfer from the chaos of city life to the serene Krishnaraja Sagara dam project fails to bring the couple closer; Mujahid remains absorbed in his work, leaving her alone with the plants. One day, Mujahid takes her to his new friend Iftikhar, who has six children: “Three daughters, three sons. Apart from the eldest, Asifa, the rest were all like monkeys without tails” (10). Banu highlights the insignificance of family planning and conformist practices running in most of the Muslim families. Wife of Iftikhar wishes to get operated after the seventh baby, but he interjects, “There is no need, Shaista. I am the one raising them. Why are you worried? Thanks to God's grace, I earned enough to look after all of them well”(10). She taunts him that our Asifa has left school due to your sufficient earnings. Iftikhar gives a very conservative reply, “I made her stop studying because girls do not need much education. A high school certificate is enough. . . . We can get her married off next year” (10-11). Asifa was a beautiful girl but burdened to help her mother and care for her siblings. Iftikhar flamboyantly expresses his love for Shaista. He informs, “I planted this guava tree for Shaista. Every plant and flower here is a favourite of hers. . . . If I were an emperor, I would have built a palace to put even the Taj Mahal to shame and call it Shaista Mahal”(12).

Shaista has given birth to a boy. Her eldest daughter, Asifa, was expected to care for all her siblings as well as send food to the hospital. Mujahid's wife, Zeenat, feels pity for Asifa and offers some help. Shaista feels grateful and remarks, “It is Ok, Zeenat. Asifa is not my daughter; she is like my mother. Not just now--—ever since she left school, she has been managing all the household chores and looking after all the children” (18). Banu suggests that such a fate commonly befalls elder daughters in Muslim families. After the

forty-day postnatal rest, a ceremony was held at Shaista's house. Zeenat and Mujahid were preparing to attend when they received a telegram reading, "Mother serious," and immediately left for Mysuru. Zeenat's mother passed away, and Amma's fortieth-day ritual, as observed in Islam, was performed. The couple then returned to KRS, and one day they visited Shaista's house. To their shock, Shaista had also passed away, and Iftikar had married a girl not more than eighteen years old the day after Shaista's fortieth-day fatiha was completed, claiming that someone was needed to look after his children. Asifa and all the children surround Zeenat, a two-month-old infant in the arms of Asifa, and her eyes overflow with tears. Zeenat feels, "somewhere in the distance, Shaista was probably whispering 'she is not my daughter,she is my mother…'" (22)Banu pathetically critiques the concept of marital love that is narrowly centered on childbearing, and exposes the wretched condition of children who are brought into the world in the name of God's gift, without proper planning or care.

The story *"Fire Rain"* exposes familial conflict and patriarchal authority. Mutawalli Usman Saheb is a typical family man with a wife, Arifa, a son, and four married sisters. He is enraged by his youngest sister, whom he had educated, married lavishly, and gifted generously, when she demands her share of ancestral property. Her invocation of Allah, the Prophet's Shariat, and moral rights intensifies his fury. Though he restrains physical violence, he dismisses her claim and silences Arifa, ordering her back to domestic duties. Ironically, Mutawalli is a philanthropist, president of the mosque committee, and an active political figure. He promised one woman to arrange her husband's surgery and assured his sister of securing her son a job through his recommendation. Meanwhile, his friend Dawood came and informed him that Nasir's corpse was found from the pond and the police buried it in the Hindu cemetery. 'Islam is being destroyed, Annavre . . . there is no respect left for muslims . . ." (32). Dawood adds further, "To think that a Muslim corpse, without a shroud, without the ghusal, without even the janaza namaz, could be buried unceremoniously in a samshana instead of in a khabaristan" (33). Everyone present forgot the purpose of their gathering; the news made them tremble. This burial became a subject of intense discussion among Muslims. "Now giving him a proper burial seemed like the holiest of duties for the same people he had cheated" (34). Banu astutely suggests that religious sentiments can easily divert people from pressing, rational concerns. Above all, ensuring proper burial rites for Nasir's body emerged as a convenient resolution to many of Mutawalli's problems.

His sister temporarily changed her behavior during this crisis and refrained from demanding property rights. Mutawalli, along with his associates, spent the entire day moving from one office to another, followed by late-night discussions at his home recounting his supposed hard work. Eventually, the body was exhumed and the funeral procession began, but suddenly a man started shouting obscenities at the top of his voice in a strange and vulgar manner. Everyone was shocked yet remained silent when they realized that the drunken man was Nasir, the painter. When Mutawalli returned home, he hallucinated that crows were attacking and killing him. He called out for his wife but was informed that she was in

the hospital, as their son—who had been suffering from acute fever for the past fifteen days—had now developed meningitis. The news struck him like a blow, and all the voices calling for help seemed to echo in his ears. Banu underscores that, in the pursuit of publicity, politicians often neglect urgent responsibilities, using religious issues as tools that attract unquestioning public support and ultimately lead to collective disaster.

"Black Cobras" exposes patriarchal indifference toward women and challenges the entrenched belief that a son completes a family. It narrates the plight of Aashraf, abandoned by her husband Yakub after the birth of three daughters. Yakub remarries in the hope of a son, while Aashraf suffers poverty, hunger, and her infant's illness. Despite repeated appeals to the mosque committee and the mutawalli for child support, she is dismissed and silenced through selective interpretations of Sharia. Banu critiques how religious laws are distorted to serve male desire, while voices like Zulekha Begum reclaim Sharia's ethical insistence on justice and equality. Zulekha Begum reads the line of Sharia to Aashraf, " Look, according to Sharia, even if he marries again, he has to ensure that he does not make even a little distinction between the two wives and treats them both equally" (53). She further refers to the lines that reflect Banu's intent and purpose in writing about the miserable condition of women:

> Let them behave as per these texts at least! Let them educate girls, not just a madarsa education, but also in schools and colleges. The choice of a husband should be hers. Let them give that. … Let a girl's maternal family give her a share in the property. Let them respect her right to get divorced if there is no compatibility between the man and woman. If she is divorced, let someone come forward to marry her again; if she is a widow, let her get a companion to share her life with. (53-54)

The Mutawalli, who is expected to enlighten society against evil and unjust practices, instead emerges as an accomplice to them. Even within his own family, he ignores his wife's complaints despite her having seven children. She laments, "These children, the home, samsara—do I have even a minute of free time? If I bear one child every year, what will I become?" (43). In the pursuit of public respectability, men often subject their families to suffering. The Mutawalli refuses a sterilization operation, fearing social scrutiny and damage to his public image.

After repeated failures to obtain food or money, Aashraf sat outside the mosque with her children, demanding attention. On a cold night, she shielded them with her tattered saree. When Yakub arrived, he abused and struck her violently. She collapsed; Munni slipped from her arms, cried briefly, and fell silent. The end of Aashraf's story is similar to the rest of the women in *Heart Lamp*: intentional cruelty and social and institutional apathy. Aashraf and her small, grieving children fade into the background, but the women of the village gather like cobras around the mutawalli, subtly subverting the stature of obedience imposed upon them. As he walks through town, a woman throws a stone toward the mutawalli,

pretending that there's a dog nearby while muttering, "A dog, just a dog!" Hanifa Chikamma addressed the wind, "May Allah's curse fall on you. It feels like I saw Shaitan in person" (59). Qazi Saheb's daughter in law seeing Mutawalli sahib asks to her son, "Do you want to see a gorilla, my love? Look, there, a gorilla!" (60). Another woman screams out into the distance; her words strike him like dynamite, "Nothing good will come your way … may black cobras coil themselves around you"(60). His own wife exploded, "'I have given you seven already. At least now I am going to get an operation done'"(60). The symbolic cursing of Mutawalli expresses the collective rage and defiance against the oppressive system. The story critiques the lack of support from religious figures like mutawalli, who, instead of helping, stand by and watch Aashraf's suffering. These are small victories, but they wound the mutawalli nonetheless. *"Black Cobras"* encapsulates all the themes Mushtaq covers best: the cruelty of men, the oppression of the traditional village structure, and the powerful rage of women united.

The short story *"A Decision of the Heart"* explores the emotional complexities of family relationships, particularly the tension between marital obligations and filial duty within a patriarchal Muslim household. Yusuf, a fruit seller and the only son of the widowed Mehaboob Bi, is raised through her immense sacrifices. After marriage, his wife, Akhila, resents his closeness to his mother, viewing her as a rival and accusing Yusuf of loving the old woman more than her and their children. Her bitterness culminates in abusive muttering, calling Mehaboob Bi her *savathi*, which provokes Yusuf: "he beat her a few times and walked out of the house" (65). Akhila's jealousy reflects a patriarchal structure that pits women against one another, forcing them into competition for male attention and emotional security. Rather than presenting Akhila merely as a villain, Mushtaq subtly exposes her fear of abandonment and her desire for exclusive love.

Yusuf is portrayed as a man torn between two emotional worlds: the duty he owes his mother and the responsibility he bears toward his wife and children. Yusuf consoles Akhila, reminding her that while she has four sons, his mother has no one else to care for her. "If your own children ask if you have eaten, if you are well, what is wrong in that?" (68). Akhila admits that she seeks only his love. His internal struggle highlights the gendered expectations placed upon men to prioritize filial loyalty while maintaining control within the household. However, Yusuf, exhausted by constant jealousy, angrily asserts that no one can come between a mother and her son, declaring his intention to honor his mother publicly. He proclaims, "who are you to come between mother and son? You die of envy if I buy her just one saree! You wait and see. I will get her to wear gold jewelry all over her body. I will put up a shamiana covering the whole street and get her married" (70). His momentary consideration of divorce or polygamy reveals how patriarchal privileges remain available to him as tools of punishment. Yet, Mushtaq complicates this power by showing Yusuf ultimately rejecting these options, suggesting a moral conscience that resists overt cruelty. The most striking decision of the heart comes when Yusuf chooses to arrange his mother's marriage rather than abandon either relationship. While this choice appears to restore

domestic harmony, but it also exposes the tragic displacement of an aging mother who becomes an obstacle in her son's marital life. Mushtaq critiques a social reality in which elderly women, after dedicating their lives to their children, are rendered burdensome once their nurturing role is complete. The story interrogates the emotional costs of patriarchy. No character emerges as entirely guilty or innocent; instead, each is shaped by social conditioning. Mushtaq demonstrates how love, sacrifice, and resentment coexist within family structures, making every "decision of the heart" morally complex and deeply human.

"*Red Lungi*" demonstrates the stark class differences within the Muslim community. The story is about a wealthy and educated family that centers on Razia, a mother plagued by migraines, who was surrounded by children in her home during summer vacation. She, in an attempt to keep her son and her relatives' children occupied during the summer vacation, decides to arrange their circumcisions, or *khatna*. She scrupulously plans the ceremony for the neighborhood boys—offering them simple, plain lungis—while dressing her own wards in lungis embellished with sequins and zari. The family's decision to offer free circumcision for poor boys harshly contrasts with the careful hospital procedure arranged for their own wards. Instead of proper medication, the narrator notes the condition of poor boys, "The foreskin fell on the ash-filled plate in front. Blood spurted from the wound. Ibrahim took some of the ash from the plate and sprinkled it gently on the cut. The dripping blood mixed with the ash, and its flow began to reduce" (90). The narrative exposes how religious practices are shaped by class distinctions, turning a sacred tradition into a display of wealth and privilege. In doing so, it subtly critiques the social and economic inequalities that persist even within the bounds of a shared faith and communal identity.

The story *Heart Lamp* is a work of auto fiction, drawing upon the lived experiences of the author herself. It centers on Mehrun, a woman who discovers her husband's infidelity and seeks to reclaim agency over her life. When she returns to her parental home to disclose her husband's betrayal, her pleas for support and separation are met with rejection, reflecting the pervasive cultural conditioning that prioritizes patriarchal norms and familial honor over a woman's emotional and moral autonomy. Her brother complains, "'why? Why didn't you tell them before leaving? It seems like you have made up your mind to bring us dishonour'"(100).Her brother, rather than responding with empathy or seeking to address his sister's anguish, reinforces patriarchal norms by reminding her of her husband's authority, stating that if your husband declares, "I do not want this woman called Mehrun; I will give her talaq?"(101), nothing can be done. His response exemplifies the internalization of patriarchal values within familial structures, where male dominance is normalized and a woman's suffering is rendered inconsequential in the face of societal conventions. She laments her family's inaction and reminds them of her pitiable situation:

> I feel at your feet, saying that I didn't want to get married. Did you listen? I said, I will wear a burkha and go to college. I begged you not to make me stop studying. None of you listened to me. . . . I have the burden of five children on me. Their father is roaming around, and I don't have a life.

> When a man is doing such a haram thing, are none of you able to ask him why he is doing this? (101)

Her mother tries to console her, urging her to win him back through love. Mehrun, however, responds that she feels physical disgust at the sight of him and declares that she will seek *talaq* and refuse to return to that house. Her outburst reflects the intensity of her psychological anguish, yet she finds no understanding or support from her family. In a final act of desperation, she threatens to set herself on fire if she is taken back by force. Against her will, her brother takes her back to safeguard the family's honour, where her husband asks her to behave normally and once again threatens her, "In one single breath- one, two, three times- I'll say it and finish this off, tell her. And tell her that after her talaq,see if she is able to get her younger sisiters and her daughters married off" (106). The narrative reflects the **honor–shame paradigm,** common in patriarchal societies, where women are burdened with the responsibility of preserving familial and communal respectability. Mehrun's desire for separation is framed as moral deviance. She is expected to *perform* the socially sanctioned role of a compliant wife, regardless of emotional betrayal or moral injury.

Once again, we witness the eldest daughter of the family as the victim of a familial tussle. Salma, the eldest daughter, like Asifa in the story *Shaista Mahal*, takes care of all the remaining siblings and is forced to stay away from her studies. Both daughters understand their mothers and become the reason for their peace and existence. Mehrun, like Shaista, considers her daughter the mother of her younger siblings, "you must be a mother to these children, my dear" (110). Eventually, in her pensive mood, she douses herself with kerosene, ready to self-immolate, before she is saved by her eldest daughter, who cries, "'Ammi! Ammi! Don't leave us and go!' She held her mother's legs" (111). Mehrun remembers not so much her words as her gentle touch, which profoundly affects her.

A Taste of Heaven is about the life of Shameem Bano that gradually destroyed under the weight of compulsive familial responsibilities. As the eldest daughter-in-law, she enters her marital home carrying a sky full of limitless expectations and hopes. However, these aspirations are systematically eroded by the relentless demands placed upon her role.

> She turned round to see her sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, their expenses, food, clothing, a mother-in-law who was always sick and the prescribed diet she had to be cooked, her father-in-law's countless relatives and friends. Her own dreams withered away. (151)

She was managing everything in the hope that her co-sisters would reduce her responsibilities. But her first brother-in-law left for Dubai just a year after marriage. Her disappointment knew no bounds. Her hope for some freedom got shattered. Maybe only after death would she be free from endless chores. She began to hiss, unbashful, paying no heed to who heard her. Her husband's inaction and inability to resist his wife began to cause his internal collapse. As the narrative notes, "He rebuked himself for clinging to the excuse of her menopause and letting go of all relationships and kindness because of it"(153). Soon, her anger reached

Bi Dadi, who had lived in this household for ten years even before her in-laws' marriage, and Shameem Banu herself had learned domestic skills under Bi Dadi's supervision. But Bi Dadi's peevish insistence on her prayer mat enraged Shameem, resulting in Bi Dadi being sent away to Arif's house. Later, her son Azeem brings her back. In a poignant and symbolic gesture, the children offer her a glass of Pepsi, humorously calling it *aab-e-kausar*, assuring her that she is now in heaven. Bi Dadi accepts this illusion, repeatedly asking for *aab-e-Kausar*, feeling the imagined presence of her deceased husband. This episode powerfully invokes **Simone de Beauvoir's notion of woman as the "Other,"** whose fulfillment is deferred to transcendental spaces rather than realized within lived reality. The character Bi Dadi reveals the pathetic condition of child marriage. She lost her husband just after a month of marriage. A year after her death, she got her first period. Family couldn't go with remarriage; consequently, "Her body, her mind, her dreams, none were fulfilled. She remained an eternal virgin"(155). From a feminist standpoint, Bi Dadi's experience exemplifies what Judith Butler terms the regulation of bodies through cultural norms, where female sexuality is controlled not only through prohibition but also through denial. Her body is socially marked as "married" yet remains biologically and emotionally untouched, revealing the paradoxical violence of patriarchal institutions that privilege ritual over lived experience.

The story "*Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord*!" serves as an apt closing door for the collection. It is written like a letter addressed to Allah, where a woman taunts and dares God to try and survive life as a woman. The protagonist recounts the traditionally sanctioned practices imposed upon her:

> My feet never touched the front yard, and stepped only on the floor inside the threshold of the house. My seragu never once slipped from my head…. Laughter did not cross my lips, and neither did my eyes wander round like bees. (200)

She recalls her absolute obedience, taught to revere her husband as God, and exposes the deep emotional suffering this indoctrination causes after marriage. She notes "I had to set down roots in another's front yard, grow new shoots there, bloom there. He was getting attached, while my identity was melting away"(201). Sexual humiliation is no longer hidden within the private sphere but normalized within marital relations. The husband's desire for her body and the power he exercises over it function like a scepter of authority bestowed upon him by God. She heart-touchingly asks God, "Did you not have the time to peep into my heart and see my fears, my wishes, dreams and disappointments?" (201).The narrator painfully remembers that *my body was like his playground and my heart a toy in his hands. It* illustrates what **Kate Millett** terms *sexual politics*, where control over the female body becomes a primary instrument of male dominance. The issue of dowry is also foregrounded in the narrative. The husband demands dowry and, when she fails, condemns her to lifelong emotional agony by severing all ties with her parents. The husband's greed severs her parental bonds, imprisoning her emotionally; she bitterly tells God that if she is merely His actor, He must remember her suffering.

> My happiness and sadness are not borrowed. They are not to be performed. They are to be experienced. You are just a detached director. When one of your own characters assaults my mind, have you no duties as a director? Grant me one solace at least. What is my fault in all this, tell me? (203)

Her mother dies, yet he refuses to take her to see her. The narrative interrogates the social expectation of compulsory childbearing; as she becomes pregnant again while still breastfeeding. When she protests, he dismissively remarks, *"I am the one raising them; what is your problem in bearing them?"* (205), completely ignoring the hormonal changes and physical pain women endure during and after pregnancy. Reflecting on her condition, she admits, *"I was a slave; even so, the owner who gave me food, water, and shelter in return for my labour seemed like a mahatma to me"* (206). After some days, she is hospitalized with a growing tumour and faces further cruelty when he demands the necklace that carries memories of her Amma and announces his intention to remarry; completely shattered, she cries out to God, *"You gave me the strength to bear immense pain, but you should not have given him the cruelty to inflict so much of it. What is the limit of patience?"* (207). Society unquestioningly legitimizes his desires—some assert, "He can marry four; what can you ask?"(207), while others advise her to seek monthly maintenance. Reduced to such options, she turns to God in despair, *"Can you hear my grievances? Are my cries reaching you? What will I do… what will I do?"* (207). Eventually, her husband remarries, and her letter ends with this note, "if you were to build the world again, . . . do not be like an inexperienced potter. Come to earth as a woman, Prabhu!" (208).

Conclusion:

The investigated stories suggest that women—whether as wives, mothers, sisters, or daughters—are consistently pushed to the margins, with their desires and expectations neglected under patriarchal supremacy. Although the selected stories strictly present the lives and cultural ethos of South Indian Muslim families, the trauma and pain women experience within the family and society are common across all patriarchal communities. The author exposes the shortcomings of familial structures that few dare to confront, offering a deep and largely untouched exploration of women's lived realities. She draws attention to the pitiable condition of Muslim women who become victims of male authority and rigid religious customs.

The narratives explore how women's struggles for autonomy and dignity are frequently undermined by neglect, victim-blaming, and the prioritization of family honor over individual well-being. The author also highlights how religion, in many cases, is interpreted in a biased manner to reinforce male domination. Practices such as *talaq* and polygamy are shown as being exercised primarily for the gratification of male autonomy, while ignoring the ethical conditions and restrictions prescribed for these acts. At the same time author exposes the flawed practices and perceptions popular in Islam. The Qur'an does not demarcate human beings based on sex or gender, nor does it define them in terms

of binary opposition. In the Qur'anic conception of the human pair, neither half is privileged. Both men and women are viewed as equal moral agents and are promised the same rewards for righteousness. The Quran reads:

> For Muslim men and women, For believing men and women, For devout men and women, For men and women who are Patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, For men and women who give in charity,… For men and women who engage much in God's praise, For them has God prepared Forgiveness and great reward. (qtd. in Barlas 23) ■

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From Domestic Containment to Mythic Assertion: A Comparative Study of Women's Agency in the Narratives of Banu Mushtaq and Devdutt Pattanaik

Payel Dutta

A comparative analysis of women's representation and narrative strategies in the works of Banu Mushtaq and Devdutt Pattanaik, two significant contemporary Indian writers who engage with gender through distinct literary modes. While Mushtaq's Heart Lamp: a collection of twelve short stories translated from Kannada by Deepa Bhasthi (2025) shows s a profound exploration of the lived realities of Muslim women in contemporary India through twelve short stories, Pattanaik's Sati Savitri: And Other Feminist Stories They Don't Tell You (2024) reinterprets mythological narratives to reclaim female agency within cultural memory. Drawing upon feminist literary theory and narrative analysis, this paper examines how both writers challenge patriarchal structures by re-centering women's voices, even though at different narrative levels. Mushtaq, a lawyer, activist, and writer emphasizes micro-level acts of resistance embedded in everyday life of Muslim women as passive victims, presenting them as complex agents who navigate patriarchy, religious conservatism, and economic marginalisation whereas Pattanaik employs mythic allegory to reframe women as intellectual and moral agents within epic traditions. The study argues that despite their divergent genres and contexts, both authors use storytelling as a powerful tool to question gendered hierarchies and to redefine women's agency in contemporary Indian literature. By juxtaposing realist and mythological frameworks, this article highlights the multiplicity of feminist interventions in 21st-century Indian writing. This paper explores the silencing and subjugation of women within Indian patriarchal society through the lens of feminist criticism, with particular strong emphasis of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern as articulated in her seminal essay Can the Subaltern Speak? The expanded discussionis presented in the writings of both of them. Both illuminate women's agency, transforming enforced silence into powerful narrative voices within patriarchal frameworks. Banu Mushtaq mainly writes about realistic stories that show the everyday lives of women, particularly Muslim women especially their silence, suffering, and quiet resistance within family and society which we witnessed in our daily life. Devdutt Pattanaik, on the other

hand, retells mythological stories to question traditional ideas about women and to give voice to female characters who were often shown as obedient or weak. This article compares how these two writers represent women's struggles and strength in their respective work.

Keyword: Silence, Contemporary Indian literature, subjugation, subaltern, feminist narratives, Realism and mythology, Patriarchy, Transformation, Resistance, Gender representation.

Introduction:

The representation of women in contemporary literary studies occupies a central position in feminist literary criticism, particularly 21st century has witnessed a significant shift in Indian literary discourse, marked by a renewed focus on marginalized voices and gendered experiences. Contemporary Indian literature increasingly interrogates entrenched patriarchal structures, questioning traditional representations of women and offering alternative narratives that foreground female agency. Within this evolving literary landscape, women's issues are no longer confined to peripheral concerns but occupy a central position in both realist and mythological writing. Literature thus becomes a powerful medium for resistance, reinterpretation, and social critique.

Among contemporary Indian writers who foreground questions of gender and identity and their works centre on engaging gendered narratives, Banu Mushtaq and Devdutt Pattanaik stand out for their distinct yet converging approaches to women's representation. Mushtaq, a prominent Kannada writer and activist whose international booker prize book Heart Lamp(2025) brings to light the lived realities of Muslim women through her realist short stories. Her narratives focus on everyday oppression such as domestic violence, emotional silencing, economic dependency, and social confinement experienced by women within patriarchal and community-bound structures. Her narratives, rooted in lived experience, offer an insider's perspective on the intersections of gender, religion, and class, making Heart Lamp a vital contribution to feminist literature (Rao, 2025). This story's protagonist Mehrun who embodies the subaltern women-voiceless in marriage and tradition yet asserting subtle selfhood, drawing on feminist theories from Judith Butler (1990) Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988) to critique emotional violence, challenging stereotypes via postcolonial feminist lenses like Mohanty's bargaining with patriarchy. Analysing all these theories this paper profoundly situates Mushtaq's work within broader debates on gender and power. *"A woman's silence is often mistaken for consent, when it is only a strategy for survival*". This line nicely captures Mushtaq's recurring theme that silence is not passivity but a forced response to patriarchal pressure, revealing how women negotiate power within oppressive domestic spaces. *"Thewalls of the house were higher than the walls of the prison.* "The metaphor of domestic imprisonment highlights how patriarchy operates invisibly within everyday life, turning private spaces into sites of control.*"She did not*

shout, but her refusal was loud enough. Mushtaq redefines resistance by emphasizing internal resolve rather than outward rebellion, thereby expanding the concept of feminist agency.*"Society did not need chains; it had customs."* This reflects how cultural norms function as instruments of control, especially for women in conservative social frameworks. Mushtaq foregrounds the silent endurance of women within domestic spaces, suggesting that silence itself becomes a survival strategy. As she observes*, "a woman's silence is often mistaken for consent, when it is only a strategy for survival."* This statement reveals how patriarchal systems misinterpret compliance, thereby erasing women's internal resistance. She emphasises subtle, often silent forms of resistance rather than portraying dramatic rebellion, thereby presenting agency as a gradual and deeply personal process rooted in lived experience. The significance of Heart Lamp extends beyond regional literature, as its International Booker prize win underscores its universal appeal (Rocco, 2025). By centering Muslim women's experiences, Mushtaq challenges the marginalisation of minority voices in Indian literature, contributing to global feminist conversations (Goyal, 2025).

Devdutt Pattanaik, a mycologist, approaches women's issues through the lens of mythological reinterpretation. His feminist retellings challenge conventional patriarchal readings of Hindu epics by revisiting female figures such as Sita, Savitri, and Draupadi. "*Myths are not stories of the past; they are mirrors in which societies see themselves."*Pattanaik positions myth as a living narrative, open to reinterpretation and ideological critique.*"Sita was not weak; she was constrained by the rules written by men."* This line directly challenges patriarchal readings of epic women, reframing constraint as social imposition rather than personal failure. *"Women in mythology are judged not by their choices but by their obedience"*.He reinterprets myths to grant women like Sati and Savitri active roles, emphasizing their life- giving agency beyond passive devotion. His narratives disrupt gender norms, as in Yuvanashva's maternal transcendence, positioning women as societal forces that smart men must engage meaningfully. He also elaborates on Yuvanashva's identity dilemma as she becomes confused and stuck in the murky spaces between motherhood and paternity. The art of his work crosses the lines dividing what is considered male and female, masculine and feminine, preserving the nuance of notions like gender and sexuality. Yuvanashva's name of the crown king Mandhata which translates which translates to "*he who was nursed by me*" (Pattanaik 205), profoundly explores the true essence of motivations driving his transgression of and re-construction of the gender standards that he formerly upheld. In this work some maternal traits are associated rather than paternal ones, exploring Yuvanashva's non-heteronormative life. The glorious past assumes extraordinary formsof gratitude to postcolonial Indian English author. This milestone mycologist retells legendary history, but from a unique way that challenges authority, stereotypes, idols, and sexist ideals. In this digitalization, retellings enrichthe underprivileged societyan opportunity to be heard. In this new generation people have a limited comprehension of dominant concepts of

gender because of their complex connotations. He views women's role in Hindu myth as essential, complementary forces to men, often using gender as metaphor for cosmic balance rather than literal hierarchy. He emphasizes stories of women like Sati and Savitri as embodiments of choice, desire and power in patriarchal contexts. On the other hand, he strongly critiques moral frameworks that privilege compliance over autonomy. *"Control of stories is control of society."* This underscores the political power of narrative in shaping gender norms across generations. Pattanaik does not merely retell myths instead he interrogates how these narratives have been shaped, transmitted, and weaponized to regulate women's roles in today's patriarchal society. By reimagining mythological women as thinkers, decision-makers, and moral agents, he disrupts rigid gender norms embedded within cultural memory. He employs complementary duality in his milestone work by describing myths through Ardhanarishvara, where flesh (feminine) engages mind (masculine), and deities like Lakshmi, Durga, and Saraswati represent wealth, power, and knowledge. In epics, women range from polyandrous (Draupadi), monogamous (sati), to ascetic (nuns), with Hinduism valorising the devoted wife as magically empowered. Pattanaik highlights tales of women's desires, extramarital agency, and autonomy, like courtesan's freedoms curtailed in patriarchy. Feminism, for him, means women's freedom without domination, reinterpreting myths to reveal hidden strength

In nutshell, despite their differences in genre, language, and narrative strategy, both writers converge on a shared objective: the reclamation of women's voices from systems that have historically silenced or misrepresented them. While Mushtaq's realism exposes the micro-politics of patriarchy operating within homes and communities, Pattanaik's mythological framework operates at a macro-cultural level, questioning ideological foundations that legitimize gender inequality. Together, their works demonstrate how feminist discourse in Indian literature can operate simultaneously within everyday reality and symbolic tradition. Both authors historically shift women from silenced margins to mythic agents: Mushtaq used the tool of intimate kannada realism, Pattanaik through ancient lore. This paperdeliberately shows a comparative study of Mushtaq and Pattanaik to examine how women's agency is constructed, negotiated, and articulated across realist and mythological narratives. By juxtaposing lived experience with cultural mythology, the study seeks to highlight the multiplicity of feminist interventions in contemporary Indian writing. Such a comparison is particularly relevant in the current socio-cultural climate, where debates around women's autonomy, representation, and voice continue to shape literary and public discourse.

Theoretical Groundings: Agency, Voice, and Narrative

This paper isgrounded in feminist literary theory, particularly the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter, Judith butler, Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and Chandra Talpade Mohanty to examine the representation of women's agency in contemporary Indian literature. Judith Butler's performativity, Gayatri Spivak's subaltern critique, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's Third World feminism provide a robust theoretical lens for analysing women's agency transitions- from Banu Mushtaq's domestic silences to Devdutt

patanaik's mythic voices- in patriarchal and postcolonial narratives. Butler's Gender Performativity reflected here through his arguing that gender is not innate but projected through repeated stylized acts within a "heterosexual matrix" challenging binaries in myths where women's roles (e.g Sati's devotion) appear natural yet are performative. This theory equally applied in Mushtaq's protagonistsperform "silence" as survival Muslim households, subverting norms via subtle repetitions, while Pattanaik's retellings expose mythic femininity as honourable mention enabling agency through parody-like reinterpretation.

Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as the *"Other"* as articulated in "*The Second Sex*", provides a crucial framework for understanding women's subordinate position within social and cultural systems. Beauvoir argues that one is not born a woman but becomes one through social conditioning and patriarchal expectations (Beauvoir 301). This idea helps analyse how female characters in the works of Banu Mushtaq and Devdutt Pattanaik are shaped and constrained by social norms, moral codes, and cultural traditions rather than by any inherent weakness.

Elaine Showalter's theory of gynocriticism further informs this study by emphasizing women's writing as an independent literary tradition. Showalter argues that women's texts should be studied through women's experiences, emotions, and creative expressions rather than through male-dominated literary standards (Showalter 13). This innovative approach is particularly useful in reading Mushtaq's realist narratives, where women's lived realities expressed through silence, suffering, and endurance -form which is the foundation of the narrative structure.

G. Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" questions if marginalized women (e.g Mushtaq's Kannada Muslim Characters) can articulate beyond elite representations, deeming their silence a patriarchal construct. In Pattanaaik's myths-subaltern like figures(e.g Draupadi) speak through epic vents, yet Spivak warns such "recovery" risks epistemic violence by intellectuals ventriloquizing (Epics aboutWomen, published on 21st January, 2018). Mushtaq embodies this poignant narrative in Heart Lamp (2025) which vividly portrays the lived reality of the protagonist Mehrun where silence only becomes medium of mythic resistance, but the true essence of agency demands escaping representation traps.

Mohanty critiques Western feminism's homogenizing "Third World Women" as passive victims, urging analysis of local patriarchies like bargaining in Mushtaq's tales. Pattanaik's Hindu myths align with her call for contextual agency, where women negotiate power (e.g. Savitri's wit) without universal victimhood (Feminism Is Not About Women Dominating Men-Devdutt Pattanaik, in an exclusive conversation with Deccan chronicle, he shared insights into his attest book *"Sati, Savitri"* and other feminist Tales "*They Don't Tell You"*).

Together, these theorists frame the query's arc from the internalised performativity of power (Butler), through the crisis of representation and the silences margin (Spivak), to the specific, located strategies of agency (Mohanty).

Theorist	Core concept	Mushtaq Link	Pattanaik Link
Judith Butler	GenderPerformativity concept: in her 1990 work *Gender Trouble,* it challenges the challenges the traditional, fixed understanding of gender, arguing that gender is not innate but rather socially constructed through repeated actions and behaviours.	Silence as repeated act	Mythic roles as citation
Gayatri Spivak	Her concept of the Subaltern as articulate in her essay *"Can the Subaltern Speak?"*	Voiceless endurance	Epic "recovery" limits
Chandra Talpade Mohanty	Postcolonial insights Local bargaining	Domestic negotiations	Cultural agency forms (Men and Women in Hindu mythology, published on 25thOctober, 2018, on Esplanade)

In nutshell, the critical study draws upon theories of myth and adaptation as cultural discourse. Myths are not static stories of the past but living narratives that reflect social power structures. As adaptation theorists argue, revisiting myths allows writers to challenge dominant ideologies and reinterpret cultural memory (Hutcheon 8). Pattanaik's feminist reinterpretations function as cultural critique by exposing how patriarchal readings of myth have shaped moral expectations of women. By treating myth as an adaptable discourse, the study highlights storytelling as a site of resistance and gender redefinition.

Banu Mushtaq's short stories are deeply rooted in the everyday realities of women whose lives unfold within restrictive domestic and social structures. Patriarchy in her

narratives is not always overtly violent; rather, it operates subtly through expectations, silence, and normalization of suffering. Mushtaq poignantly observes that *"a woman's silence is often mistaken for consent, when it is only a strategy for survival."* This statement foregrounds the misinterpretation of women's silence as acceptance, exposing how patriarchal systems erase women's emotional and psychological resistance. Silence, in Mushtaq's fiction, becomes a forced response shaped by fear, dependence, and social conditioning.

Mushtaq repeatedly depicts the home as a paradoxical spaceone that promises security but often operates as a site of control and confinement. The metaphorical imprisonment of women is powerfully expressed when she writes, *"the walls of the house were higher than the walls of the prison."* This comparison challenges romanticized notions of domesticity and highlights how private spaces can be more oppressive than public institutions. Through such imagery, Mushtaq reveals how patriarchy embeds itself within everyday routines, turning familial spaces into zones of surveillance and restriction.

Unlike narratives that equate empowerment with overt rebellion, Mushtaq emphasizes subtle, internal acts of resistance. Her women may not always confront authority directly, yet their refusal to completely surrender their sense of self becomes a form of agency. This is evident in the line*, "she did not shout, but her refusal was loud enough."* The statement redefines resistance, suggesting that agency need not be spectacular to be significant. Mushtaq thus broadens feminist discourse by acknowledging survival, endurance, and internal resolve as valid modes of resistance.

Beyond the household, Mushtaq exposes how community norms and traditions reinforce women's oppression. Social customs function as invisible chains that regulate women's behaviour more effectively than explicit coercion. As Mushtaq notes, *"society did not need chains; it had customs."* This observation critiques the cultural mechanisms through which patriarchy sustains itself, particularly within conservative and community-bound settings. Women's bodies and choices are regulated not through force alone, but through deeply ingrained social expectations. They are subjugated from generations to generations.

Devdutt Pattanaik approaches women's issues through mythological retellings, emphasizing that myths are not static relics but evolving narratives that reflect societal values. He asserts*, "Myths are not stories of the past; they are mirrors in which societies see themselves."* This perspective allows Pattanaik to interrogate how patriarchal interpretations of myth continue to shape contemporary attitudes toward women. By revisiting epics through a feminist lens, he minimizes dominant readings and opens space for alternative interpretations.

Pattanaik's feminist project involves re-examining mythological women who have traditionally been portrayed as submissive or passive. He challenges such portrayals by asserting, "*Sita was not weak; she was constrained by the rules written by men."* This statement reframes female suffering as a consequence of social and moral codes rather than

personal inadequacy. Pattanaik thus shifts the burden of judgment from women's character to the patriarchal systems that limit their choices.

A recurring concern in Pattanaik's writing is the moral framework used to evaluate women in mythology. He critiques the tendency to equate virtue with obedience, stating that *"women in mythology are judged not by their choices but by their obedience."* This critique exposes how moral narratives are gendered, rewarding compliance while punishing autonomy. Pattanaik's reinterpretations encourage readers to reassess ethical standards imposed on women across cultural traditions.

Pattanaik underscores the political significance of storytelling itself, emphasizing that narratives shape collective consciousness. His assertion that *"control of stories is control of society"* highlights the ideological power of myth. By reclaiming stories from patriarchal interpretations, Pattanaik positions feminist retellings as acts of cultural resistance. Myth, in this context, becomes a battleground where gender norms are negotiated and questioned.

A Comparative Inquiry: Where Realism Converges with Myth

A comparative reading of Banu Mushtaq and Devdutt Pattanaik reveals two complementary yet distinct modes of feminist intervention in contemporary Indian literature. While both writers are concerned with women's agency and resistance, they operate at different narrative levels and cultural spaces. Mushtaq focuses on the micro-politics of everyday life, foregrounding the lived experiences of women within domestic and community settings. In contrast, Pattanaik addresses the macro-politics of cultural memory by reinterpreting mythological narratives that have historically shaped social attitudes toward gender.

Mushtaq's realist narratives expose how patriarchy functions subtly through silence, routine, and social expectation. Her stories highlight how women's oppression is often normalized within family structures and community customs, making resistance difficult and invisible. By portraying silence as a survival strategy rather than a sign of weakness, Mushtaq challenges conventional understandings of agency. Women in her stories assert themselves through small but meaningful acts—refusal, endurance, emotional withdrawal, or moral clarity-thereby redefining resistance in everyday terms.

Pattanaik, on the other hand, approaches gender inequality by questioning the ideological foundations embedded in mythological storytelling. His feminist retellings reveal how traditional interpretations of myths have reinforced patriarchal values by idealizing obedience, sacrifice, and female suffering. By reimagining mythological women as thinkers and moral agents, Pattanaik disrupts fixed narratives and opens space for alternative readings. His work demonstrates that myths are not neutral stories but powerful cultural tools that influence social behaviour and moral judgement.

The contrast between realism and mythology is central to understanding their feminist strategies. Mushtaq's realism emphasizes immediacy and lived experience, making

visible the everyday forms of gendered control that often go unnoticed. Pattanaik's mythological narratives operate symbolically, addressing broader cultural ideologies that justify and sustain these everyday practices. Together, their works suggest that patriarchy operates simultaneously at personal and cultural levels, and therefore requires multiple modes of narrative resistance.

Despite their differences, both writers share a commitment to reclaiming women's voices from patriarchal silencing. Mushtaq gives voice to women whose stories are rarely heard in mainstream literature, while Pattanaik reclaims mythological women whose voices have been overwritten by patriarchal interpretation. Their narratives collectively demonstrate that women's agency can be articulated both through silence and speech, through lived reality and symbolic tradition.

Thus, the comparative study of Mushtaq and Pattanaik highlights the richness and diversity of feminist expression in contemporary Indian literature. By bridging the domestic and the mythic, the personal and the cultural, their works expand the understanding of how literature can challenge gender hierarchies and reimagine women's roles in society.

Mapping Women's Agency in the Indian Context

Women's agency in the works of Banu Mushtaq and Devdutt Pattanaik functions across different narrative scales, ranging from intimate domestic spaces to broader cultural and mythological frameworks. This section explores how both writers represent agency through varied crucial social, moral, and narrative dimensions, thereby offering a layered understanding of women's empowerment.

In Banu Mushtaq's realist narratives, women's agency is closely tied to domestic and social environments. The home, family, and community form the primary spaces where power relations are negotiated. Mushtaq portrays how women navigate these confined spaces through endurance, emotional intelligence, and subtle resistance. Their agency is often expressed in moments of refusal, silence, or moral clarity rather than open confrontation. By focusing on everyday experiences, Mushtaq reveals how patriarchal control is embedded in routine practices and social customs, making resistance both necessary and difficult. Yet, within these constraints, her female characters assert their individuality and self-worth, demonstrating that agency can exist even in limited circumstances.

Devdutt Pattanaik portrays women's agency at a broader narrative level by reinterpreting mythological figures as bearers of moral and intellectual authority. His feminist retellings challenge traditional portrayals of epic women as passive or submissive by highlighting their capacity for decision-making, ethical reasoning, and self-definition. Characters such as Sita, Savitri, and Draupadi are reimagined as thinkers who question social norms and patriarchal expectations. Through these reinterpretations, Pattanaik asserts that women's power lies not only in endurance but also in wisdom and moral autonomy.

His narratives reposition women as active participants in shaping ethical discourse rather than as symbols of sacrifice.

Both writers emphasize that storytelling itself is a site where gender and power intersect. Mushtaq uses realist storytelling to expose the hidden mechanisms of patriarchy operating within everyday life, while Pattanaik employs mythological narratives to challenge ideological structures rooted in cultural memory. Their works demonstrate that control over stories often translates into control over social norms and gender roles. By reclaiming narrative space for women, both writers resist dominant patriarchal discourses and offer alternative ways of understanding female agency. Storytelling thus becomes a powerful medium through which gendered power relations are questioned and redefined.

Literature as an instrument of Feminist Reclamation

Literature plays a pivotal role in reclaiming women's voices and experiences from patriarchal erasure. In the works of Mushtaq and Pattanaik, storytelling functions as a feminist act that challenges silence, reclaims agency, and reshapes cultural narratives.

Both renowned authors use storytelling as a form of resistance against dominant gender norms. Mushtaq's narratives resist patriarchy by documenting the lived realities of women whose struggles are often ignored or normalized. Her stories transform personal suffering into collective awareness, making visible the emotional and psychological costs of oppression. Pattanaik's retellings resist patriarchal mythology by questioning traditional interpretations and offering alternative readings that foreground women's autonomy. In both cases, storytelling becomes a tool for challenging inequality and asserting women's right to self-representation.

A key feminist intervention in both writers' works is the re-centering of silenced or marginalized female voices. Mushtaq brings attention to women who are often excluded from mainstream narratives due to class, religion, or social position. Pattanaik reclaims mythological women whose voices have been overshadowed by male-centric interpretations. By placing women at the centre of their narratives, both writers challenge the historical marginalization of female perspectives and assert the importance of women's experiences in shaping cultural and literary discourse.

The much debated narratives of Mushtaq and Pattanaik contribute significantly to contemporary discussions on gender, power, and identity. Their unique works encourage readers to question traditional gender roles and to recognize the complexity of women's agency. By addressing both everyday realities and cultural myths, these narratives bridge the gap between personal experience and ideological critique. As such, they offer valuable insights into ongoing debates about women's autonomy, representation, and equality in modern society.

Conclusion

This comparativestudy of these two authors bring together realist and mythological narratives to examine how women's agency is reimagined, constrained, and reclaimed in contemporary Indian Literature and at the same angle it has also examined how Banu Mushtaq and Devdutt Pattanaik represent women's agency through distinct yet complementary narrative strategies. At the one hand, Mushtaq's realist stories foreground the everyday struggles and quiet resistance of women within domestic and social spaces, highlighting agency as survival, endurance, and moral strength and on the other hand, Pattanaik's mythological retellings, in contrast, reclaim women's moral and intellectual authority by reinterpreting epic narratives through a feminist lens. Together, their works demonstrate that feminist intervention in literature can operate at multiple levels—from lived reality to symbolic tradition. The combination of realist and mythic perspectives enriches contemporary Indian literary discourse by offering diverse modes of resistance against patriarchal structures. This comparative approach underscores the importance of storytelling in challenging gender hierarchies and reimagining women's roles in society. The study also opens avenues for further research in gender-focused literary studies. Future research may explore similar feminist interventions across regional literatures, other mythological retellings, or intersections of gender with caste, class, and religion. Such inquiries would deepen the understanding of how literature continues to serve as a powerful medium for feminist expression and social transformation. ■

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The Role of the Minor and Peripheral Characters in Rewriting Moral Agency in Keerthik Sasidharan's *The Dharma Forest*

Anirban Chatterjee

Keerthik Sasidharan's *The Dharma Forest* (2020) reimagines the Mahâbhârata from its edges rather than its centre. Instead of gods and kings, attendants, handmaids, hunters, and nameless soldiers form the novel's moral core. By shifting the perspective from heroic spectacle to reflective awareness, Sasidharan relocates dharma from doctrine to consciousness. Drawing on B. K. Matilal's Moral Dilemmas in the Mahâbhârata (1989), Chaturvedi Badrinath's The Mahâbhârata: An Inquiry into the Human Condition (2006), Alf Hiltebeitel's Rethinking the Mahâbhârata (2001), A. K. Ramanujan's essay "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?" (1989), Ashis Nandy's The Intimate Enemy (1983), and Pratap Bhanu Mehta's critical reading of The Dharma Forest, this paper argues that the novel transforms ethical theory into literary consciousness. A brief comparative reference to Anand Neelakantan's Asura: A Tale of the Vanquished situates Sasidharan's work within the broader landscape of contemporary epic retellings. Through the lens of marginal figures, The Dharma Forest emerges as a modern experiment in dharmic humanism, suggesting that the highest form of action resides in the cultivation of attentive presence.

Introduction

The question of dharma, understood as the proper way to be and act, has re-emerged as a site of both spiritual inheritance and ethical exploration in several recent Indian fictions dealing with the Mahâbhârata or its manifestations. Keerthik Sasidharan's *The Dharma Forest (2020),* the first in a projected trilogy, partakes of this revival not by retelling the events of the epic but by recovering its ethical interiority. The battlefield of Kurukcetra is translated into a landscape of consciousness. Silence, care, and retrospection take the place of divine intervention and martial excellence as the terrain of ethical conflict. This reallocation of attentiveness—from the spectacular to the subtle, from the glorified to the ignored—redefines the meaning of dharma in an age of disjunction. The novel thus builds a new ethical epistemology grounded in experience and involvement, displacing ethical authority from the centre to the periphery through the agency of attendants, handmaids, hunters, and unnamed witnesses.

Sasidharan's creativity lies in expanding the already pluralistic voice of the epic into a more radically interior register. The Mahâbhârata has long functioned as a work of dialogue, butmodern retellings have frequently crammed this plurality into moral teaching.Rajagopalachari's *Mahâbhârata Retold* exemplifies this didactic inclination, removing much of the epic's subtleties in favour of propaedeutic clarity. Sasidharan's prose, by contrast, retains moral difficulty within narrative hesitation. Ethical insight emerges not from prescription but from empathy and attentive seeing.

This narrative shift corresponds to a philosophical recognition of dharma as irreducibly subtle. As B. K. Matilal observes, "It is very difficult but not impossible to understand the extremely subtle ways of dharma or duty" (dharmâ-nâm gatiC úûkcmaC duranvayam) (Matilal 26). Sasidharan brings this insight into the arena of aesthetics. His characters inhabit moral reasoning as lived consciousness—Bhîcma in reflection, Draupadî in dignified endurance, Arjuna in hesitation. Moral cognisance appears not dogmatic but experiential. Dharma, in Sasidharan's vocabulary, is awareness made visible.

Research Questions

1. How does Keerthik Sasidharan's *The Dharma Forest* reinterpret dharma through minor and peripheral characters?
2. In what ways does the novel redistribute moral agency from epic centres (kings, warriors, divine figures) to marginal presences?
3. How does the narrative transform philosophical debates on dharma into literary consciousness and lived experience?
4. To what extent does the novel's contemplative narrative style function as an ethical method rather than merely an aesthetic choice?
5. How does *The Dharma Forest* position itself within contemporary epic retellings while diverging from didactic or revisionist models?

Research Objectives

1. To examine the role of minor and peripheral characters in reshaping the moral architecture of *The Dharma Forest*.
2. To analyse how the novel redefines dharma as contextual, relational, and experiential rather than doctrinal.
3. To situate Sasidharan's narrative within major philosophical interpretations of the *Mahâbhârata*, particularly those of Matilal, Badrinath, Hiltebeitel, Ramanujan, and Nandy.
4. To investigate how narrative form—polyphony, interiority, and meditative pacing—contributes to ethical meaning.

5. To locate the novel within the broader field of contemporary Indian epic retellings and assess its distinctive philosophical intervention.

Discussion: Positioned within the continuum of traditional and contemporary interpretations of the epic, the novel can be examined through Alf Hiltebeitel's idea of the Mahâbhârata as an education for kings. However, Sasidharan extends this educational framework beyond rulers to include ordinary individuals and those on the fringes. The attendants caring for Bhîcma's wounded body, the soldiers who hesitate before committing acts of violence, and the women whose silence transforms into strength—all contribute to a comprehensive moral education. As Hiltebeitel notes, "Hearing the 'dharmic hunter's' story in the forest, the PaG avas and Draupadî learn about the ways of the 'unrespectable'" (Hiltebeitel 217).

This results in a transformation of scale, where the cosmic becomes intimate, and the divine is intertwined with the human experience. The forest serves not only as a setting but also as an allegory for the interconnectedness of life. This relational understanding aligns with Badrinath's definition of dharma as that which sustains and upholds life: "All the sayings of dharma are with a view to supporting, sustaining, bringing together, upholding, all living beings" (Badrinath 220). Sasidharan's narrative embodies this principle by exploring interconnected perspectives rather than isolating heroic subjectivity.

While The Mahâbhârata is traditionally recognised as a tale of fate and duty, Sasidharan translates it into a similar focus. His sentences unfold gently, inviting contemplation. This deliberate pacing is not a mere artistic flourish; it serves a moral purpose. The silence within the narrative forms the backbone of the novel's ethical framework. Meaning emerges only through action rooted in tranquillity. Through measured rhythm and meditative pacing, Sasidharan turns the act of reading into an exercise in mindfulness.

In the midst of the modern world's rush and noise, The Dharma Forest provides a contemplative education. Ethical insights arise through pauses and silence rather than through explicit declarations. This inward reflection resonates with Ashis Nandy's critique of the colonisation of the inner life by modern rationality, where "This colonialism colonises minds in addition to bodies" (Nandy 11). Sasidharan counters this shift in values by positioning tenderness as an epistemological virtue. The quiet efforts of attendants, the dignified restraint of Draupadî, and Arjuna's reflective hesitations imply that sympathetic perception itself constitutes a moral act.**Discussion:** Positioned within the continuum of traditional and contemporary interpretations of the epic, the novel can be examined through Alf Hiltebeitel's idea of the Mahâbhârata as an education for kings. However, Sasidharan extends this educational framework beyond rulers to include ordinary individuals and those on the fringes. The attendants caring for Bhîcma's wounded body, the soldiers who hesitate before committing acts of violence, and the women whose silence transforms into strength—all contribute to a comprehensive moral education. As Hiltebeitel notes, "Hearing the 'dharmic hunter's' story in the forest, the PaG avas and Draupadî learn about the ways of the 'unrespectable'" (Hiltebeitel 217).

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This posture towards the peripheral situates Sasidharan within a broader literary field while distinguishing its method. Ethical authority no longer descends hierarchically but arises from attentiveness. As A. K. Ramanujan argues, "Dharma itself is relative to the agent, the context, the time, the place" (Ramanujan 45). Sasidharan's peripheral figures embody this contextual moral agency through daily acts of care and endurance.

This study, therefore, reads The Dharma Forest as a literary experiment in reconstructing moral agency. In making the marginal the focus of its intensity, the novel makes a philosophical intervention into the modern conception of dharma. The later sections will examine how this vision unfolds through the novel's ethical architecture, its revaluation of peripheral figures, and its narrative reconfiguration of karma-yoga as detached yet compassionate engagement.

The Ethical Architecture of The Dharma Forest

In The Dharma Forest, Keerthik Sasidharan rotates the axis of moral attention away from spectacle towards the commonplace. Where traditional retellings of the Mahâbhârata forefront princes, sages, and warriors as moral authorities, the novel allows ethical reflection to unfold through servants' movements, soldiers' manners, and maidens' thoughts. Moral

significance arises not in royal councils but in unnoticed gestures, suggesting that dharma exists in the unnoticed permanence of the everyday rather than in heroic attributes.

This redistribution of ethical focus draws upon possibilities already present within the epic itself. The Mahâbhârata's frame narratives and episodic voices generate a polyphonic moral texture, though many modern abridgements reduce this plurality to a single didactic register. C. Rajagopalachari's *Mahâbhârata Retold,* for instance, clarifies moral dilemmas through lucid exposition, restoring confidence in virtue by simplifying ethical conflict. Sasidharan proceeds otherwise. He intensifies ambiguity to recover the moral intelligence embedded in uncertainty. His minor figures are not illustrative types but centres of ethical sensitivitythrough whom the conscience of the epic awakens. This position finds consonance withMatilal's assertion that "Dharma by its very nature cannot be static. When the basis of dharma is discussed, especially when there are changes in society, it is bound to change" (Matilal 41).

Sasidharan's choice to speak through such characters has implications for both aesthetics and philosophy. Aesthetically, perception is levelled as epic grandeur is refracted through those who serve rather than command. Philosophically, the moral fulcrum of the epic is displaced. The scene of service becomes a microcosm of dharma in practice, where ethical awareness is inscribed in labour. Such devotion, stripped of heroic spectacle, nonetheless bears an ethical gravity comparable to epic action, as seen in Jara's self-recognition after the fatal act, when he reflects that"He could have been more patient ... not abandoned his aspiration for non-violence" (Sasidharan 12). By granting interiority to those excluded from moral discourse, Sasidharan universalises the ethical imagination.

This inversion reflects B. K. Matilal's insistence that dharma in the Mahâbhârata is not a fixed code but a context-bound process of deliberation. As Matilal notes, "it is very difficult but not impossible to understand the extremely subtle ways of dharma" (Matilal26), since "the truth of dharma lies in the dark cave" and "cannot be completely known by us as universally fixed" (Matilal32). Sasidharan's minor characters are situated in this uncertainty. Their ethical agency operates where rules fail, and authority recedes. This marginal moral exposure is articulated in the novel when Bhîcma reflects that "most of them would die anonymous deaths… no poet shall laud their valour"(Sasidharan 128). By highlighting such consciousness, Sasidharan translates Matilal's perception into narrative form.

Similarly, the women around Draupadî suggest a redistribution of morality within the domestic scene. Their presence around the queen translates karma-yoga into the language of relation. In Rajagopalachari's interpretation, Draupadî's suffering becomes a spectacle of morality; in Sasidharan's, it is a silent sharing of endurance understood among women.This ethical posture corresponds to Badrinath's insistence that moral force does not necessarily belong to authority or strength, for "the weak are, in fact, much stronger than the strong" (Badrinath 226). The handmaidens' labour preserves moral order not through administration or command, but through recognition—an awareness of shared vulnerability that supplants hierarchical obedience with ethical proximity.

The Dharma Forest presents the ethical weight of hesitation and accentuates the sense of dharma into that of doubt. This distributed awareness corresponds to what Alf Hiltebeitel identifies when he notes that "the proclamation of dharma is done for the sake of the power of beings… by dharma beings are upheld" (Hiltebeitel 216). In the *Mahâbhârata,* this moral education is the prerogative of the dharma-king. Sasidharan transfers this education to the group. The attendants, soldiers, and handmaids are the new pupils of dharma, positioned within what Bhîcma recognises as a moral distortion. From them, dharma learning descends from the throne to the hearth. The moral universe is participatory rather than prescriptive.

This redistribution of morality is implicitly critical of a modernity that valorises visibility. Nandy warns that colonialism cannot be understood merely as political domination, since "colonialism… cannot be identified with only economic gain and political power" but functions as a deeper ethical disturbance (Nandy 21). Sasidharan's auxiliary figures counter this paradigm by affirming invisibility as strength. Their refusal to dramatise virtue aligns with what Nandy describes as a moral and cognitive venture undertaken from within marginal positions (Nandy 14).

In this manner, the minor characters approximate what Badrinath identifies as dharma's ethical demand toward the vulnerable: "the one class that requires the greatest protection of all is composed of those who are weak, are poor, are exploited, are helpless" [Badrinath 225]. Their service to Bhîcma and Draupadî enacts dharma not as command but as relational awareness, rendering the narrative's ethical landscape relational rather than hierarchical.The peripheral figures' dipolar moral agency also revivifies the idea of úraddhâ as active attentiveness. Their work is based on trust—not the certainty of reward, but the rightness of work. Sasidharan transforms this spiritual axiom into a literary experience.

The ethics of distributed agency is coordinated through a transformation of perspective. The novelist shifts focalisation to offer no privilege to a single consciousness, allowing ethical meaning to emerge through convergent and intersecting viewpoints rather than a dominant centre. This plurality reflects the insight that "the Indian way is to have many ways, to be plural" (Ramanujan 48). In this mosaic of views, the novel suggests that dharma is approachable only through plurality, and that its moral meaning lies not in resolution but in resonance.

Through these marginal lives, *The Dharma Forest* reconstructs the moral imagination of the epic age for modernity. It brings ethical magnitude to smallness and depth to anonymity. The result is not nostalgia or revisionism, but a reawakening of conscience through attention. This awakening is crystallised in Shalakhya's moment of insight: "Now, thanks to Bhîcma, he would begin to see once more" (Sasidharan 127). Their stillness, like Bhîcma's breath, ensures the tenuous continuity between violence and virtue.

Minor and Peripheral Characters as Agents of Moral Redistribution

In *The Dharma Forest,* Keerthik Sasidharan changesthe moral perspective to peripheral figures whose ethical force lies in attentiveness rather than authority. The novel locates moral reflection not in sovereign decision but in marginal intelligences, confirming Pratap Bhanu Mehta's observation that its most searching insights emerge through figures "unencumbered by the passions, frailties and self-importance that make humans and the gods partial and self-deluded" (Mehta).

This reallocation of moral authority recalls the epic tradition in which moral insight often arises from the margins. As Hiltebeitel argues, the Mahâbhârata repeatedly discloses dharma through characters who disrupt hierarchical certainties, revealing moral knowledge through liminal situations and indirect instruction (Hiltebeitel 221). Sasidharan assents to this logic. His subordinate characters are not representative types; they are sensibilities through which the conscience of the epic is reawakened.

Within the novel, the marginal vision exposes the hypocrisy of elite moral claims. Shalakhya learns that "the purported glories of all royal families hang threadbare on the very secrets they concealed" (Sasidharan 34), while other marginalisedcharacters recognise the precarity of power, warning that when a great tree falls, "the many small plants that live in and around its shadow… shall also wither away" (Sasidharan126). Through such voices, the novel situates dharma not in domination but in relational awareness.

Sasidharan's choice of figures through whom the narrative unfolds is significant both aesthetically and philosophically. Aesthetically, it democratises perception: epic action is seen through the eyes of those who serve rather than those who rule. Philosophically, it vitiates the epic's moral centre by relocating ethical awareness within labour. The scene of service becomes a microcosm of dharma in practice, where ethical knowledge is rooted in labour. The devotion of attendants is not heroic in the conventional epic sense, yet it attains comparable moral value. By giving interiority to those excluded from recognised ethical agency, Sasidharan widens the area of ethical imagination.

This inversion is expressed through marginal voices that resist abstraction. In *The Dharma Forest,* ethical comprehension arises from immediacy, as when Ustrâkca, the pisacha, observes, "Unlike humans, we don't need names to know ourselves… We don't talk about things that we can't point to" (Sasidharan 343). Moral awareness here is grounded in perception rather than explanation. Likewise, Draupadî's impatience with retrospective narration—"what we pay you for, is for the happenings of tomorrow" (Sasidharan211)—redirects ethical attention from justification to responsibility. These moments render moral reasoning experiential, embodied in gesture and rhythm rather than discourse.

In the international context of ethical fiction, Sasidharan's method aligns him with writers like Hermann Hesse or Kazuo Ishiguro, but his metaphysical foundation is characteristically Indic. His moral world is concerned with karma, not confession. Response

is cyclical, not terminal. Awareness, not salvation, is the goal. This orientation distinguishes his novel from Western models of ethical closure. A brief comparative resonance may be noted with Anand Neelakantan's *Asura: Tale of the Vanquished,* which similarly subverts epic authority by relocating moral perspective, though Sasidharan's focus remains inward and mediative rather than interpretive. In reasserting this classical understanding through a modern aesthetic of introspection, Sasidharan constructs what may be described as a phenomenology of attention, where ethics is inseparable from perception and moral clarity arises from sustained seeing.

Dharma as Awareness from the Margins

The Dharma Forest reimagines the moral imagination of the Mahâbhârata for a modernity sapped of certainty. The novel assumes a quiet revolution in narrative ethics, shifting attention from extravaganza to ingenuity and relocating dharma from proclamation to perception, from grandiose action to everyday diligence. This ethical orientation accords with Sasidharan's own view that "dharma… is not a programme to achieve moral perfection but rather a practice to live better with each passing day, contingent on where we find ourselves in history and society" (Sasidharan, "How Ancient Dharma Stories Encourage a Life of Compassion"). Sasidharan reveals that moral life is not a doctrine to be learnt but a consciousness to be cultivated. His fiction becomes a philosophical recovery precisely because it returns to Indian thought its contemplative centre.

This study has shown how the ethical architecture of the novel—built upon poise, relation, and restraint—extends into a moral ecology sustained by peripheral figures. Sasidharan articulates the ethical orientation explicitly in his essay on dharmic storytelling, where he argues that "the locus of virtue in those stories lay not in ritual or rank but in sustaining commitment to an ideal that demanded some form of sacrifice" (Sasidharan, "HowAncient Dharma Stories"). The novel's words become a form of sâdhana: a discipline of seeing rightly, of bringing the world into cognition without clutching it.

The redistribution of moral agency—from kings to caretakers—realises the moral potential long discerned by modern interpreters of the epic. In *The Dharma Forest,* moral knowledge arises in the hinterlands of ambivalence where choice embodies cost. This is most evident in the novel's attention to marginal lives, where anonymity becomes the site of ethical gravity. As Pratap Bhanu Mehta notes, the novel persistently shifts meaning toward "questions of accountability" rooted in finite, ordinary lives rather than divine certainty (Mehta). The reader, like the attendant, thus learns discernment through attention rather than instruction.

The critique of the moral desensitisation of modernity made by Ashis Nandy (1983) also points to the relevance of the novel. In a world in which efficiency is equated with probity, and spectacle with truth, *The Dharma Forest* returns tenderness to the area of knowledge.It foregrounds compassion, patience, and silence not as abstractions but as lived orientations that resist domination and recover moral responsiveness from within everyday life.

The forest itself stands as the novel's major metaphor. It embodies the interdependence of all beings—the moral ecology within which every act resounds. Sasidharan invites readers to inhabit this space, recognising that dharma is not an abstract rule but an equilibrium of consciousness and life. To live rightly, the novel suggests, is to remain awake to relation. The forest teaches what the battlefield forgets: that endurance and empathy, and not conquest, are the supports of existence.

What emerges from this reading is not merely a revised interpretation of the Mahâbhârata but a redefinition of moral consciousness itself. As Vyâsa reminds Bhîcma, "when the time comes, you'll know which dharma to choose… the only question is: do you have the courage to choose it?" (Sasidharan 22). This awareness finds voice in the novel's ethics of attention, shaped by the consciousness of minor characters and its measured tempo. Perception itself becomes moral participation, dissolving the boundary between philosophy and life. Through stillness, service, and silence, The Dharma Forest allows dharma to breathe again—from the margins, for the world.

Conclusion

Keerthik Sasidharan's The Dharma Forest reimagines the Mahâbhârata by shifting moral authority from powerful figures to marginal characters like attendants and hunters. The novel redefines dharma as a reflective awareness, emphasising ethical understanding through ambiguity and relationality instead of prescriptive doctrine. Drawing on insights from various scholars, it preserves the epic's complexity while extending it into a modern context. The forest serves as both a setting and a metaphor for a moral ecology where every life contributes to meaning. In an age of spectacle, Sasidharan highlights the ethical importance of silence and anonymity, suggesting that true moral agency lies in perception, attention, and empathy cultivated from the margins. ■

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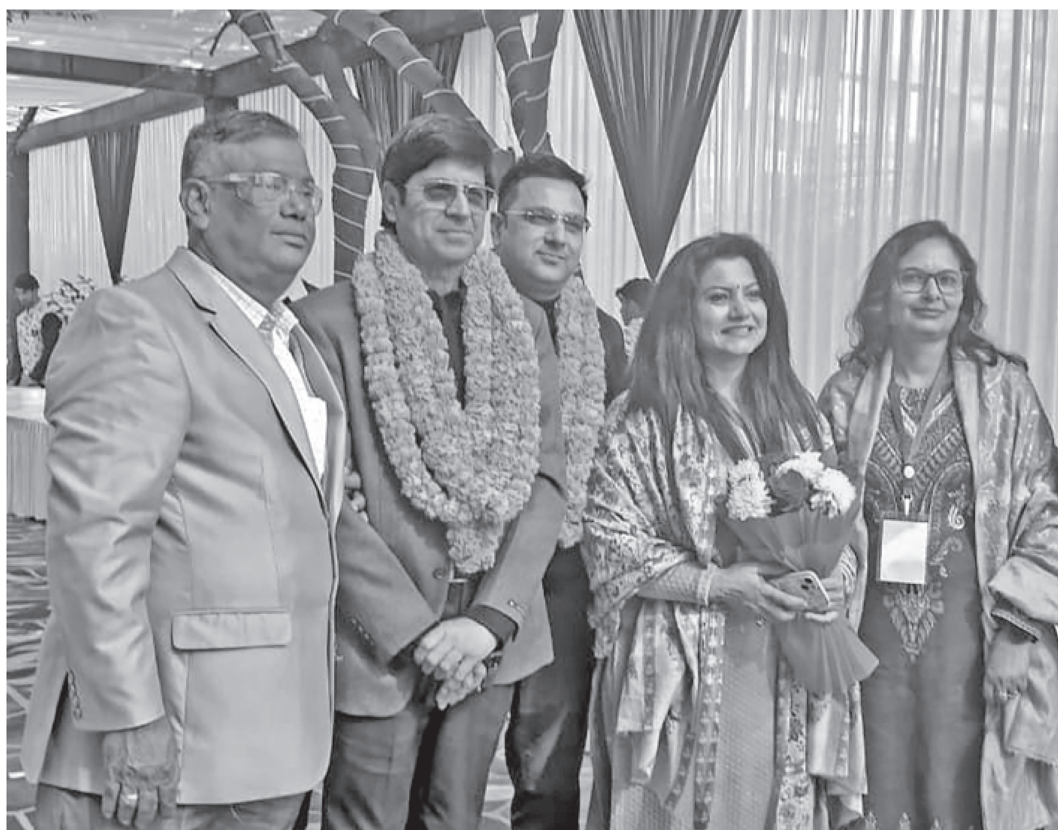

Editor of ROCK PEBBLES journal with Dr Subash Gautam, chairman, AESI and Dr Vikas Sharma, General Secretary of AESI at Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapeeth, Varanasi, UP, during the 68th All India English Teachers' Conference on 10th January 2026

The Space of Kitchen and its Significance in the Life of a Woman: A Reading of Select Novels representing Food and Confinement

Monali Ghosh Dastider

Being the most essential need of our life, food has always played a major role in human beings' lives. However, food as a matter of study has been discovered quite lately by scholars. As a journalist, Food and food related works involves within it a huge industry. It encapsulates not only the food eaters within it, but it also creates many different dimensions through which one is involved with food. Interestingly, food studies is a kind of multidisciplinary area, other than its biological necessity, it has gained the attention of anthropologists, historians, literary scholars, sociologists, philosophers etc. Food and its evolution have a vast history; however, this article would not deal deeply with the historical aspect of food, rather, it will attempt to look into the cultural, aesthetic and especially gender association of food in human lives through literature. Warren Belasco, in his book Food: The Key Concepts, quotes Homer, who wrote almost 3000 years ago, "A hungry stomach will not allow its owner to forget it, whatever his cares and sorrows."(Belasco, 02). These lines bring home to us the importance of food, to us as it never lets anyone forget about food. Moreover, food also plays a major role in literature. This paper takes into account the various aspects of food is related to, with particular reference to Kavery Nambisan's 'The Scent of Pepper' and Anita Desai's 'Fasting, Feasting'.

The paper seeks to establish a connection between food and the role it plays both literally and metaphorically in the characters' lives. It looks into the cultural aspects, gender roles and paradoxical power positions in each character's life. It would also look into another aspect of how food provides a woman multiple opportunities within a limited space, a question of whether the space of the kitchen and domesticity provides a woman with power, or is it just a way to suppress a woman, is to be answered.

Keywords: Food, kitchen, gender, culture, power, space.

Introduction:

Being the most essential need of our life, food has always played a major role in human beings' lives as Woolf says: 'One cannot think well, love well, or sleep well if one

has not dined well'(18). However, food as a matter of study has been discovered quite lately by scholars. It encapsulates not only the food eaters within it, but it also creates many different dimensions through which one is involved with food. Interestingly, food studies is a kind of multidisciplinary area, other than its biological necessity, it has gained the attention of anthropologists, historians, literary scholars, sociologists, philosophers etc. Food and its evolution have a vast history; however, this paper would not deal directly with the historical aspect of food, rather, it will attempt to look into the cultural, aesthetic and especially gender association of food in relation to the history of human lives through literature. Warren Belasco, in his book *Food: The Key Concepts,* quotes Homer, who wrote almost 3000 years ago, "A hungry stomach will not allow its owner to forget it, whatever his cares and sorrows."(Belasco 02*).* Belasco asserts that food is something which is 'an object of anxiety' and that nothing can be more frightening than running out of food[1].

Moreover, food also plays a major role in literature. It serves as a medium of expression for most of the writers. Food and the kitchen have always been predominantly held as an area related to women. There is a large plethora of books related to food and women in literature where food plays important roles in their lives. In this literary sense, food writing aspires towards more than merely communicating information about food; it also aims to provide readers with an aesthetic experience. It can serve as a substitute to compensate our emotional, physical, psychological and also social desires, imperfections and ambitions. Foodways also change through time, and the changes may vary among individuals of differing status, occupations, gender and age. Indeed, the study of these changes will inform us about general courses of social change. It becomes a profound gesture of recognition. It also takes into account the question of identity, which involves consideration of personal preferences, pleasure, creativity, and the sense of who we are. It also includes factors such as taste, family and ethnic background, and personal memories. The cultural aspects of identity include widely shared values and ideas, extravagant notions about the good life, as well as the community's special food preferences and practices that distinguish it from other communities.

Each community, each country has their own particular food habits which distinctly differentiate them from each other. Belasco defines the term 'Cuisine' as quoted below,

> In popular language, the term 'Cuisine' is often reserved for high-class, elite, or 'gourmet' food. But, following anthropologists Peter Farb and George Armelagos (1980: 190-98), we take a more expansive view to suggest that all groups have an identifiable 'cuisine', a shared set of 'protocols', usages, communications, behaviour, etc. (Belasco 15)

As mentioned in the lines, food is the marker of a community. It helps us identify an individual or a group of people sharing common food habits held together as a particular community. Literature has also served us with platters of cultural habits belonging to different people,whether domestic or international. In the novel *Fasting Feasting* by Anita Desai,

food is a predominant theme which encompasses the characters throughout their journey of life. Apparently, there is a contradiction made between the lives and food habits in the two parts of the world, the east and the west, represented by Uma and Arun. The novel takes us to a continuous parallel drawn between Uma's Indian family and the Pattons, the American family where her brother Arun stays in the US. Arun's constant struggle to adjust to another culture is beautifully portrayed through his dislike for food cooked by Mrs Patton. Through this constant parallel between the two places, we can find a subtle similarity in how both families, the characters, tend to express their emotions through food. We get a peek into the traditions and food habits of two cultures in the same novel. Again, in Kavery Nambisan's *The Scent ofPepper*, undoubtedly, the readers attain an unprecedented knowledge regarding the Kodagu culture and their food habits. Food offers a microcosmic glance into the society's inner workings, wherein, as Claude Levi Strauss affirms, "We can hope to discover for each special case how the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure or else resigns itself to revealing its contradictions..."(Strauss7).

From times immemorial, women and food have been intricately related. The traditional setup of the Indian society, specifically, and also moreorless in other parts of the world, the basic and most important role of a woman is to prepare food for her family, regardless of her marital status, either voluntarily or involuntarily. The kitchen is supposed to be the ideal place where a woman in Indian society fits in. Other than the real world, literature is playing an important role in depicting the stories and conditions of these women who are dedicated to the kitchen willingly or unwillingly. India, as a country, has a rich and varied tradition and cultures, and within its culture, food holds the foremost place, becoming the medium to know about a particular culture. However, the relation between women and the kitchen inside a culture has many aspects to it. The theme of food takes a key place in many works of women's literature. The most evident feature related to this theme is feminine identity and domesticity. While discussing women's roles, the patriarchal point of view has to be mentioned. For different women, food and the kitchen play different roles for them. In the words of Carole M Counihan:

> Between men and women, food is a means of differentiation as well as a channel of connection. By claiming different roles in regard to food and distinct attributes through identification with specific foods, men and women define their masculinity and femininity, their similarity and differences (Counihan and Kaplan7).

Here, the differentiation and connection between male and female goes back to the traditional belief that the female members of a household must wait until the male members of the family eats and the females have to eat the leftovers. Interestingly, it's not always that a woman is forced to perform such duties; they seem to be pleased to feed their family. Therefore, it is not always that a woman unwillingly acquires the role of cook. To look back, the roles which men and women acquire come from ancient times, when men, who are said to be physically stronger than women, performed the work that was to be done

outside the household, and women did the domestic work. This trend is continued even in the contemporary period; there are still many families where the male goes out, works and earns for his family, and the woman stays back at home looking after the needs of her family. In a larger view, it is not just the case with Indian or Eastern society as such, but also the Western part of the world, as Carole M. Counihan says.

> Patriarchal Western society not only restricts women's economic and political opportunities but also defines their role within the family as nurturer and food provider, a role compatible with the use of food as a voice. (Counihan 120).

Many feminists feel that the areas of food, cooking and the kitchen are a means of oppressing women by the patriarchal society, where she is made to understand that her position is nothing more than that of a cook. The feminists have had a long and conflicted relationship with all things domestic. Cooking, a task traditionally relegated to women through the role of the selfless nurturer, is perceived by feminists as an act that reflects women's oppressed cultural status both inside and outside the home. Radical feminist writers like Ann Oakley express their frustration with housework when she describes women's responsibilities in the home, such as cooking, as an act that inhibits women's lives and calls for the abolition of household work[22]Oakley.Ann and Germaine Greer. "Images of Housework". While references to cooking feature in many feminist texts as an unwanted and, in some cases, negative experience of being a woman, what becomes apparent is that feminists are not directly opposed to cooking as such. Rather, feminist writers such as Greer and Oakley object to patriarchal restrictions that prevent women from doing anything other than cooking. Apparently, it is not feminism that divorces women from food and cooking, but patriarchal social structures that confine women to the kitchen (Oakley, 70). Again, Judith Butler also maintains the position that women become women under a cultural compulsion or a choice to become one. The compulsion does not come from 'sex' (Butler, 12). If a girl or a woman fails to prove herself as a skilled cook, able to feed her family, she becomes the subject of criticism. The texts that I am dealing with ironically show us a picture of the women caught in the web of the societal gender roles of maintaining the household, feeding the family, where somehow these attempts transform themselves into their personal experiences and expressions. These women tell us their story, their efforts, their imagination, and their interests through their restricted space of the kitchen. In the first text by Kavery Nambisan, *The Scent of Pepper*, Nanji, the protagonist of the novel, comes to her in-laws' house for the first time after her marriage, and she is said to be 'consigned to the kitchen'(Nambisan, 4). She happily accepts her role and works according to her 'consigned' role. She feeds her family, her labourers too. Nambisan's portrayal of her character Nanji is a kind of paradox where Nanji proves to be a 'traditionally' perfect daughter-in-law, perfect wife and a perfect mother for her children. She enjoys her domestic work, not only in the kitchen but also outside the kitchen, working and helping in the field. Baliyanna, Nanji's husband, is a kind of passive character in the novel where he does not do much work, especially household works as

after his marriage, he kept himself busy with work outdoors. It is as if he has transferred all the household responsibilities to Nanji, and she carries forward that responsibility with open arms. Beauvoir states that,

> …'the good wife' is man's most precious treasure. She belongs to him so profoundly that she shares the same nature with him; she has his name and his gods, and she is his responsibility. He calls her his other half. He takes pride in his wife as in his home, his land, his flocks and his wealth, sometimes even more; through her, he displays power to the rest of the world; she is his yardstick and his earthly share. (Beauvoir, 228)

And Nanji is the kind of wife or the 'good wife' that Beauvoir talks about for Baliyanna. She goes through many hindrances in her life, and her ultimate refuge became her kitchen and the food which she cooked. The home and the coffee estates seem to instil in her a sense of peace and calm. Nanji drowns her sorrows and pleasures in her work and looks at work not as drudgery or a mundane task but as an irredeemable object of life. She was born to work and does not shirk from her innumerable tasks, be it feeding a large family, looking after her ailing father-in-law, Rao Bahadur Madaiah, the servants of the house and the supervision of labourers in the coffee plantations (Sukumar 02). When we read the novel, we see that Nanji, after her marriage, starts thinking only about the well-being of her in-laws, thus 'performing' as Butler says, the gender roles assigned to her. The view of a woman being the nurturer, nourisher and food provider of a family essentially fits in with the character of Nanji.

Talking about the nurturer and food provider 'task' entitled to women, Uma in Anita Desai's *Fasting,Feasting* is also no less than a nurturer to her family. Uma, the eldest daughter of the family, again holds the responsibility of her home. The difference, however, is that Nanji performed her duties after marriage, as shown in the novel, and Uma was still a maiden taking care of her paternal family. After her younger brother Arun is born, her mother provides Uma with the task of babysitting, which Uma follows obediently. Even after Arun has grown up and is sent for studies, her mother asks Uma to pack Arun's things. The title calls for attention to the rituals of food and eating habits, which the novel links to the main theme of family relationships. Food becomes almost an obsession for the characters in the book and their attitudes to it almost come to define can link the word 'fasting' in the title to the character of Uma, as she is left without any intellectual or educational nurture by the conservative values of her parents and at forty-three years of age, still finds herself living with them and without a life of her own. The word 'feasting' instead has been applied to her brother Arun because he has always the possibility to get the best opportunities, and the second part of the novel describes his life in the USA, a society which is described by Desai as one of excess. Uma was deprived of all the opportunities of life, although she tries to achieve things on her own account, but comes out as a failure. She engrosses herself in household work, cooking food for the family, however unsatisfactorily. In an instance from the text, the situation calls for attention towards the importance of male members in their household:

> Mama knows what is wrong. She taps Uma on the elbow. 'Orange', she instructs her. Uma can no longer be ignorant of Papa's needs, Papa's ways. After all, she has been serving them for some twenty years. She picks out the largest orange in the bowl and hands it to Mama, who peels it in strips, then divides it into separate segments. Each segment is then peeled and freed of pips and threads till only the perfect globules of juice are left and then passed, one by one, to the edge of Papa's plate...(Desai 23).

Uma had to suppress her desire to eat and also to ignore serving her Papa with the oranges, but her Mama did not let her do that and made her serve her Papa. We can relate the position of Uma to what Butler says about women trying to 'perform' the roles given to them.[33]Butler, Judith. Moreover, Arun, being a male in the family, had all the privileges of life, but somehow, he could not fully enjoy what he received. He could understand the position of her sister through the Pattons.Hence, there was no difference apparently in the position of the females in a family, whether it was in India or in America. Again, in the second half of the novel, the 'feasting' literally expresses the American culture where there is abundance. But, somewhere amidst this abundance, there was emptiness in the Pattons' house where not only Arun, but even Melanie, the daughter, felt alienated. It also provides a contrast between Uma and Melanie, where Uma is almost metaphorically or literally starving for food, and all the other opportunities of life, and, on the contrary, Melanie, who is provided with an excess of food and opportunities, is not able to enjoy it because she is bulimic. However, Mrs Patton is not a good cook, as it is hinted through instances in the text; she always tries to satisfy her family members. To overcome this feeling of alienation from her family, she tried to find refuge in malls, where she could buy plenty of edible things which kept her engaged, thinking that these things would help her fight her loneliness. Whereas, there is Melanie, who is a patient of bulimia, who expresses her disgust for food, especially what her mother cooks for her.

In the novel, Desai draws the food and textures of an Indian small town and of an American suburb. In both, she suggests, family life is a complex mixture of generosity and meanness, license and restrictions. The novel's subtle revelation is in the unlikely similarities. In one dark moment, Arun recognises in the Pattons' bulimic daughter a version of his own unhappy sister, Uma, and the shock provokes a reflection of these two frustrated women. Hence, we see food in all its forms expresses the condition of women and a larger view of the cultures of these two families and the places where they live.

For ages, domestic work done by a female has never been acknowledged as proper 'work'. As Foucault asserted, "Power is everywhere" (Foucault63), confinement to the kitchen before or after marriage seems to be the sole duty that a woman has to follow. But if we take Foucault's views into account, then the kitchen can also be turned into a space of power. Counihan discusses the importance of cooking for a woman, comparing it with the hunting skills of men, which seemed to be essential for men to prove their 'masculinity'. She says:

> Cooking as a skill and productive activity is valued in women as much as hunting skill is valued in men. Just as a poor hunter is considered worthless, so too a woman who cooks poorly or infrequently is considered 'worthless'. The charge is rarely levelled against women, however, perhaps because cooking is a moreorless daily activity that they cannot escape as easily as men can avoid or postpone hunting. Nonetheless, new wives are occasionally criticised for their neglect of this role. (Counihan105).

For some women kitchen becomes a source of power for them, or in other words, some women transform kitchen works in the form of power within the household. A woman's role in the family is, however, in a paradoxical state as cooking for the family implies a sense of control over the members and at the sametime while cooking, she has to keep in mind the taste buds, choices of her family members too. The 'power' here is wrapped around by the protocols and the responsibilities of not just feeding the family but also pleasing them with what they are fed. So, in one sense, she holds power and control over the food intake of her family, and in another sense, this power limits itself within the four walls of the household. Men can exert power over women by refusing to provide food or by refusing to eat or disparaging the food they have cooked. Women can also exert power over men by refusing to cook, controlling their food, or manipulating the status and meaning systems embodied in foods. (Counihan, 7-8). Anita Mannur, in her book *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture,* opines that:

> The home is part of the private sphere in which the values of patriarchy are reaffirmed, with women, paradoxically, located both at the centre and at the periphery of the familial home space. Far from being neutral spaces, homes are contested sites "manifest on geographical, psychological and material levels. (Mannur52).

Therefore, power politics in the kitchen for a woman is quite unpredictable because, in some cases, it can provide power and respect to the woman, as Nanji in Nambisan's novel, who, by her culinary skills and domestic knowledge, turns her position into an important one. Again, in stories mentioned in Bulbul Sharma's texts, women use their culinary skills to gain attention. However, Uma and Mrs Patton in Desai's novel could not achieve the desired attention they wanted, apparently because Mrs Patton was not a good cook, and Uma merely became the scapegoat of the hardcore patriarchy prevalent in the Indian society. It turns out that power in the space of the kitchen for a woman is a two-way process where the cook and the receiver of food share a complementary relationship with each other. Also, it can be assumed that, in a household, power works in turns for everyone through cooking, acceptance, appreciation or refusal of food.

Through the above discussion, it can be concluded that food is literally and metaphorically an important part of human lives. Its representation in literature does not limit itself to mere nutritional or taste values; it reveals a myriad of explanations and

connections to a person's mind and heart. "If readers cook and consume a recipe from a story, the story moves beyond the sense of sight. It is now tasted, smelled, touched, and even heard. The story takes up actual space. Whereas a book's pages are 2-D, food is 3-D; the story now has weight, texture, shadow, depth. Fantasy becomes reality, identification becomes performance, and mind becomes body. And the story is ingested, incorporated into the reader at the cellular level. The story literally comes alive." (Cognard, 425) Food in literature becomes a window for many women to express themselves, their experiences, to try and test their abilities and most essentially empower themselves through a work least appreciated in a gender-centric society. As Strauss says, "If food gives 'voice' to the disempowered, some women sing gloriously through their dishes (Strauss, 44). In the novels discussed, we see that each protagonist's life revolves around food preparations, trying to please their family, trying to confine themselves within the norms of the society and simultaneously letting their imagination run free within the limited space they are provided with.

For many women, the kitchen represents centuries of patriarchal oppression. Whereas, this whole situation of women with food and cooking can be reversed, not as a disadvantage, but as a medium of power, although the scope of this power is narrow and is confined within the household. Moreover, taking control over the kitchen can also be related to the woman's domain, where she is free to do whatever she wants to do. As in Virginia Woolf's *ARoom of One's Own*, Woolf suggests the need for a room of one's own for a woman, which was not actually available, a room which suggests a certain amount of privacy and a place which she could claim as her own[44]Woolf, Virginia. This leaves us to contemplate the actual position of a woman in a gender-centric patriarchal society. The dichotomy of a woman's place in a family and in a society as a whole would remain problematic, as some women take their task happily, and some don't. Literature offers us these problems and leaves on the reader for self-interpretation. But inmost cases, the women authors bring to life a woman's experiences through abundant food metaphors, as it is the most basic thing associated with women.

Therefore, Food becomes the ultimate refuge for a woman to compensate for any emotional or mental conditions, be it a moment to celebrate or a moment of sadness. In the texts discussed in the paper, food and kitchen is the place where the characters tried to take refuge, characters like Nanji succeeded in enhancing her position in the household and in growing as an important member of the family, whereas, Uma and similarly Mrs. Patton are seen as struggling to attain an important position in the house as apparently they were not good cooks and could not keep their families happy. A woman's culinary skills become the determining factor; it is like she is given the resources, and her life would depend on how she uses those resources to her benefit. The authors of these novels present to us different pictures and symbols that food can provide us with, and their characters represent all the women, irrespective of their geographical location, caught in this paradoxical situation. ■

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(Footnotes)

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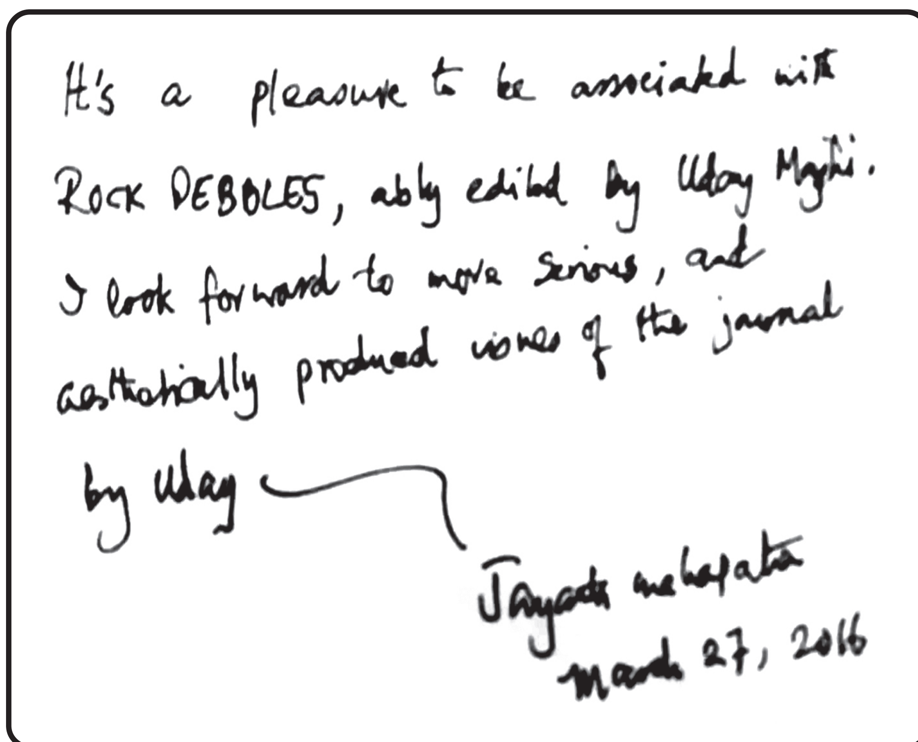

It's a pleasure to be associated with ROCK PEBBLES, ably edited by Uday Majhi. I look forward to more serious, and aesthetically produced issues of the journal by Uday

Jayanta Mahapatra
March 27, 2016

What Jayanta Mahapatra (noted Indian English poet)
wrote about ROCK PEBBLES Journal.

Beyond Silence: Mapping Human Rights Discourses in Select Assamese Novels

Ankita Choudhury

Assamese literature has long served as a cultural space in which marginalized voices articulate their experiences of violence, displacement and systemic injustice. The history of Assam—punctuated by colonial exploitation, ethnic conflict, contested citizenship and entrenched inequalities—has produced a literary tradition deeply invested in questions of dignity, identity, and survival. Yet many of its most significant texts remain insufficiently studied within a human-rights framework, despite their profound engagement with the social realities of oppression. A comparative reading of Arupa Patangia Kalita's *Felanee*, Rita Chowdhury's *Makam*, and Umakanta Sarma's *Ejak Manuh Ekhan Aranya* demonstrates how Assamese fiction documents violations of fundamental rights and exposes structural violence embedded in the political and economic order. Through varied narrative techniques and theoretical resonances, these novels illuminate the lived dimensions of rights violations, transforming literary storytelling into acts of testimony, resistance, and critique.

Keywords: Trauma Theory, Human-rights, Emotional ruptures, Displacement, Marginalized

Introduction:

From the perspective of Trauma Theory, *Felanee* embodies the fragmented, recursive structure characteristic of narratives grappling with communal conflict. Kalita situates her characters within an environment where violence is not episodic but cyclical, returning in waves that tear apart social cohesion and disrupt the continuity of everyday life. The novel's nonlinear shifts mimic the psychological shocks experienced by those who witness burning homes, forced displacement, and the disappearance of loved ones. Trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth emphasize that trauma resists full representation and often surfaces through disjointed memory; *Felanee* embodies precisely this challenge by refusing a coherent, chronological narrative. The story emerges through dispersed recollections, overheard testimonies, and emotional ruptures that draw the reader into the survivors' lived experience. This structural choice serves a political function: it refuses to normalize or rationalize violence, instead foregrounding its destabilizing effects on ordinary people whose voices rarely enter formal historical accounts.

The novel also resonates strongly with Feminist Human Rights theory, which emphasizes that conflict disproportionately affects women, whose bodies become terrains on which ethnic identities and patriarchal anxieties are inscribed. Felanee's struggles illustrate how violations of bodily integrity, safety, and freedom are inseparable from broader political crises. Her attempts to protect her family, secure shelter, and preserve dignity speak to Amartya Sen's notion of "capabilities" as essential to human freedom. Conflict strips away these capabilities, reducing life to bare survival. Through domestic scenes—mothers trying to calm terrified children, families fleeing in the night, women standing in endless lines for relief supplies—Kalita documents the slow erosion of agency. These details exemplify what Rob Nixon calls "slow violence," violence that is incremental, often invisible, and disproportionately borne by the marginalized. Although ethnic conflict appears sudden and spectacular, its consequences accumulate over years, leaving psychological and material scars that shape generations. Kalita thus constructs a narrative that is not merely descriptive but diagnostic, revealing how structural inequalities and historical grievances make certain communities perpetually vulnerable to rights violations.

If *Felanee* explores the internal fractures of Assamese society, *Makam* exposes another dimension of rights denial: statelessness. The novel reconstructs the experiences of the Chinese-origin Assamese community targeted during the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Through a Postcolonial and Biopolitical framework, the narrative shows how the state can transform particular populations into "suspect bodies" through the selective withdrawal of legal protections. The experiences of arrest, detention, confiscation of property, and deportation depicted in the novel evoke Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life," where individuals exist within the nation-state yet outside its legal and moral protections. The very act of identification—being marked as "Chinese" despite generations of residence—reveals the arbitrariness of citizenship when national security discourse overrides constitutional principles. Chowdhury's characters find their entire lives determined by an administrative apparatus that classifies them not as citizens with rights but as threats requiring surveillance.

The narrative technique in *Makam* reflects what Subaltern Studies scholars such as Ranajit Guha describe as the recovery of voices erased from dominant histories. Chowdhury meticulously reconstructs testimonies of individuals who were transported thousands of kilometres to detention camps, families separated by bureaucratic decision-making, and young people forced into a homeland they had never known. These personal stories break the silence surrounding an episode largely omitted from national memory. By weaving emotional narratives with archival detail, Chowdhury merges historical realism with literary humanism, insisting that the experiences of this community cannot be dismissed as collateral damage of wartime paranoia. Instead, they must be understood as violations of the fundamental right to belong, to possess a home, and to retain one's identity in the face of political anxieties. Hannah Arendt's formulation of "the right to have rights" becomes central: without recognition by the state, all other rights collapse. Chowdhury's novel thus acts as a moral indictment of nation-state mechanisms that manufacture exclusion.

In contrast to the acute political violence in the first two novels, *Ejak Manuh Ekhan Aranya* reveals a different, more deeply entrenched form of rights violation: exploitative labour conditions. Using the lens of Subaltern Studies, Sarma depicts tea-garden labourers as a community historically constructed as subaltern—brought to Assam through colonial labour recruitment, segregated into plantation enclaves, and denied access to land, political participation, and socio-economic mobility. Their situation exemplifies what Johan Galtung identifies as structural violence: oppression built into the very organization of society. Generations of labourers in the novel endure inadequate wages, restrictive housing, poor healthcare, and continued marginalization, illustrating how economic systems can perpetuate human rights abuses as effectively as political conflict.

Sarma's realist narrative foregrounds the monotony and invisibility of this oppression. Unlike *Felanee*, where violence erupts suddenly, or *Makam*, where the state exerts overt biopolitical control, the exploitation in this novel is gradual, normalized, and largely unquestioned by those in power. Literary scholars studying postcolonial labour have often noted that plantation economies rely on the production of silence—workers' voices are suppressed, their histories ignored, and their identities reduced to economic utility. Sarma counters this erasure by depicting characters who dream, mourn, resist, and hope, thereby restoring their humanity. The forest imagery functions as both metaphor and material condition: the labourers inhabit spaces that isolate them from mainstream Assamese society while symbolizing their enduring resilience. Their connection to the land is fraught, for it sustains them even as it confines them within structures of exploitation. Sarma's work thus extends the definition of human rights beyond political freedoms to include economic justice, social dignity, and the right to meaningful life.

All the three novels demonstrate the continuum of human rights violations—from the spectacular to the invisible, from violence inflicted through weapons to violence inflicted through policy, bureaucracy, or economic arrangements. This continuum becomes particularly clear when analyzed through Michel Foucault's concept of biopower, which describes how modern states regulate populations not only through laws and coercion but through subtle mechanisms that shape life itself. In *Felanee*, biopower manifests through the failure of the state to protect citizens; in *Makam*, through the state's active reclassification of citizens as enemies; and in Sarma's work, through economic structures that regulate bodies as labouring machines. Despite these differences, all three novels reveal that human rights violations are not anomalies but by-products of political, historical, and economic systems.

Historical consciousness plays a crucial role across the narratives. Each novel constructs a counter-history that challenges official accounts. *Felanee* reveals the everyday suffering omitted from political analyses of ethnic conflict. *Makam* retrieves a silenced chapter in Assamese and Indian history, confronting the narrative gaps created by wartime nationalism. *Ejak Manuh Ekhan Aranya* exposes the continuity of colonial hierarchies

into postcolonial times, demonstrating that certain injustices persist even after political independence. The novels thereby align with Hayden White's theory that historical narratives are shaped by moral and ideological choices; by foregrounding marginalized voices, these texts reconfigure the moral landscape of Assam's past. Their insistence on remembering what dominant histories suppress becomes a form of literary activism, asserting that justice requires not only policy reforms but also the ethical labour of remembrance.

The theoretical dimension deepens further when one considers the relationship between narrative form and rights discourse. Legal language tends to be abstract, universalizing, and detached from the experiential realities of those it seeks to protect. Literature, by contrast, situates rights within lived contexts. The stories of Felanee searching for her lost home, the Chinese-Assamese families waiting in detention camps for news of their loved ones, and the tea-garden workers burying yet another exhausted labourer reveal that rights are not simply entitlements but conditions necessary for human flourishing. Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach becomes particularly relevant: each novel outlines the deprivation of basic capabilities such as bodily health, emotional integrity, affiliation, and control over one's environment. These deprivations articulate what it means to be human in situations where systems reduce people to disposable entities.

What binds the three novels is their shared insistence on reclaiming humanity in contexts that aggressively deny it. All three narratives foreground characters who, despite suffering, articulate hope, solidarity, and resistance. Felanee's attempts to rebuild life amid ruins, the Chinese-Assamese community's endurance in the face of erasure, and the tea-garden workers' small acts of defiance demonstrate that oppressed communities are not mere victims but agents navigating hostile worlds. Their resilience challenges the deterministic narratives often associated with conflict or poverty. Through their struggles, the novels assert that human rights are not abstract ideals but lived practices, negotiated daily under difficult conditions.

The comparative significance of these works is further enhanced when viewed through the ethics of care. Each narrative demonstrates that care—whether familial, communal, or interpersonal—becomes a mode of survival in oppressive conditions. Felanee's community shelters one another in times of crisis; in *Makam*, friendships and kinship networks become lifelines amid detention and exile; in Sarma's novel, labourers support one another through shared hardships. These acts of care counter the systemic violence surrounding them and reveal the affective dimensions of rights. Human rights become meaningful not merely through institutional guarantees but through relational networks that sustain life when institutions fail.

Despite their thematic richness, these novels remain underexamined, partly due to linguistic marginalization and limited translation. Northeastern Indian literature often occupies a peripheral position in national discourse, mirroring the political and geographic

marginalization of the region itself. This exclusion underscores the need for scholarship that bridges regional literary studies with human-rights theory, trauma studies, and subaltern historiography. Such interdisciplinary work can illuminate not only the narratives themselves but also the broader structures that shape whose stories are circulated, studied, and preserved.

Conclusion:

However, Assamese literature, as demonstrated through the comparative study of these three novels, offers a profound meditation on what it means to live with dignity amid violence, exclusion, and exploitation. These narratives transform literature into a moral and political act, insisting that the stories of the displaced, the stateless, and the labouring poor must enter the ethical consciousness of society. By engaging with human rights through theoretical frameworks ranging from trauma theory to biopolitics, the novels reveal the layered, interconnected forms of violence embedded in the social fabric. Their cumulative force lies in their ability to convert personal suffering into collective memory, challenging readers to confront uncomfortable truths and to recognize the ethical obligations owed across boundaries of class, ethnicity, and citizenship.

Together, *Felanee*, *Makam*, and *Ejak Manuh Ekhan Aranya* redefine the contours of human rights in Assamese literature. They reveal that rights are not merely legal protections but existential foundations, constantly negotiated in a world shaped by historical injustices and contemporary inequalities. Their narratives insist that justice cannot be understood without acknowledging the emotional, social, and cultural dimensions of suffering. Through their unflinching portrayals of violence and resilience, they invite a reimagining of Assamese literary history—not as a peripheral tradition but as a vital archive of human aspiration and ethical struggle. ■

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Cultural Crossroads:
Analyzing Colonial and Post-Colonial Narratives

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The present paper examines how specific degrees of the colonial and postcolonial periods' elaborate connections with cultures are depicted in literature. Through literary narratives, the paper investigates how the questions of identity reconstruction, hybridization, resistance and cultural imposition are advanced and shaped. The first section of the paper delves into colonial narratives, specifically how colonial powers forced their cultures on the colonized, how conquered civilizations resisted and modified and how this resulted in cultural fusion. The literary classics such as "Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe and "A Naga Village Remembered by Easterine Kire are therefore examined to understand the dynamics of the colonial and post-colonial narratives. The second section focuses on postcolonial narratives, which emphasized the critiques of ongoing colonial outcomes, complicated identities created by colonial legacies, and attempts at decolonization and cultural rebirth. These perspectives cope with issues inclusivity of psychological effects of colonialism. This paper evaluates the well-known examples of the long-term consequences of such ancient interactions of the transmission of identities and cultures, highlighting the significance of literary narratives in chronicling and interpreting the cultural intersections of the colonial and postcolonial periods.

Keywords: Colonial, Post Colonial, Culture, Identity, Narratives, Comparative Literature

Introduction

The role of colonial and postcolonial literature becomes very important in understanding these intricacies pertaining to cultural intersections and identity formation processes during and after the colonial period. Much of the colonial literature represents the voice of the colonizers, and it actually embodies the imposition of foreign cultures, languages, and ideologies on colonized societies. Normally, these works are focused on issues like domination, subordination, and cultural erasure of indigenous identities. On the other hand, postcolonial literature emerges as a response to these colonial discourses, giving a voice to the colonized and speaking of the outcomes of colonialism. This work engages with the struggles for reconstruction of identity, resistance to cultural imposition, and hybridization of cultures as a result of these colonial encounters.

Literature provides a strong platform for analyzing these cultural intersections, which illuminate how single individuals and communities negotiate these confounding identities within the postcolonial world. It is through such literary narratives that an author can narrate experiences of colonized peoples, condemn legacies of colonialism, and project visions for cultural revitalization and self-determination.

This research focuses particularly on the works of two well-known writers, Easterine Kire and Chinua Achebe, major contributors to the insight literature offers into cultural dynamics in their respective regions: Nagaland in India and Nigeria in Africa. Such a study will be conducted to compare their works with regard to the representation of colonial and postcolonial experiences, arguing for similarities and differences. Moreover, their narratives will be contrasted with other major literary figures in both colonial and postcolonial literature setups to underline general trends and specific regional dimensions.

The following core thesis of this paper is that both colonial and postcolonial discourses represent and further cultural identity, resistance, and hybridization processes within a culture. Through their works, Easterine Kire and Chinua Achebe succeed in projecting subtle portrayals of how colonized societies resist cultural impositions, reconstruct their identity, and negotiate hybrid cultural landscapes that open up in the wake of colonialism. The stories are explored here in an attempt to make some contribution to the greater debate on the cultural inheritance of colonialism and current identity-forming processes within postcolonial contexts.

Colonial Narratives: Cultural Imposition and Resistance

Easterine Kire is a very well-known Naga writer who delves deep into the question of colonial impact on indigenous cultures, especially with regard to the Nagas. Her works reveal the intricate and at times painful interplay of power, identity, and resistance that indigenous communities face under colonial rule. In her story, Kire unravels the dehumanization and loss of identity of these communities at the hands of constant forceful imposition of foreign values and systems by the colonial powers. What constituted dignity and cultural heritage as central to the way of life for the Naga people is gradually eroded by the colonial powers' imposition of authority on them, thus leaving the community grappling with lost traditional values.

Kire's characters embody the daily struggle of retaining an identity that is forced to assimilate into another culture, establishing inner and outer conflicts of indigenous peoples who are pressured to set their customs aside and take up the ways of the colonizers. This vividly shows as a strong comment on the wider effects of colonialism on indigenous societies. Indeed, in this novel, Kire writes:

> *"In the shadow of the British presence, the village lay under a heavy blanket of foreign authority. The once proud traditions and ceremonies of the Naga people seemed to wither under the constant scrutiny and dismissal of the colonial rulers.*

The villagers were reduced to mere objects of curiosity, their rich cultural heritage overshadowed by the incessant demand to conform to alien values. The elders spoke in whispers of the days when their identity was untainted, but now, the younger generation faced a fractured self, caught between the old ways and the unrelenting push to assimilate into a world that refused to see them as equals." (Kire, 2014)

One feels that the fundamental point raised by Kire, much like Chinua Achebe, who famously wrote in his Things Fall Apart, "The white man is clever… he has put a knife on the things that hold us together and we have begun to fall apart," reverberates with the same themes of disintegration and cultural fragmentation. Like Achebe's characters, Kire's protagonists often dance on the thin line between the old world and the new in a universe where they are eyewitnesses to the disintegration of their communities as their people succumb to colonial rule.

In the stories of Kire, the village symbolizes the broader indigenous experience under colonialism. Once the heart of Naga culture and tradition, it becomes reduced to a curiosity as colonial influence pressures people to adopt foreign ways. Elders, the keepers of tradition, feel especially marginalized, while the younger generation struggles to forge a fractured identity between their ancestral past and imposed colonial future. Kire captured this poignantly in another excerpt:

"The once proud traditions and ceremonies of the Naga people seemed to wither under the constant scrutiny and dismissal of the colonial rulers. The villagers were reduced to mere objects of curiosity, their rich cultural heritage overshadowed by the incessant demand to conform to alien values." (Kire, 2014)

The way in which Easterine Kire narrates the social change that resulted due to colonial rule shows how traditional structures were unsettled and new lines of tension opened up within indigenous societies. Her narratives underline deeply the disruptions created by colonial forces, which caused the breaking of traditional customs and the rising of social discords. According to Kire:

"As the missionaries' voices grew louder in the village, the rhythms of our dances and the songs of our ancestors were drowned out. The old ways seemed like relics in a rapidly changing world, and the very fabric of our community was unraveling as we were pulled in different directions." (Kire, 2018)

Here, Kire underlines the fact that colonial forces have disturbed the social cohesiveness of the village and time-honored traditions. The colonial practices were intruding into the community and bringing in uncertainty and destabilization to a once harmonious community. Contrasted to this, Achebe's criticisms reflect the social upheaval caused by colonialism:

"The politicians were all the same: liars and cheats. They promised the people heaven on earth and delivered hell instead." (Achebe, 2016)

Achebe's dialogue underscores the sense of betrayal felt by indigenous peoples as they witness the erosion of their spiritual and cultural foundations in the face of colonial and modern influences. Kire and Achebe respectively represent deep social upheavals brought about by colonial rule, thus epitomizing how the challenge and change of traditional structures was brought about through foreign intervention and influence.

Violence and marginalization thus remain major themes running parallel in the novels of Easterine Kire. They unmask the systemic repression of people under the rule of the colonizers. Her narratives underline the deep impact of colonial violence and continuous struggles of people belonging to a stigmatized group for the assertion of their identity and the retrieval of history. For instance, Kire addresses the lasting impact of violence in her works.

This section emphasizes that trauma and marginalization are stuck forever in the indigenous people. The violence that colonial powers inflicted on them, combined with the internal cracks of their society, created an ever-continuing pattern of hurt reflected in every aspect of their life where big emotional and cultural scars remain. Further underpinning this collective impact of colonialism, Kire writes:

> *"As the elders recounted the tales of their past, the pain of violence and the sense of marginalization became evident. The stories spoke of a community that had been pushed to the edges of history, its people struggling to reclaim their place in a world that had sought to erase them. The village's collective memory was marked by the harsh realities of colonial rule and the enduring struggle for recognition and justice." (Kire, 2018)*

Here, Kire captures the struggle of indigenous communities in an attempt to retain their historical and cultural identity against erasure by colonial powers. Elders' stories reflect a broader narrative of resistance and resilience to show how these communities fight for a place and dignity in the world that has marginalized them so. On the other hand, Chinua Achebe—who explores colonial impacts in terms of violence and marginalization—investigates the general inference of this:

> *"The white man had brought not only religion but also civilization. His religion was Christianity and his civilization was European. The two were inseparable. When he said that he was building a school he meant he was building a church. The school was merely a bait to attract children into the church." (Achebe, 1958)*

This excerpt reveals the personal and societal impacts of colonial disruptions, where traditional power structures and domestic relationships are strained under the weight of external pressures and violence. Both Kire and Achebe use their narratives to expose the brutal realities of colonialism and its enduring effects on marginalized communities, highlighting the resilience and resistance of those who strive to reclaim their identities and histories amidst ongoing oppression.

Achebe's quote reflects a rejection of colonial impositions and a reaffirmation of traditional practices and beliefs. It underscores the resilience of indigenous cultures in maintaining their own systems of knowledge and spirituality, despite the disruptive influence of colonial forces. Both Kire and Achebe emphasize how cultural resilience manifests through active resistance and preservation of indigenous ways of life, asserting the validity and strength of their traditions in the face of external challenges.

> *"Our fathers and their fathers before them have lived on this earth and have not wanted white man's god. Nor do we want him. White man's god cannot help us to produce good yam and cocoyam crops. He cannot help us to hunt or to fight our enemies. He cannot even heal sick people. We have our own medicines and our own gods and spirits who help us." (Achebe, 1958)*

Kire illustrates how cultural practices, such as storytelling and ritual, become forms of resistance. These practices are not merely remnants of the past but vital components of the present, asserting the community's agency and continuity. By integrating traditional elements into their current lives, the indigenous people resist cultural erasure and maintain a sense of identity and unity.

> *"In the midst of the turmoil and change brought by the foreign presence, our people did not simply yield. They found ways to preserve what was essential. The songs of our ancestors, the stories told by the fireside, and the rituals performed under the sacred trees became acts of defiance. It was not just about holding on to the past but about weaving it into our present so that we remained whole." (Kire, 2011)*

Chinua Achebe combines the Igbo and English languages in his novels; he does this in "Things Fall Apart." With such a style, one is powerful at taking back the voice of Africa from the domination of colonial languages. By the infusion of Igbo proverbs, phrases, and cultural references, Achebe enriches his narrative not only but affirms the values of indigenous languages and views also. This system thus stands in marked contrast to the tendency of the colonial administration toward the suppression or at least backburner status of local languages, with a view to reinforcing the cultural and especially linguistic preeminence of the colonizers.

The excerpt epitomizes Achebe's critique of colonial disruption: "The white man is clever," Okonkwo said. "He has put a knife on the things that hold us together and we have fallen apart." Achebe uses a metaphor to explain what the impact of colonialism is: a knife that severs the ties which bind the Igbo community together. This imagery serves to greatly emphasize or illustrate the dissolution of traditional structures in society and cultural cohesion because of colonial intervention. Achebe describes pre-colonial Igbo society, then disruption by colonial forces, giving light to the deeply destructive effect that colonial rule had on indigenous cultures. His story gives evidence of the destructiveness of colonialism to indigenous cultures through the imposition of new power structures and values that lead to

the fracturing of traditional identities and social bonds. Such deconstruction has allowed Achebe to tease out the intricacies of the complex power and painful consequences of colonialism laid on African societies.

In A Naga Village Remembered, Easterine Kire portrays the Naga people's struggle to preserve their cultural identity amid modernization and globalization. The village symbolize collective memory and tradition, while modern influence challenge ancestral ways. The story tat indigenous identity is dynamic, highlighting the resilience and adaptability of the community as it balances respect for the past with the demands of the present.

Easterine Kire critiques how the so called development projects exploit and devastate indigenous land. She portrays trees being cut down, rivers polluted and natural resources destroyed- elements once central to community life and tradition. Through this, she highlights how economic progress often leads to environmental ruin and the erosion of cultural identity. Kire emphasizes that unchecked exploitation not only damage the land but also weakens the very foundation of indigenous existence and heritage.

> *"The trees that once formed the lush canopy over our village have been felled, leaving behind scars on the land. The rivers, once clear and teeming with life, have become murky with silt and refuse. The land, which nurtured our ancestors and their traditions, now bears the weight of relentless exploitation. Development projects promised progress but delivered only devastation. Our forests, our rivers, and our land are being destroyed in the name of progress, and with them, the very essence of our existence is fading away." (Kire, 20)*

Comparative Analysis: Easterine Kire vs. Chinua Achebe

While Easterine Kire and Chinua Achebe both consider how colonialism affected indigenous cultures in a profound way, they also explore the same fact within their individual and unique arenas, meaning the Naga people of Northeast India in Kire's case and the Igbo people of Nigeria in the case of Achebe. Founding their works on quite different geographical and cultural backgrounds, these two works dovetail into themes of imposition on culture, identity, and resistance.

How Kire Views Naga Identity and Intrusion of the Colonizer

Easterine Kire often focuses on the Naga experience under British colonial rule. In works like A Naga Village Remembered, she shows how colonial forces disrupted traditional life and weakened cultural heritage. The village becomes a symbol of resilience, surviving pressures of assimilation. Through the contrast between elders who remember a pure past and younger generations with fractured identities, Kire highlights the deep emotional and cultural impact of colonialism.

Kire highlights this very poignantly: "The villagers were reduced to mere objects of curiosity, their rich cultural heritage overshadowed by the incessant demand to conform

to alien values.” This very line epitomizes the experience of dehumanization of being seen as “other” under the colonial rule, one of the very important aspects in Kire’s engagement with the impact of colonialism.

Achebe’s Critique of Cultural Fragmentation

Chinua Achebe’s Things Fall Apart is about the collapse of the Igbo society because of British colocalisation and Christian missionaries. Achebe famously says in the book, ‘the white man is clever. he has put a knife on the things that hold us together and we have begun to fall apart,’ there being the sudden and dispensational effect of colonialism on Igbo community living. Whereas Kire’s Naga village primarily symbolizes the erosion of culture, in Achebe’s work, Igbo society is inherently shown to fracture as this foreign influence takes its stead on the people. In both works, the intrusion of new religious and social systems subverts the old order of life, thus creating an acute identity crisis for Achebe’s characters.

Narrative Techniques: Language and Symbols

Both rely on language and symbolism for representing the power of impact that colonization had. Achebe has used Igbo proverbs and phrases within his English-language novels to emphasize the worth of indigenous culture in a colonial framework. This reliance on a linguistic hybrid nature of the Art-and-life model challenges the dominance of the colonized language and affirms the richness of the African cultural expressions.

On the other hand, through symbolism within the physiognomy and cultural landscape of the Naga village, Kire enunciates the gradual erosion of tradition. The sacred trees and rituals of the village, which had once been at the center of Naga life, turn into fossils in the face of colonial and modern pressures. Her use of these symbols points out the close relationship between the land, culture, identity, and how colonialism will cut through these ties.

Postcolonial Reflections: Identity and Hybridity

Both works extend the critique to the postcolonial period, grappling with the difficulties of formulating identities and cultural hybridity in a world designed by colonial legacies. In his later writings, like Anthills of the Savannah, for instance, Achebe contemplates the problems presented by neocolonialism, since it remains a relic of colonial power that defines the structures of African societies. His characters find themselves drawn into contradictions that come with borrowed systems and are pulled towards self-governance that is authentic.

Kire’s later writings really fear the dilemma of maintaining Naga identity in the face of forces like modernity and globalization. She firmly argues that indigenous identity may not be static; it may constantly change within new challenges. This dynamic conception of culture reflects a broader postcolonial concern with how exactly marginalized communities navigate the legacies of colonialism while asserting their own agencies in a changing world.

Conclusion

This paper has interrogated the complex representations of cultural intersections within colonial and postcolonial literature, thematically ranging from identity, hybridization, resistance and cultural imposition. In essence, this research goes on to prove that through the examination of colonial narratives represented by Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart", and Easterine Kire's "A Naga Village Remembered" how colonial powers imposed and adapted cultures to their subjects often caused deep disruptions and conflicts. The novels of Easterine Kire, especially "A Naga Village Remembers", are in deep evocation of the experiences of the Naga people under British colonial rule.

It showcases how traditional values and cultural identities have been eroded in the work, along with the inner and outer challenges the Naga community faces in standing against any form of cultural imposition. Kire's utilization of the Naga village to represent the cultural resistance of people against dehumanizing effects of colonial rule brings into light the continuous efforts that indigenous people have always put in place to save their heritage from forced assimilation and modernization. On the other hand, "Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe represents a deep fragmentative moment within Igbo society that occurred as a result of British colonial and missionary influences.

However, the narratives of Kire, Achebe and Rushdie bring out the convolutions involved in cultural junctions, resistance and continuous reaching-out for cultural renewal within the strong legacies of colonialism. ■

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The Manipulation of Reality: Memory, History and Language in George Orwell's *1984*

Reena Chatterjee

George Orwell's masterpiece creation *1984* is considered a dystopian novel that manifests the manipulation of memory, history and psychology by utilising the tools of language, fear and propaganda. This paper explores how the ruling party in Oceania exercises total control over its citizens by manipulating their perceptions of reality, suppressing individual freedom, rewriting history and by establishing dominance over language or by hegemonic language. Through a critical analysis of this novel, this study lays emphasis on the ways in which totalitarian regime uses fear, propaganda and psychological manipulation to maintain their power and control over individuals. The paper also examines the relevance of Orwell's '1984' in the contemporary society advocating the dangers of government control, censorship and manipulation of information. In his novel Orwell has used an appropriate term 'Big Brother is Watching'. This phrase justifies the authoritarian and arbitrary rule and policy of any government. This novel is considered Orwell's future prediction wherein he expresses the apprehension of future threat.

Keywords: Totalitarianism, Manipulation, Propaganda, Dystopia, Surveillance, Censorship, Control, Fear, Arbitrary, Authoritarianism.

Introduction:

Time and space are the Twin pillars or components that shape the creation of literature imbibing the author's works with depth and form. An author is profoundly associated to his contemporary age. The problems that exist during that period become the remarkable points of his writing who aims at the depiction of socio-political, economic changes during his time in his creation. Orwell's literary journey commenced from 1933 and his literature is regarded as the milestone which witnessed the great changes during variegated socio-political upheaval. Moreover his creations endeavour to awake and alert people to the future apprehensions.

A writer maybe dogmatic, extortive and impersonal but, he cannot ignore or deny the socio-political, cultural, historical and economic factors which capture the writer's imagination and appeal him to manifest the writer's emotion, sentiment and sensibility that

is profoundly moulded by his birth, his education, his environment and even his economic struggles. Similarly, the political, economic and social conditions of the age of Orwell left their mark on his psyche and shaped his world-view. The socio-political questions of his contemporary period on which Orwell brooded deeply, laid emphasis on his cultural values. Being a liberal humanitarian, he depicted his variegated experiences in his masterpiece works through his ever-widening channels, thoughts and actions. His experience of dire poverty in Paris and London, totalitarian rule in Spain, imperialism in Burma gave him ample sources for thought to contemplate over the great socio-political and economic problems of the age.

George Orwell was born at Motihari in Bihar on June 25, 1903. He was baptized as Eric Hue Blair. Some miserable happenings of his childhood left an indelible mark in his personality. The isolation that Orwell felt in his early stage of life shaped him as a distinguished author and made him a sensitive and sensible individual. The sense of fragmentation and alienation is very common to Orwell's protagonists. They are Flory, Comstock, Bowling and Winston Smith from his different novels. The Orwellian man is always a solitary- a member of society which is uncongenial to him, standing out alone.

George Orwell referred to the tormenting experience of his childhood. The account of his preparatory school was bitter enough that created the twin feelings of resentment and hatred against institutional despotism. Critics like Anthony West and Jeffrey Meyers tried to make psychological deficiencies of Orwell's argument and suggested and associated between Winston's experience in *1984* and Orwell's experience at Crossgates. The system at Crossgates has been depicted as authoritarian and the system in '1984' has been presented as totalitarianism and Orwell was fully aware of the distinction between the two systems.

The authoritarian system at Cossgates made him aware of an ugly social reality; was class distinction. The education system in England only fostered class consciousness in the aristocratic class and middle class. Orwell delved deep into various faces of the society and depicted its discrepancies or social anomalies. The aim of a satirist is not merely to present any kind of weakness, evil or drawback but also to attack, discard and comment on them. A satirist enlightens his readers. Orwell, through his creations not only made scathing attacks over those tendencies, rules, policies, practices and politics but also presented the difference between reality and appearance conspicuously. Being a visionary and sensitive author, he was intensely appalled on confronting the real world order.

Text Discussion:

The third decade of the twentieth century is marked as the age of variegated socio-political tendencies which left profound mark in the English society. As an author and humanitarian George Orwell was committed to the betterment and improvement of the society from every sphere to create a harmonious and inclusive social climate by their resistance from certain political systems.

Several distinguished writers of his contemporary period were aware of the dreadful changes of life that were responsible for widening the ditch among different social classes. Among them Galsworthy depicted the exploitation of the workers and labourers by the capitalists. In his dramas like *Justice*, *Strive* and *The Silver Box*, he presented the bourgeois tendency of the capitalists and industrialists and their practices and policies which created the problems and imbalances in society. E. M. Foster in his masterpiece work *Passage to India* also tried to highlight the importance of social relationships in a society among different races with contradicting views and opinions.

George Orwell pin-points the motive-springs of inspiration of the back-office work. One of his thought-provoking work, Orwell manifests that the writer's predicament arises from his unwillingness to sacrifice his intellectual liberty and integrity despite social pressures that infringe on his thought process. His heart is maimed to see the idea of intellectual Liberty is under attack for two directions. He manifests that in the totalitarian system, we find the immediate practical enemies, monopoly and bureaucracy. Any writer or journalist finds himself thwarted by the general drift of the society rather than by active persecution.

Orwell highlights a distinct motive force of creative writings of the writer's office age that emerged and was driven by a compelling vision and their works revealed a profound purpose. Orwell stood apart from the writers of his age for he was always able to assert his identity as a writer. He was one of those novelists who maintained his integrity and fearlessness despite the political pressure. In his first novel, *Burmese Days*, he depicted the Burmese environment- the Burmese scenery and setting. It has a well-rounded narrative in which plot determines a significant role. Orwell's political novel *Animal Farm* is an allegorical novel uses farm to satirise the Russian Revolution and the subsequent Soviet Regime which highlights the themes of corruption and power. And his last novel *1984* is regarded a book of prediction and a dystopian novel which depicts a state where individual freedom is subjugated and memory, view and thoughts are controlled by corrupt and brute politicians.

In *Animal Farm* George Orwell presents the narrative of destructive sort of socialism artistically by blending satire with animal fable. Orwell foresaw the nexus of Nazism with Bolshevism and was afraid of such a kind of confluence would create a destruction. His predictions were proved true in Stalinistic Russia where all the principles that culminated in Socialist Revolution were trampled underfoot by the totalitarian rulers. It is also regarded an anti-utopian and significantly distinct in treatment from the anti-utopias of Aldous Huxley and H.G.Wells.

His Worldly acclaimed novel *1984* is regarded a seminal work of science fiction that depicts a horrible totalitarian future society where the government would exercise total control over its citizens. The novel is a powerful warning about the dangers of government manipulation, censorship and control over capturing all the Institutions including education Institution and all public properties those confirm and reflect the human rights of equality,

secularism and freedom. The foundation of these institutions also manifests the ideas of democracy.

The novel reflects Orwell's experiences of living alone and working with ordinary poor people. Orwell has always been a critical of the hatred and injustice between the Spanish government and the communists. He took part in the Spanish civil war, and deeply outraged against the inhuman tendencies of the dictatorial and brute ruling class. This prophetic novel vividly demonstrates the totalitarian society of a city called Oceania. The dictatorships of totalitarian leaders like Joseph Stalin in Soviet Union and Hitler in Germany was heart wrenching for Orwell and he was compelled to depict this poignant condition of those countries in his novel *1984*. The Big Brother is of symbolic figure and a significant leader of this totalitarian regime. The novel underlines three social classes: The ruling class, the middle class and the working class. In the novel, the Inner Party is associated to the ruling or upper class, the Outer Party, working for different ministries represents the middle class, the Proles represents labourer or working class.

The story follows Winston Smith, a low-ranking member of the ruling party who works in the Ministry of Truth, falsifying historical records to confirm the party's ideology. As Winston becomes increasingly disillusioned with the party's oppressive regime, he loves his fellow worker Julia and starts to rebel against the party. However, their rebellion is eventually disclosed by the Thought Police and Winston is captured and subjected to acute physical, mental and psychological torture and persecution. Winston's rebellion against the party is driven by his desire for individual freedom and autonomy, while the party's ideology emphasises the significance of the confirmatory and obedience. Working as an editor in the Ministry of Truth formed by the government, he does not like such a system of government because government is trying to manipulate the reality of history and making their civilians forgetting the real incidents. He realizes this when one of his tasks is presented with the manipulation. Workers at the Ministry of Truth profoundly organise all the documents such as is newspapers, books etc. daily with the purpose of the state's interest to control the information and its power. The Ministry of Truth is a symbol of the party's control over information and history. The ministry's task was to 'rectify' historical records to confirm to the party's ideology effectively and erasing any dissenting voices or alternative narratives. As Winston Smith underlines "Every record has been destroyed or finished, every book is rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every stature and street, building are renamed, different scholars have their distinct, every date has been altered." (George Orwell, p.37).

This statement of Winston illustrates the extent to which the party is willing to control the narrative of history and memory.

O' Brian who adheres all the policies made by the authorities of the party and holds all power to run the totalitarian system of the government explains that, what is most important to the party is just the total control over everything and nothing more than power.

Winston feels oppressed by all the means that the party uses to subjugate its citizens so that it can manage to achieve its goals.'

The abuse of language and control over media has clearly been exhibited in this novel. Modern political speech has a lot in common. The dark, propagandistic, sarcastic, hypocritical and euphemistic language has been a constant focus of our modern political leaders. While, the media is awfully under the total control of the party, Winston's own memories are constantly at odds because of the control of the party in the term of the changing of history. It leads Winston to the sense of disorientation and doubt. Winston states "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two equals four. If that is granted, all else follows." (G.O., p. 69).

It highlights the significance of individual memory and experience in resisting the mutilation of truths.

'O Brian describes to Winston that they are regulating life at all its rates by controlling every source of information and by managing and rewriting the content of all its histories for its own end.' He explains :

"You think there is something called human nature that will be agreed by what we are doing and turning against us. But it's human nature that we make. He states 'Humanity', outside are the others; irrelevant." (G.O., p.67)

"The party doesn't permit individuals to keep records of their past. Information is distorted encroached and controlled in some way by an overarching power source to set their own perspectives permanently in the memory and psyche of individuals. These activities of the party crippled the mind of people and Winston finds all the important documents damaged or even not one is left. He crumpled up the original message and any note that he himself had made and dropped them into the memory hole to be devoured by the flames." (G.O., p. 71).

In this way, in our contemporary political arena, past is getting changed day by day; every moment. This process of continuous and endless modification is done not only through journals but also through periodicals, books, magazines, films, leaflets, pamphlets, posters, sound tracks, photographs, kids shows, cartoons etc. Apart from that, opposition leaders and their thoughts are presented ridiculously and sarcastically by creating their memes with the help of technical tools and is presented through the help of social media. They also create a sort of literature or document which would possibly depict a particular political or ideological significance. Similarly, Ministry of Truth endeavours to form the individual's world view without any fact to associate the government's interest. In order to ensure their post, position and politics, they use the power to control the mind, psychology and past of their citizens.

The slogan of the party was "Who controls the past, controls the future; who controls the present controls the past." (G.O., p.34) This slogan highlights the significance of

controlling history and memory in shaping the narrative of the party's power. It manifests the party's perpetual attempt to regulate history. The party here disseminates the concept that any state with its unlimited power of control has the authority to regulate all the phases of time past, present and future. The party always projects the defence mechanism by generating illusions, by spreading its narrow ideology and by dividing people in the name of race, religion, cast and creed for its own immortality. It presents its opposition's existence meaningless, thoughtless and its main leaders brainless, frail and weak. The party controls everything; it has the power and all power is supposed to control the family, individual, sex, thoughts, emotions, feelings and history. Winston's feeling of fear from the party, the thought police and room number 101 create nightmare to him. It makes Winston an isolated, helpless and powerless person. Therefore, Winston is compelled to follow the party's plan and policy.

Syme (a minor but significant character who works with smith) is a philologist. He is a key figure in the creation of the 11th edition of the Newspeak Dictionary, a project to eliminate all the desirable words and concepts from the English language and from the minds of the citizens. Syme is an intelligent and true believer in the party and its ideology, but he is out spoken and clear sided. In his long conversation, he talks to Smith:

"The proles being are not human being.... by 2050- earlier,.... all real knowledge of Oldspeak will have disappeared. The whole literature of the past will have been destroyed.... Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron- they'll exist only Newspeak version.... actually changed into something contradictory of what they used to be.... Literature of the party will change. Even the slogans will change. How could you have a slogan like 'freedom is slavery' when the concept of freedom has been abolished? The whole climate of thought will be different... there will be no thought.... orthodoxy means no thinking- not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconscious." (G.O., p. 53)

This statement reveals the idea of the party's manipulation of language and its mechanism to control thought and to incorporate the fake idea of freedom, knowledge and peace. Winston is deeply concerned about the threat to Syme's life. He states: "Syme will be vaporised. He is too intelligent. He is too clear and speaks too plainly. The party does not like such people. One day he will disappear. It is written in his face." (G.O., p. 53)

George Orwell has also mentioned the chronology of thoughts and ideas that have been changing since the time of civilization. He has emphasised how the meaning of revolution for justice and equality has remarkably been twisting under the banner of equality and trying to establish a fresh tyranny as soon as the old one was overthrown. So, hear he manifests how power regulates through language and thoughts. It shapes our understanding of the world and impacts our social norms and Institution

George Orwell, through the conversation between Winston and Julia reveals another future threat i.e. 'Double think' projected by the government of the particular party. Double think means the power of holding two contradictory believes in one's mind and accepting both of them. Winston here explains: Doublethink lies at the very heart of INGSOC, since

the essential act of the party is to hold simultaneously two opinion which cancel out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing to both of them. (G.O., p.250) This statement presents the ways in which the party uses double thing to control individual thoughts, memories and beliefs.

Foucault (a distinguished French philosopher and renowned social political cultural and literary theorist) has also introduced a conceptual idea of 'Panopticism' in the late 19th century where a surveillance policy had been presented. Foucault is prominent as he challenges conventional knowledge and demonstrates how modernisation is a threat for unlimited power to search, seize and detain without warrant. It can impose restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of the press, uses of the internet, television programming and so on. It is similar to Oceanian law to some extent that Orwell has depicted in this novel. Orwell had mentioned how the modern form of monitoring and controlling is being exercised by several political tools and devices and the symbolic characters. In this novel Orwell has used the term 'Big Brother Watching' that mirrors the Oceanian capitalist society. We get the identity of this symbolic character in the conversation between Julia and Winston Smith. He introduces Big Brother in this way "Big Brother is infallible and all powerful. Every success, every achievement, every victory, every scientific discovery, all knowledge, all wisdom, all happiness, all virtue, are held to issue directly from his leadership and inspiration. Nobody has ever seen Big Brother. He is the face on the hoardings, a voice on the tele-screen. His function is to act as a focusing point for love, fear, reference and emotions which are more easily felt towards an individual than organization." (G.O., p.27)

As we can say, Big Brother is the face of INGSOC, the ruling party of Oceania. He is the leader of the nation and the head of the party. Throughout the plot of this novel, his existence is constantly in doubt. Consequently, it denotes the metaphorical figure of machinery, tools, devices and mechanism of defence through which the party determines its existence controls entire institutions and systems.

Big Brother, a fictional character created by George Orwell, has now become true. We firmly regard that it was his prediction about future political system. Contemporary political system is entirely based on this idea. This practice is very common across the world where we have the authoritarian or utilitarian government. George Orwell has used this to represent some abstract ideas or concepts. Now, it has become an iconic symbol of the 20th or 21st century. Big Brother is one of the most prolific symbols ever created by George Orwell which also symbolises the power of the ruling party. This is the role of Big Brother in Oceania to create among the citizens both love and fear so as to complete an utter surrender to the party ideology. The main party slogans: War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength. This dichotomy of ideas shows the duality, duplicity of the party's thought and predicament. Ultimately, it is comprehended that Big Brother is the symbol of the party's power not for the sake of the good, but power for its own sake; to control. It is the brutal, ruthless and terrifying idea of the authoritarian practice that George Orwell has depicted through the character of Big Brother.

Another grave problem that Orwell has depicted in this novel, is the class differences in Oceania. The ruling party and its supporters have more authority to suppress people physically and mentally under the party's rule where People are compelled to follow to the authority. In this novel, Orwell has mentioned three classes which are controlled by the Inner party. This Totalitarian rule controls the entire means of productions. Moreover, it promotes the capitalists and industrialists and is governed by them. In this novel the protagonist elaborates:

"The capitalists owned everything in the world, and everyone else was their slave. They owned the land, all the houses, all the factories and all the money. If anyone disobeyed them, they could take his job away and starve death.... the chief of all the capitalists was called the king, and....."(G.O., p.72)

The end of this statement has a hyphen (-). This shows the ultimate power of ruling party; capitalists, industrialists and authoritarian tendency of capturing and occupying other's rights. This technique has been applied by Orwell to present the tendency of modern feudalism. George Orwell, in this novel through the character of Winston Smith reveals:

"There was also something called the 'Jus Primae Noctis', which would probably not be mentioned in a textbook for children. It was the law by which every capitalist had the right to sleep with any woman working in one of his factories." (G.O., p.73) This Latin term denotes 'Right of the First Night's. In historical context, particularly in the medieval feudalism, it was the legal right or authority or customary to the feudal Lords to have sexual relations with the brides of their vassals on their wedding night.

Now, in this modern society, the same practice is in trend in a new form. The lower-class people are forced to submit themselves to the ruling party's power and control. Through these lines, George Orwell has pointed out the class discrimination that can be vividly comprehended through the reference to the Marxist ideology. In Marxism and Literary Criticism, Eagleton evaluates Marxist literature as a whole that underlines only loss and profit as the foremost driving force of society. The society which is completely occupied by the totalitarian tendency and mentality

Conclusion:

To conclude, after discussing all the aspects and scenarios depicted and disseminated in *1984*, we can comprehend the harsh realities of modern society where a man has become an object. We can only hope for the betterment; a society full of happiness, harmony, peace, equality and Justice against all kinds of objectifying tendencies of unjust, unlawful, oppressive and arbitrary rule by resisting courage, confidence, sensibility and efforts. George Orwell through this insightful creation, gives a warning to the people of the world about the future dangers created by the totalitarian government who would be using all the means of science and technology to control the socio-political system and would capture all the democratic institutions. Orwell's last ray of hope remains in the collective and inclusive

strength of the suppressed. Though he points out the Inner party's immoral practices like prostitution, drug addiction, fake news and propaganda, there is some hope of the resurgence of the victims like proletariat class if, they realize the importance of a united revolt. Orwell depicted the totalitarian society where the spirit of man was denatured and diminished by manipulating the memory and emotion with the help of technological autocracy that created dystopian society. Orwell is concerned about the future society where cultural values would be thrown into the wind and rulers won't have moral consciousness. Orwell's faith in the proletariat, their decency and their love for common sense would redeem it from the depths of gloominess. In this way, we can say Orwell lived a celebrated life of action. He was a man of deeds. He didn't compromise his ethical values both in public and personal life on the matters pertaining to society, politics and culture. He was committed towards his duty for the betterment and improvement of society. He is admired for his integrity, decency and honesty. He is still remembered for his vociferous voice that he raised against the totalitarian rule which snatched the rights of people and which enslaved them mentally, physically, psychologically, economically, culturally and politically. ■

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Ecocentrism, Adi Folklore, and Identity: Ecological Sustainability in Selected Poems from Mamang Dai's *The White Shirts of Summer*

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Ecocentrism as a principle prioritizes ecocentric life rather than the anthropocentric or human-centric ideology. This perspective, where the environment is given a central point, is a way to achieve a sustainable future in this time of urbanization, industrialization, and modernization. The Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh, like the other tribal communities in Northeast India, maintains a profound connection with nature and resources integral to their daily life and culture. Orality constitutes a significant element of the Adi tradition. The Adi folklore, encompassing folk songs, folk tales, riddles, proverbs, folk dances, etc., represents their connection with their roots and ancestral value system. Their folklore also emphasizes their ecocentric life and culture, showing how their distinct identity is shaped by their relationship with nature. Preserving their culture and value system necessitates the retelling and incorporation of Adi folklore into literature for the benefit of the current generation and their future. This paper is a critical study of Adi folklore, as retold or integrated in Mamang Dai's selected poetry in *The White Shirts of Summer*, to comprehend tribal ecocentrism concerning the Adi community of Arunachal Pradesh. This paper also intends to examine how the distinct traditional identity of the Adi community is rooted in nature through the analysis of their folklore in selected poetry by Dai. This study also seeks to understand how the ecocentric life and culture of the Adi community, as reflected in their folklore, are essential for our society's sustainable future.

Keywords: Ecocentrism, Adi Community, Folklore, Northeast, Tribal Identity, Sustainable Future.

During the time of urbanization and industrialization, the ecological crisis shows up in many ways, such as ecocide, anthropogenic crises, deforestation, and resource depletion. The term "ecocentrism" comes from the Greek words *oikos* ("house") and *kentron* ("center"). It emphasizes an ecocentric value system rather than anthropocentric or human-centric ideology.Gray, Whyte, and Curry define, "Ecocentrism sees the ecosphere—comprising all Earth's ecosystems, atmosphere, water, and land—as the matrix which birthed all life and as life's sole source of sustenance … Ecocentrism thus contrasts sharply with anthropocentrism, the paradigm that currently dominates human activities, including our

response to ecological crises such as the sixth mass extinction"[1] (130). Ecologist Aldo Leopold used the phrase, "The Land Ethic," to denote this ecocentric value system in 1949: "The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals … A land ethic, of course, cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these 'resources,' but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state" (203-204). Arne Naess used the term, "Deep Ecology" to imply that, the welfare of the planet's non-human entities is just as important as human welfare. According to him, "The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value) … Richness and diversity of life-forms contribute to the relation of these values and are also values in themselves. Human beings have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs" (4).

This paper, utilizing close reading methodology, intends to critically examine the selected Adi folklore, rewritten or incorporated in poetry by Mamang Dai, an Adi poet, to understand how much tribal traditional ways of life, practices, customs, and knowledge systems are integral to this value system of ecocentrism. This study examines selected Adi folklore in literature to investigate the ecocentric culture of the Adi communities and the foundation of their unique tribal identity within this ecocentric value system. This endeavour seeks to assess the sustainable relationship between tribes and nature, as well as how this relationship serves as a genuine pathway towards a healthier, greener future for the universe.

We can learn much from the indigenous or tribal cultures—"the fundamentals of living with one another and with Earth in ways that are relation-based rather than consumption-based, responsibility-based rather than right-based" (Rowe). Krystyna Swiderska writes, "Western economics is not only destroying the environment. It is also destroying Indigenous peoples' holistic development models that ensure balance with nature and provide alternative paradigms for sustainable development."

Tribal communities have a harmonious relationship with nature, as it is an important part of their daily lives, culture, food habits, economy, traditions, festivals, and other facets of their value system. This correlation between indigenous peoples and natural resources, such as forests, rivers, and mountains, is essential for keeping their cultural heritage and tribal identity alive. Northeast India is home to various tribal communities who live harmoniously with nature and its resources, adhering to their traditional lifestyles and cultures. The ecocentric lifestyles and knowledge systems of these communities are truly inspiring for the world as it confronts natural devastation and ecological degradation during this era of urbanization, industrialization, and modernization. Arunachal Pradesh, one state among the eight states of Northeast India, is known for its natural beauty and cultural distinctiveness. This land is home to diverse indigenous tribal communities like Adi, Nyishi, Mishmi, Galo, and Monpa. These communities have their traditions and cultures, yet all are grounded in their ancestral value systems and ecocentric lifestyles. This lets them proudly

embrace their tribal identity and solidarity. My paper examines the Adi community to analyze how their diverse folklore in Mamang Dai's poetry embodies their ecocentric lifestyle and identity, illustrating a sustainable coexistence with nature.

"In literary terms, Adi means people of the hills" (Mibang vii). C. Dunbar describes the Adi territory as a vastly populated region featuring "thickly wooded mountains, their sides as steep as the roof or the walls of a house," alongside "the most torrential rainfall" in the world and "one of the greatest rivers in Asia" (230-231). This description vivifies how the Adi life is intimately related with nature. Elwin rightly characterizes the Adi land as "one of the most fascinating and exciting parts of North-Eastern Frontier Agency; the scenery, when it is not hidden by cloud and rain, is superb… it is a country of song and dance…" (*A Philosophy for NEFA*20). The Adi community is also much akin to their folk culture and storytelling. Pandey states that the Adis are "the most gay of the Arunachal tribes," and "they make merriments at various important periods of cultivation, harvest, and other religious festivals" (1). Their folklore pertains to every aspect of their existence, including joy, agriculture, harvesting, festivals, and rituals. Koley points out "the Adis are primarily nature worshippers and believers of magico-religious faiths" (20). Their folklore well reflects these aspects of the Adi community. "In Adi society, folklore includes numerous folk tales, folk songs, folk dances, jokes, proverbs, etc. Folk tales (Batung) of Adis are mines of indigenous wisdom, which may be considered valuable wealth of Adi oral literature" (106).

Folklore constitutes the traditional knowledge and beliefs of a culture, disseminated among a specific group of individuals. William John Thoms, an English antiquary, coined the term "folklore" in 1846 to replace "popular antiquities." It is passed down from one generation to another or from one area to another through demonstrations or oral instructions. In *African Literature: An Introduction*, Oyekan Owomoyela emphasizes that "there is hardly any phase of tradition and life that is not affected or regulated by some aspect of the folklore," as it serves as the conduit through which "the behavioural values of the community," along with the accumulated wisdom and technologies of past eras, are transmitted to the current generation and safeguarded for future generations (1). In Adi society, the current generation of children, drawn to film music and external cultures, is departing from their "essential social and traditional lifestyles" (Koley 107). It is imperative to address the endangered status of tribal folklore and to implement initiatives aimed at preserving and disseminating it among the younger generation to enhance their awareness of their heritage and identity. According to Koley, "the whole process of preserving and promoting folk literature should be augmented," and the hope is that the Adi people are now aware of the importance of documenting their wealth (107-108).

Mamang Dai, an Adi, is a well-known writer from Arunachal Pradesh. Through her poetry and novels, she intends to revitalize the lost glory of their culture and the rootedness of her community. Her recounting of the oral epic narratives and tales pertinent to their belief system and distinct identity is essential for preserving ancestral customs and lifestyle, as well as for enlightening the current generation about their heritage amidst urbanization,

modernity, and globalization. In her folklore, "Finding the way," from her collection of poetry, *The White Shirts of Summer*, she emphasizes the importance of orality in defining their tribal identity and the relation between their folk culture and nature. This lore is based on the Adi epic narrative, highlighting the significance of words to their community as speech to help people to convey the meaning of their life and culture, as they had no written script: "We ate the words. / We were hungry. / We ate the words" (Dai, *The White Shirts of Summer*61). According to the Adi belief, an elderly man owned the history of his tribe inscribed on deerskin, which was subsequently incinerated, leading him to consume it. In an alternate narrative, a deer residing in the mountains observed the progeny of a mythical ancestor inscribing the chronicles of the world on a fragment of liver. The deer approached them with a proposition: they might inscribe messages on his skin, and he would return them whenever required. During a hunt, the men inadvertently killed the deer and consumed it. (Dai, "Finding the way" *Poetry at Sangam*)

The Adi folklore is not only a part of their culture; it revitalizes their identity as a tribal community with their values. This lore, "Finding the way" explores the traditional ways of the Adi community, referring to the value of their ancestors, rituals, and battles to find out their roots and culture, and their sense of solidarity: "In the cave of our ancestors / we drank the wine of ritual, / sprinkled blood on the ground" (Dai, *The White Shirts of Summer* 61). This lore of Dai also suggests that, their relations with nature, rain, snow, sunrise, and sunset are unavoidable and their myths are entangled with them. Nature is also a being to the Adi community. This lore calls the present generation of her community to their hunting tradition and to "sing for the river flowing east" (61). "The river has a soul," as Dai mentions in her poem, "Small Towns and the River" (102). Following the ways of their ancestors and to be rooted, the Adis followed "the wild way," and they should continue the same path to live with their dignity and identity together with "the wind and waters, the flying sky, and the stag on the horizon dancing among the stars" (61). The moments of their life are inscribed upon the earth and sky, where a sun seed embodies resilience and the intricate connection between life and land. The beauty of their land and culture is obvious in Dai's words: "The letters to earth and sky / written in the outline of the hills" (62). The strength and fragrance of nature symbolize the significance of growth and existence, emphasizing the nurturing of the earth—corn, mud, and the elemental cycle remain vital, offering breath and fervour in the quietude of hills and the fierce expanse of skies. This lore, "Finding the way" is truly a way to reach their roots for the present generation and will be for the future. Dai, through this folklore, fulfills her responsibility as an Adi to safeguard their culture and inspires all to do the same. This lore, which reflects their ecocentric lifestyle and culture, serves as an inspiration for society on how to coexist with nature for a sustainable future.

> Communities living historically in the proximity of these natural ecosystems, over a period of time, develop specific knowledge on the ecosystem and environmental resources that are later called as traditional knowledge or traditional ecological

> knowledge (TEK). TEK has been practiced since the ancient hunter-gatherer cultures; however, the term TEK as such was brought into extensive use in the 1980s. At present, it denotes an integrated relationship between humans and ecosystems … (Kala)

Dai's folklore indicates that, the closeness between humans and nature underscores the importance of coexisting with nature in all facets of life for a sustainable future. In fact, tribal ecological knowledge is a road map for a healthy future. Dai's other folklore from the same collection, "The hour of freedom", also points out the significance of words and the oral history of their culture, highlighting the importance of natural resources in their existence and value system. She states that "The word, when it was first uttered, meant everything" (63). The word meant their traditional value system, their ecocentric life and culture. That word—their folk culture, their orality, their folk songs and tales—is like "A spark fanned by the wing of sky / breaking the shape of silence / into a heartbeat, song, hope" (63). This word was their strength to demand their freedom, "to want what we want" (63). Their native soil, this earth, is their hope. They think their land is their identity, their voice to reach their freedom, their dignity and tribal solidarity. When the Adis feel sorry, then their land inspires them with a hope, a new spirit:

> The land speaks to us when we are grieving:
> Past present future, the holy bundle of three.
> Earth sky water.
> I will restore the life of your failing pulse,
> hold your hand, and teach you to bear grief. (63)

This shows how closely the Adis are related to their homeland and nature. They can feel and believe in the power of their land. They think their past, present, and future are connected with earth, sky, and water, three elements of nature to embody a human body. The land, along with other elements of nature, will revive the vitality of their faltering pulse, guide them, and instruct them on how to endure sorrow. For the Adis, nature represents a restorative force and their aspiration for liberation. Gray, Whyte, and Curry assert that ecocentrism motivates individuals to live harmoniously with all elements of nature, including its ecosystem, atmosphere, land, water, and other resources essential for sustenance. Adis' coexistence with nature and their love for their land point out their knowledge of understanding and maintaining ecological order, biodiversity, and sustainable resources.

> Tribal knowledge often contributes to the maintenance of ecological balance, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable resource management … Tribal communities possess traditional practices and knowledge that enhance their resilience to climate change impacts … Integrating tribal perspectives into mainstream development initiatives ensures a holistic and balanced approach to sustainability. (Kumar 341)

Dai's folklore, "The coming of death,"[2] is a poignant reflection of the Adi belief of death not as an end but rather as the beginning of a spiritual life, with the living and the dead engaging in a never-ending relationship with the spiritual realm. This folklore is based on the Adi epic narratives of oral tales: Initially, humans were immortal. The esteemed progenitor Abo Tani, during his travels, came and saw birds and animals lamenting at the graves of their deceased. The sounds of mourning captivated him. In certain narratives, Abo Tani was willing to acquire knowledge of funeral procedures in return for rice beer. (Dai, "The coming of death" *Poetry at Sangam*)

In the folklore "The coming of death", the imagery of salt mixed with earth symbolizes the bittersweet nature of death, drawing a connection to the natural world—the hornet grieving for her offspring and a bird lamenting the destruction of her nest after a storm:

> This salt was given
> with a handful of earth from a hornet
> weeping over the grave of her children,
> mixed with the sweet song of a bird
> weeping after a storm broke her nest. (Dai, *The White Shirts of Summer* 60)

The Adis are known for their hospitality, their emotions, and their kind-heartedness: "Our hearts were never made of stone" (60). Like their land and nature, they are full of feeling for kinship and social solidarity. The act of grieving is a profound expression of their love, manifesting as an outpouring onto the beautiful, undulating landscape—a metaphor for life and the earth:

> This must be the path of tears
> saying what cannot be told,
> Pouring our love on a land
> lying so beautiful in drapes and folds
> offering love, sleep, rest. (60)

Whether life or death, the intimacy of the Adis with nature in every aspect of their life in a meaningful way shows their ecocentric life and culture, as they are very conscious about the fact that their tribal identity is based on their rootedness and ancestral value systems in which nature is correlated. The Adis are acutely aware of their surrounding forests, rivers, and mountains, and they consistently tend to them, as they are integral to both their daily existence and their cultural practices. Leopold suggests a community should include all the resources of nature, including "soils, waters, plants, and animals" within their boundary as "a land ethic" and affirm "their right to continued existence" (203-204). The Adis regard all resources as integral components of their existence and culture, holding them in equal importance to life itself.

In her poem, "Innocent Danger,"[3] based on a known "Arunachal folklore about snakes and man", also indicates the human and nonhuman relationship in the belief system

and life of the Adis. There are different folktales related to snakes in the Adi society. One of these Adi folktales describes how the snakes lost their beads after their encounter with man and became the enemies of people:

A Wiyu resided in a rain-soaked village with his two serpent sons, Bunja and Bidak, subsequently acquiring a tiger and a bear. The bear, deployed for veggies, remained in the forest, whereas the tiger, assigned to procure meat, resorted to stealing livestock from a nearby Abing-Nibo's village and subsequently faced retribution from its residents. In vengeance for their brother's assault, the snakes assaulted the villagers but were apprehended. The Wiyus opted to penalize the snakes by extracting their fangs, and in compensation, to take their beads. This led to the emergence of venomous snakes. Bunja and Bidak have since been devoid of venom and flee upon encountering a man, whilst the other snakes continue to assault humans in retaliation for the beads they lost. ("Tribal folktales from Arunachal Pradesh")

The poem retells such a tale related to the encounter between snakes and man and the loss of their beads. The wearing beads is an important cultural practice of the Adis. The lines in the poem, "Once upon a time we wore beads", "we were deprived of our beads", and "Elder brother lost his fangs" convey this encounter and the loss of beads of the snakes. Despite the fact that some snakes are poisonous, the poem's title "Innocent Danger" conveys the Adi people's affection for snakes and their recognition of their significance to our ecosystem. Rom Whitaker is a devoted lover of snakes and crocodiles. In his interview, he points out that, snakes are an important part of our ecosystem, and we should be careful not to be bitten by snakes instead of killing them after being bitten. Mamang Dai, also through this poem, retelling the folktale and connecting it with Whitaker, conveys this message that we should be careful of our ecosystem. Arne Naess highlights the intrinsic value of the harmonious living of the human and nonhuman entities. The Adi life and culture show this as a way of life for sustenance.

In her poem "Stay with the Song" Dai implores her community, particularly the current generation, to embrace their folk songs that reflect their heritage and values, fostering a sense of solidarity and kinship. The poem is derived from an Adi mythological narrative concerning a dove that once cohabited with the sun.[4] The dove transported her offspring as the sun traversed the sky. One day, the carrying strap dropped to the ground. The dove descended to retrieve it but was unable to ascend back to heaven. The Adis believe that the dove mourns due to this loss. The poem also reflects this tragic heart of the dove: "The afternoon belongs to the dove / weeping for her fall from heaven" (90). This poem exemplifies Adi ecocentrism, highlighting their connection to myth, the bird, and their emotional resonance with the bird's tragedy. In her poem "Sun" Dai refers to the Adi belief in Donyi-Polo:

> The Adis of the Siang Valley, for example, visualize their life on earth as surrounded by a great company of good and evil spirits, above whom rises the majestic figure of the Sun-Moon, Doini-Pollo. Doini-Pollo is not indeed the Creator or the Prime

> Mover of creation … Doini-Pollo emerged rather late in the scheme of things, and his origin was not altogether dignified: there were at first two Suns, of an unbearable brightness, but the Frog shot at one of them with his arrow and reduced its radiance to the cool and gentle light of the Moon. The Sun-Moon was created after the Wivus and, according to some traditions, later even than mankind. (Elwin, *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India* 31)

In this poem, Dai celebrates the significance of the Sun in their life and value system. She writes that the sun helps them in remembering their memory, their past, and their roots. An Adi cannot refute their intimacy with the sun in their everyday life and struggles to live with their proud identity and dignity: "Particles, moments, memories—/ specks flying in space / revolving around this sun" (*The White Shirts of Summer* 59). Dai asserts that scientific advancement enables us to "arrange light and shadow" and to "obliterate mistakes, obliterate regret," yet we cannot negate the sun and its part in our life, as "the sun is the sun" and "The sun knows" (59). Virginius Xaxa's opinion that "tribal people are seen as living in relative harmony with the natural environment" is truly reflected in the life of the Adi community (101).

Cohen states that an active folklorist integrates folklore into their writing to enhance readers' experiences and preserve a community's cultural values for posterity. Mamang Dai, as an active folklorist and active member of her Adi society, invokes the illustrious oral traditions of her ancestors through her poetry to emphasize that, their identity is rooted in their oral tradition and folk culture. Through her poetry infused with folklore, as discussed in this paper, Dai vehemently evokes the ecocentric lifestyle and culture of the Adi community, serving as a potential inspiration for sustainable practices in the current ecological crisis. Ecocentrism, as an ideology advocating for an ecocentric lifestyle rather than an anthropocentric society, emphasizes the rights of ecology and the harmonious coexistence of humanity and nature. "Ecocentrism is believed to be a fructuous philosophy that extends inherent value not only to human beings but also to the entire natural world. In this environmental ideology, man is neither a crown of creations nor a supreme centre of the system, but a part of the ecosystem that has to coexist with all other elements of the earth to lead a harmonious life" (Nithya).The Adi folklore in Dai's poetry illustrates the harmonious relationship between tribal life, culture, and nature, emphasizing the significance of this coexistence in shaping their distinct identity. This is a commendable message for a sustainable future in our society. ■

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[1] "A mass extinction is a short period of geological time in which a high percentage of biodiversity, or distinct species—bacteria, fungi, plants, mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, invertebrates— dies out … the sixth mass extinction is driven by human activity, primarily (though not limited to) the unsustainable use of land, water, and energy, and climate change" ("What is the sixth mass extinction and what can we do about it?" in WWF)

[2] The title of this folklore, "The Coming of Death" is taken from a chapter title of Verrier Elwin 's book, *Myths of the North-East Frontier of India* (1958).

[3] The title is taken from a interview with Rom Whitaker, snake man of India, "A Life Less Ordianry," in round Glass Sustain.

[4] This tale of the Adis oral culture is outlined at the footnote of the poem, "Stay with the Song" by Mamang Dai. (*The White Shirts of Summer* 90)

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Growth and Development of the Nepali Language in the Darjeeling Region with Special Reference to Padre Ganga Prasad Pradhan and Paras Mani Pradhan

Sushma Rai

Anira Phipon Lepcha

Although the Nepali language had its prominence in Darjeeling and Sikkim for a long period, yet its development with regard to printing and popularity in terms of its usage and expansion of its geographical boundary happened mostly after the arrival of the British and the European Christian missionaries in Darjeeling region. Apart from the contribution of the various missionaries who came to the region, numerous conscious Nepali educated group of people like Padre Ganga Prasad Pradhan and Paras Mani Pradhan also immensely contributed towards the cause of the development of Nepali language in particular and Nepali society in general through popularisation of the language and imparting education to the locals in their mother tongue. In the long run, this ultimately led to the awakening of their love for the language and culture. Soon the language became a binding force for making the people from divergent lingo-cultural background into a single composite unit bonded by one language i.e. 'Nepali' and with the passage of time it became their marker of identity.

Keywords: Nepali, Ganga Prasad Pradhan, Paras Mani Pradhan, Darjeeling, Gorkhey Khabar Kagat, Nepali Sahitya Sammelan.

In 1835 Darjeeling region was ceded to the British administration after which the region was developed as a sanatorium. With the passage of time, the British colonial administration started Tea and Cinchona plantations in the region for which huge labour was required. Since the area was sparsely populated in the formative years of the introduction of the plantation huge number of labourers were recruited from various parts of the country including neighbouring countries like Nepal and Bhutan. In no time, Darjeeling became popular for Tea, Timber and Train. Such developmental activities greatly changed the demographic profile of the region, and in this background the Nepali language became the *lingua franca* of the various ethnic groups in the entire Darjeeling region.

The formal education in Darjeeling hills started only after the coming of the Christian missionaries to the region around 1842. According to L.S.S. O'Malley, first attempt to educate hill people was initiated by Rev W. Start who was a private missionary. As early as in 1850, he was the first person to open a school for the Lepchas, who were considered the aboriginals of the region. After him came Niebel, who was a German missionary not only started a school but also prepared some Lepcha elementary textbooks[1]. In this connection arrival of William Macfarlane in Darjeeling around 1869 was noteworthy. He was one of the first Scottish missionaries who started a temporary school in a rented house just above the Ging Tea Estate with twenty Nepali and Lepcha orphans[2]. He was the first missionary to realize that in order to impart education in the hills it is imperative to have a group of teachers from the area with a good command of the local language. Therefore, during the first year of his missionary work in the hills, he devoted himself to train the group of boys selecting from the local area. They later served as the nucleus of the training school at Kalimpong, which later trained other teachers for the whole district[3].

The untiring efforts of the various missionaries led to the beginning of the formal education in the Darjeeling hills. Soon many such schools were started in and around the region. By the year 1873, there were around twenty five primary schools in the hills where as many as six hundred and fifty boys and girls were studying. This figure rose to seventy primary schools in 1907 with two thousand four hundred twenty boys and three hundred girls. By 1944 there were two hundred ninety-nine schools for boys and nineteen for the girls, of which one hundred twenty were run by the Scottish Mission, ten by the Roman Catholic Mission, three by the Ramakrishna Vedanta Ashram and four by the Buddhist Mission[4]. Soon with the commencement of formal education in the region a need for the reading materials in their native language was also felt. As Nepali was the common language between the various tribes of the hills, with the passage of time, it led to the beginning of an era of printing in the native language in the region. Moreover, with the introduction of the various printings and publications in Nepali language a new consciousness among the Nepali people developed for their language, which ultimately led to the development of linguistic nationalism afterwards among the Nepali speaking populace of the country.

PADRE GANGA PRASAD PRADHAN

The first step towards the popularization of the Nepali language in Darjeeling was initiated by Padre Ganga Prasad Pradhan who was the first ordained Nepali Pastor from the region. Though he was born in Kathmandu on 4th July 1851, at the very early stage of his life his family shifted to the Ging Tea garden in Darjeeling. He even worked in the tea garden as a child labourer. It was during this time that he came in close contact with the missionaries like Rev. Macfarlane and Rev. Turnbull, who had a profound impact on his life. Moreover, because of their influence and inspiration, he became one of the early converts from the hills and also the first Nepali to be ordained a Pastor. He even translated the Bible into Nepali language for first time in around 1914. This provided the opportunity for the simple Nepali speaking population to read and understand Bible in their vernacular language.

This not only gave a great impetus towards the spreading of the new faith Christianity in the hills, but in the long run, it also helped in the popularization of the Nepali language among the linguistically diverse population of the region.

When he was entrusted with the task of being the teacher of the school where he was once a student, he was very much aware of the scarcity of study materials in the vernacular language. Therefore, he took the responsibility of writing books in the Nepali language. This made the lessons simple and easy for the local children to understand. This was one of his greatest contributions towards the popularizing the Nepali language among the locals. He understood the difficulty of the hill students to learn in alien languages like English and Hindi as he himself had gone through the same problem when he was a student. Apart from that, he also started the first Nepali monthly journal titled 'Gorkhey Khabar Kagat' from Darjeeling in 1901, which was published till June 1932 and was printed from his own Gorkha Press. 'Gorkhey Khabar Kagat' holds a very significant place in the Nepali literary world as it was not just the first Nepali journal published from Darjeeling, but its publication also preceded the publication of 'Gorkha Patra' from Nepal by few months[5]. Though it was published with a special purpose, it is the second magazine published in the history of Nepali journalism after Motiram Bhatt's 'Gorkha Bharat Jeevan'(1895)[6]. However, not a single copy of the magazine is found yet, the only validation of its existence is found in the advertisement of the Bharat Jeevan Magazine. Therefore, 'Gorkhey Khabar Kagat' is considered the first regularly published magazine in Nepali language.In fact, he is considered as the first Nepali to be the publisher and editor of first ever published journal in Nepali language in India.

PARAS MANI PRADHAN

As already mentioned, formal western education was started by the missionaries in various parts of Darjeeling as early as in 1842, the Nepali language and literature were not a part of the curriculum until 1917. In this connection, the efforts of Parasmani Pradhan to introduce the Nepali language in the schools of Darjeeling and Kalimpong were noteworthy. Moreover, it was only after much slog by Parasmani Pradhan that finally, after 1917, the colonial administration allowed education to be imparted in the Nepali language in the Hills. He even dared to criticize the language used in the 'Gorkhey Khabar Kagat' as he believed that the language used in the paper was not the language spoken and written by the Nepalis of Darjeeling hills. He even went on saying that, the paper was doing more harm than good for the development of the Nepali language and literature[7]. It proves his concerns and love for the development of the Nepali language that he even dared to challenge Padre who was working under the patronage of the British government.

Parasmani Pradhan or Prasman Pradhan (registered name in his school register) since childhood was deeply inspired by his father, Bhagyaman Pradhan, who was the first person to popularize the written form of the Nepali language in India since 1892. From the beginning, he was not happy with the education system in the hills. From Primary School to

Upper Primary School to High School, he never had the opportunity to study in Nepali, as all the schools at that time in the hills had Hindi as the medium of instruction. Yet even as the schoolboy he has contributed poems, articles and letters in Nepali which were published in the weekly magazine called 'Gorkhali', which was published from Benaras. He also translated Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's short novel 'Yugalanguriya' into Nepali under the title 'Hiranyamaye Charitra' which was published as a series in 'Gorkhali'. This is regarded as the first novel to be printed in the Nepali language from Darjeeling[8].

Parasmani Pradhan was one of the first conscious minds who thought about uniting youths to uplift the Nepali language and literature and to establish a Nepali literary association. This ultimately led to the establishment of the 'Gorkha Sahitya Samaj', the first association of the Gorkha youths and also a library in Darjeeling Government High School[9]. It is from this moment that, the era of *'Bhasa Prem*[10] emerged in the young minds of Darjeeling hills and later this was spread like wildfire throughout the country. In fact, Parasmani Pradhan was one of the first conscious Nepali who thought of bringing the entire Gorkha community under the ambit of one single umbrella through a common language that is 'Nepali'. It is because of his love and untiring efforts towards the development of Nepali language that he was even entrusted with the membership of the General Council of the Sahitya Akademi and also became the first Convener of the Advisory Board for the Nepali language[11].

The credit for publishing 'Chandrika', the first literary magazine from Kurseong in the Nepali language, also goes to Parasmani Pradhan. Its first issue was published in January 1918. The main aim of the magazine was to develop and enhance the Nepali language and its literature and to bring about uniformity in the written form of the language. Apart from that, the magazine also became the medium through which the fight for the recognition of the Nepali language by Calcutta University was carried on. Finally, a notification was issued in the Calcutta Gazette on 24th July 1918, according to which Nepali language was included in the list of vernacular languages to be taught in the Matriculation, Intermediate and the Bachelors of Arts (B.A.) examinations under Calcutta University[12]. It would not be wrong to say that this was the first step towards recognizing the Nepali language as part of the modern Indian language.

The efforts of Parasmani Pradhan shortly got the boost when he was joined by two other teachers of the Darjeeling Government High school, namely Pundit Dharnidhar Koirala and Surya Bikram Gewali in 1919 and 1923, respectively, as the teachers of Nepali and History. The association of three is known in short as 'Su-Dha-Pa', after their name initials. The great minds of the trio soon gave birth to 'Nepali Sahitya Sammelan' in 1924, considered as one of the biggest milestones in the development of the Nepali language in India. Moreover, it is not wrong to say that it is from 1924 onwards that the word 'Nepali' was being associated more with the inhabitants of Darjeeling hills rather than just being the language spoken by the people in the region. In fact, the popularity, development and use of the Nepali language in India started because of the untiring efforts of the various members of the 'Nepali Sahitya

Sammelan' in the years to follow and are continuing their work for the upliftment of the Nepali language in particular and Nepali society in general.

CONCLUSION:

The contribution of Padre Ganga Prasad Pradhan towards developing and popularizing Nepali language, literature and journalism is worth mentioning. Kumar Pradhan, one of the most eminent and pioneer historians from Darjeeling region, believes that his works had contributed a lot in the first phase of the development of the Nepali language and literature in Darjeeling region. Still, his contribution has not been recognized as it should have been mainly because of his language and his religion. He further writes that even Paras Mani Pradhan, who was forty seven years younger than him, had received many prestigious awards like 'Tribhuvan Purushkar' (Award) from Nepal State Pragya Pratisthan, including an honorary Doctorate from the Tribhuvan University for his contribution to the Nepali language. But at the same time, Ganga Prasad Pradhan's oldest work was almost forgotten by that time[13]. Likewise, D.S. Bomjan in his article "A Glance on the Nepali Language Movement that Fructified into Recognition", also holds the similar views and writes that in terms of educational, literary and intellectual contribution, Padre Ganga Prasad Pradhan is immense as he was the pioneer who had written nearly thirty-three books on varied subjects, including magazine in Nepali and his works are commendable for the development of the Nepali language in India but till date, he did not receive the recognition that he deserved. But contrary to the above views Paras Mani Pradhan believes that the language used by Padre Ganga Prasad Pradhan in his 'Gorkhey Khabar Kagat' is grammatically flawed and since letters and magazines have a significant impact on the development of the language, the magazine had tremendously distorted the quality of the language in the region[14]. He further believes that the main purpose of the magazine was to spread the ideals of Christianity and disregard Hinduism. He even went on to say that, even though the name of the magazine is 'Gorkhey Khabar Kagat', its contents were sometimes written in Hindi and sometimes in English[15]. Thus, its work was contrary to its name and hence proved that its intention was not the development of the Nepali language as was considered by many. Whatever may be the case, we cannot deny the fact that Padre Ganga Prasad Pradhan was one of the pioneers who had contributed a lot to the popularization and use of the Nepali language and the spread of education in the vernacular in the region.

Likewise, it was the constant effort of Parasmani Pradhan that, Nepali was made the medium of instruction up to the high school level. Throughout his life, he devoted his time writing much-needed textbooks in simple Nepali language, which the layman can easily understand. The introduction of Nepali language in the school curriculum in Darjeeling and Kalimpong was also mainly due to his constant effort. This later inspired the neighboring state or neighboring kingdom of Sikkim (as Sikkim was not a part of the Union of India till 1975) to introduce Nepali in the school curriculum around the 1920s. It was the fruit of the meticulous effort of Rashmi Prasad Allay, another conscious mind of the Nepali community, that the Nepali language was popularized in the kingdom of Sikkim too.

It was undoubtedly the relentless works of both Padre Ganga Prasad Pradhan and Paras Mani Pradhan who worked throughout their lives for the cause of the Nepali language which resulted in the recognition of the Nepali language as one of the major Indian languages and ultimately contributed towards the preparation of the path for the further struggle for its recognition by the Constitution of India as one of the Schedule languages of the country in the days to come. ■

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Illusory Nature of the Human Attitude in Ayn Rand's *The Beginners*

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Ayn Rand is one of the major figures who emerged in the modern fiction after the Second World War. She is widely acclaimed as one of the most accomplished stylists and prolific writers of her generation showing remarkable versatility and range.Rand's novels are concerned with the intricacies of family relationships and the isolation of the individual within the family set up. In her novels, she discusses the importance of family relationship, and for Rand, families clearly provide not only her major sources for learning about the world as a child, but also a fertile ground for studying how people adapt themselves and endure the pain of loss and disappointment of life, and how they adjust living with others, and yet continue to live and love. All the major conflicts and central themes of her novels evolve from this concern for the family, the individual isolation, and relationship to the community. Also, Rand's early isolation and struggle for identity provide both style and material for her fiction.Rand's novels portray the barrenness of familial relationship, the existential themes of the individual isolation and struggle for independence and identity as well as the lack of meaningful communication among people living together.

Keywords: Isolation, Barrenness, Identity, Tolerance, Uncertainty

Despite praise for the truth of her characterizations and Rand eye for details, Rand receives much national recognition for her fiction, after the publication of her second novel *The Fountain Head* prior to 1965; the largest segment of her audience being in the South. Her novels have been published and translated into Russian, Danish, French, German, and Italian languages. The American and other academic critical communities have been eager to appreciate Rand's works. Since the first novel *The Fountain Head*. Updike has repeatedly extolled Rand's remarkable talent, her ability to observe life with tolerance, and precision have excelled among the contemporary writers specifically evoking the names of John Cheever, Flannery O' Connor, Carson McCullers, and Eudora Welty. Indeed, Welty has long counted herself among these writers, who love and admire Rand's work apart from Rand's former teacher Reynolds and fellow novelist Doris Betts. It has been a matter of

curiosity to many discerning readers that Rand has not been faster or slower to attract scholarly assessment. In spite of her impressive body of work, her fictions have received little academic analysis. That absence of attention is puzzling, since Rand is a serious, gifted, prolific writer, whose fictions have been consistently admired by important critics and her contemporaries.Ayn Rand's *The Beginners,* is rooted in adolescence, homely, touching, stylistically conservativeits one eccentricity belongs to its heroine, a motherless Evie Decker, a plump drab girl, who one day cuts into her forehead the last name of Bertram "Drum strings" Casey, a local rock singer of dubious ability.

The deed precipitates the main action of the novel *The Beginners,* in which Evie, a testimonial in scar tissue becomes a publicity feature at Casey's performances, ultimately marries him and loses her father to heart attack, finally swallowing her fear of loneliness. Eventually she has weathered the crucial season of adolescence, having discovered an identity within the loneliness of her skin to replace the one engraved upon its surface; she has slipped down into life, and because the transformation is made with such authentic hesitation, awkwardness, and doubt in keeping that is, with the circumstances of her ungainly life we believe in it and moved by it. Though this novel sounds the tone of life, its resonance derives from the observation of a way of life; *The Beginners* is the first novel of Rand to trace the evaluation of romantic relationship from its beginnings to marriage and dissolution, close relationships and alliances. The individual is ultimately alone till the end of the novel. In this connection Edelstein points out that Ayn Rand returns to the existential themes of detachment from family, the individual's isolation and struggle for independence and identity as well as the lack of meaningful communication among people living together. The novel ends with the death of Evie's father and the event leaves her more bereft than before.

The ultimate theme of *The Beginners*, isto trace the evolution of a romantic relationship from its beginnings to marriage and dissolution, a theme of the later novels. In this novel, all human relationships and alliances, whether blood related or not, bear scars from isolating conflicts. The individual is ultimately alone in Rand's fiction, despite what comfort may come from family and friendship. Indeed, it is their uniqueness-their peculiar set of experiences and memories that form their personalities-that isolates individuals from each other. Each and every scene of this novel represents the first of its kind in Rand's fiction: one in which the individual's essential isolation from others is captured in the loss of all relatives. But Ayn Rand has protested that she is "not the least bit pessimistic as a writer".

> I never intended any of my characters to stagnate, certainly it's just that I want to see how people can maneuver and grow within the small space that is the average life (81-90).

In the final analysis it is arguably the pregnancy, for more than the marriage itself that brings out the best in Evie. Most of Rand's' women, the baby and the husband, are the true signs of entry into responsible adulthood:

> Thus, the importance of the accumulation of physical objects and furniture, like tip-proof high – chairs those emblems of the acceptance of the restrictions and responsibilities of the mature individual. Though not directly of *The Beginners*, Gullets observes further that in some Rand novels, motherhood proves to be "a happy instinct, a gift of the life course (9)

and that certainly appears to be the case with Evie. Motherhood seems to have been the goal for which she has sub-consciously striven from the opening of the novel. She seems to know just from hearing him on the radio that Casey was to be her mate, and she has done impulse or is it on instinct? The one thing guarantees to get his attention: She carves his name on her forehead. This self-mutilation is, as suggested earlier, a manifestation of the media-cued yoking of teen romance and violence; but it is also in a distorted way, a kind of marriage for Evie has done melodramatically what, until recently all women do automatically upon marriage:

> they take their mate's names as their own, or more precisely they take their last names, rejecting the identity of daughterly self (10).

Though Casey would have preferred Evie to carve "Casey" on her forehead, it isn't broad enough for "Drum strings" Evie seems to have realized instinctively that what she needs to take as her own is the surname "Drum" that is the socially accepted proof of the woman's marriage and the legitimacy of any children she may have, "Casey is my name" (219). Evie retorts as she walks out on her husband, but that identity has to do with one 'Bertram Drum Strings' Casey than with the symbolic, through the mutilation and legally through the elopement. Evie has announced publically her decision to accept those roles; and if his childishness and lethargy compel her to abandon the role of wife, she still can immerse herself in the role of mother.

Indeed, without pressing the matter too much, Rand suggests that the ineffectual Casey has minimal input into the big event. The decision to have a child is entirely Evie's: flying in the face of all logical objections, she yearns for motherhood, visualizing it as "a shaft of yellow light through her mind, like a door opening" (170-171). Casey knows nothing of this, falling asleep oblivious to his wife's urges. Significantly, Evie already looks pregnant as indeed she has looks for her entire life- obesity. Even before she articulates her dream that "She wanted to get pregnant" (17), she instinctively takes a job in the library appropriately quite, sedentary occupation which requires that she wears a 'Blue Smock' an outfit curiously reminiscent of maternity clothes. And not long after she secures the ideal job for a mother to be, she is almost as if by her own force of will, decidedly pregnant. When she finally gets around to mentioning the baby to Casey, it is not a happy announcement but a statement of fact, which, Evie feels, should have a major impetus in their move to her childhood home, left to her upon the sudden death of her father. When the fact of impending parenthood does not convince Casey to leave the tarpaper shack, Evie walks out on him. Evie Decker Casey, Proto-feminist has taken what she needed from a husband, a socially

accepted married name what she is doing requires courage and a strong sense of self, qualities which are not evident in the opening of the novel.

Indeed, she seems to have undergone a complex inversion by the novel's end. But that impression is not quite accurate. Those admirable qualities have always been within her; but her oval fingernails and narrow nose, somehow have been over looked in a world which posits overweight teens as lacking in character and will power. But the same heaviness that is so undesirable in an adolescent is just fine for a pregnant matron, whom society treats with remarkable respect and different social norms derived from popular culture have shifted far more than Evie herself and the only real inversion to occur on her part is her perception of herself and the world. In carving Casey's name in reverse, Evie does seem to confirm that, at the stage; she is looking at matters keenly; as Mary Ellen Brook, argues, that "It is as though she sees people and situations backwards, like the letters on her forehead" (12). But by the end of the novel Evie and Fay-jean Casey' sees situations, and the rest of her world rightly.

It enables her to slam the door on her friend and to leave her husband without a moment of hesitation, more importantly, Evie sees herself rightly and that would lend credence to the argument of several critics that the baby she is carrying the true Evie in effect, she "gives birth to herself. Almost as if to confirm this, she goes so far as to say that "I didn't cut my fore head. Someone else did" (20), that 'someone else is not as she maintains another teen but rather her earlier self now dead.The ending of *The Beginners* is thus an affirmative one. Essentially it is a parable of the evaluation of one woman's strong, healthy sense of identity and the novel does not end on an "inconclusive", note, nor is it quite accurate to say that its "underscores" the passivity and shallowness of Evie's and Casey's live" (14). For though Casey admittedly is more passive and shallower than ever at the end of the novel, Evie has moved beyond juvenile angst and "slipped down into (a) life" of adult responsibility" (15). If it is not a flawless vision and even Rand herself "has subsequently confessed to a desire to know how Evie Decker's baby turned out" (16), it is nonetheless meant to be a positive one. From this time onwards, strong women able to raise their families alone and dealing with the crises and impediments of daily life will be the salient feature of Ayn Rand's novel. ■

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Linguistic Communalism as a Threat to Regional Identity with Special Reference to the Constitutional Protection of Linguistic Diversity in India

Jayanta Boruah

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India has the world's largest linguistic diversity, and this diversity serves not only as a foundation of communal identity but also as a basis for the reorganisation of state borders in the largest democracy. According to the Census 2011, India has 121 major languages and approximately 19,500 mother tongues, which define the nature of India's linguistic diversity. This diversity outlines India's civilization of coexistence, grounded in the principles of "Unity in Diversity," and the rich cultural heritage preserved by the constitutional framework through Articles 29, 30, 343–351, and the Eighth Schedule. However, in the race to achieve political supremacy, Indian politics has often been criticised for politicising linguistic communities through mobilisation on one particular ideology against another to achieve a stable vote bank, resulting in linguistic communalism. Based on such ideologies of preserving native languages, it is observed that the native population attempts to impose their regional languages on non-natives, leading to serious confrontations.

The paper, therefore, argues that attempts to preserve regional identity by imposing native languages on non-native speakers in a multilingual society like India may paradoxically weaken native identity itself. Migrants, out of necessity for livelihood, may gradually acquire greater proficiency in the formal native language through structured education and professional training, surpassing native speakers who may lose hold of the formal nature of their own language. Such situations blur the distinction between natives and non-natives who gain proficiency in the native language, thereby intensifying employment competition and diluting regional identity based primarily on language. The paper evaluates constitutional provisions and judicial interpretations in light of sociolinguistic theories to highlight that linguistic preservation should be grounded in cultural transformation rather than coercive imposition.

Keywords: Constitutional and Legal Framework, Linguistic Communalism, Linguistic Pluralism, Regional Identity, Rule of Law

Introduction

India has a history of being influenced by multiple racial communities with distinct linguistic and cultural identities (Sarkar, Sengupta, and Ambekar). As such, the subcontinent has been enriched with a high magnitude of linguistic diversity, allowing coexistence within a linguistically pluralistic society (Chowdhury). This unity in diversity defines humanity's unique cultural civilization worldwide. After India gained independence, this diversity became a major reason for the reorganisation of states, or in other words, the division of state borders on a linguistic basis (Jain).

Such reorganisation marked the first territorial restructuring of independent India based on language and formed a basis for the unification of people into communal language groups in the name of regional states. The philosophy behind forming states based on language was that linguistic homogeneity plays a significant role in enhancing regional belongingness and strengthening social solidarity (Das). Further, linguistic federalism was expected to preserve cultural diversity without compromising national unity (Austin). The Constitution of India promoted linguistic diversity through Articles 29, 30, 343–351, and the Eighth Schedule (Constituent Assembly of India).

However, linguistic federalism gradually evolved into linguistic majoritarianism within states, demanding the majority spoken language as the native language and leading to linguistic communalism influenced by regional politics and administrative pressures (Patteti and Rajani). This created social, political, and economic barriers between natives and non-natives, compelling migrants to adopt native languages as functional necessities (Zieliñski).

Conceptualising Linguistic Communalism

According to sociolinguistic theories, language-based identity politics often arises when native communities sense a threat to their identity from external members within a social structure (Kýr). John Fishman emphasised that language plays a vital role in maintaining community identity and cultural survival, and linguistic movements emerge when communities perceive linguistic erosion (Safran). Benedict Anderson explained how language creates shared identity through his theory of *Imagined Communities* (Marr).

In India, linguistic mobilisation has shaped regional politics. The Anti-Hindi agitations in Tamil Nadu (Hardgrave) and the Assam Andolan (Ahmed) demonstrate the emotional and political power of language. Such movements significantly influence societal evolution, cultural assimilation, political development, and economic growth. Although intended to protect identity, they sometimes reveal how language can become divisive (Dubinsky and Starr).

Linguistic communalism arises when language protection evolves into exclusion based on language (Nguyen and Hajek). Migrants often adopt languages as survival tools rather than cultural inheritance. This compulsion lacks emotional attachment and may dilute linguistic authenticity over time (Zschomler; Chick and Hannagan-Lewis).

Constitutional Protection of Linguistic Diversity

Recognising India's linguistic diversity, the framers of the Constitution adopted a holistic approach. Article 29 guarantees citizens the right to conserve culture, script, and language, while Article 30 protects minority educational rights. Articles 343–351 establish a multilingual policy promoting linguistic harmony rather than domination. Article 350A directs states to provide primary education in the mother tongue.

The Constitution also recognises 22 official languages under the Eighth Schedule, symbolising linguistic pluralism. Thus, constitutional provisions aim to preserve diversity without undermining national integrity (Constituent Assembly of India).

The Supreme Court in *T.M.A. Pai Foundation v. State of Karnataka* held that language forms an essential component of cultural identity. Similarly, in *State of Karnataka v. Associated Management of English Medium Schools*, the Court recognised language choice as part of personal liberty under Article 21.

Imposition of Language and Its Socio-Legal Consequences

States often use language as a criterion in administration, education, and employment (Groff). The Official Languages Act, 1963 allows states to adopt regional languages for administrative efficiency (Indian Parliament). However, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu conceptualised language proficiency as a form of social and economic power (Bourdieu).

Migrants frequently acquire formal linguistic proficiency through structured learning, whereas natives rely on informal acquisition (Varma). This paradoxically enables migrants to gain competitive advantages in employment sectors requiring formal language competence (Carlsson, Eriksson, and Rooth).

Language and Public Employment

Regional language proficiency requirements aim to improve governance and public communication but may sometimes undermine constitutional equality (Banchariya). Judicial interventions, such as *Pradeep Jain v. Union of India* and *Kailash Chand Sharma v. State of Rajasthan*, emphasise that regional preferences must align with constitutional equality principles.

Native and Non-Native Forced Assimilation

When language becomes a functional requirement rather than cultural identity, migrants gain access to socio-economic opportunities originally intended for natives. Forced assimilation weakens cultural solidarity because cultural practices cannot survive solely through institutional enforcement but require lived experiences (Anderson). UNESCO similarly emphasises intergenerational transmission over administrative imposition.

Threat to Regional Identity

Language survival depends on cultural practice, literature, and intergenerational communication (Inan and Haris). Administrative enforcement alone may transform language

into an instrumental skill rather than cultural heritage (Henne-Ochoa). Migrants may abandon imposed languages once economic necessity ends (Schmid and Keijzer), thereby weakening regional identity despite temporary increases in speaker numbers.

Balancing Linguistic Protection and Constitutional Morality

The Constitution promotes both linguistic diversity and national integration. Articles 14 and 19 ensure equality and freedom of movement irrespective of linguistic identity. Excessive linguistic protection that excludes others risks undermining constitutional morality and national unity.

In *S.R. Bommai v. Union of India*, the Supreme Court recognised pluralism as a basic constitutional feature. Effective language preservation therefore requires cultural participation, multilingual education, and intergenerational transmission rather than coercive policies. The National Education Policy 2020 supports multilingual education at foundational stages (Murukali and Mero).

Conclusion

The paper argues that linguistic communalism, particularly when language is imposed on migrants, may weaken native solidarity and intensify competition. Sustainable language preservation must rely on cultural continuity, community participation, and multilingual coexistence rather than exclusionary policies. The Constitution promotes linguistic pluralism alongside equality and mobility, making inclusive cultural preservation essential for safeguarding regional identity. ■

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Chakravarti Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata*: Exploring Uniqueness in Indian Culture, Philosophy, Morality and Aesthetics

Harekrushna Barik

Kalikinkar Pattanayak

C. Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata* echoes Veda Vyasa's ideas and ideals that have enriched the lives of the Indians who have conceived India to be the '*Guru'* of the world. This book which sells like hotcakes embodies the significant episodes in the original *Mahabharata* that reflect the complexity of human nature. As the title of the book is *Mahabharata* (India the Glorious), so is the content of the book. In between the lines of the passage glow the glory and complexity of human life. Thus, this book containing four hundred and eighty-four pages, branded as mini-*Mahabharata* reveals the stark reality that War is the condition of human consciousness. Be it the political conflict between the nations; America and Iran, Russia and Ukraine, it is very much human to be political, that is, to run after pelf, power and position. Aristotle's definition of Man as political animal cannot be discarded. *Mahabharata* depicts war, the causes of war and also the objectives of the war that can be holy from boarder perspective. Shri Krishna, who is pivotal in waging of this war holds that *"Minerva's owl begins its flight only in the gathering dark";* it means that God descends upon this Earth in human form only to establish *Dharma* (righteousness) and eliminate the forces of evil just to make this world a better place to live in. Thus, war has an important place in human history, passionately felt by Vyasa the seer poet. His masterpiece *Mahabharata* contains one lakh shloka and two lakh lines in Sanskrit which have been aptly abridged by Rajagopalachari which merit critical discourse in English, the global lingua franca. This book highlights the role of the fairsex that is being worthy daughter, mother, sister and wife which sounds strikingly Indian. The episodes in the book are based upon four pillars of Indian culture:*Dharma*(righteousness), *Artha* (wealth or resources), *Kama* (desires) and *Moksha* (liberation). The writing conforms to the aesthetic standards set by the prominent Indian aestheticians: *Bharata, Abhinav Gupta, Nagarjuna, Kuntak* and so on. Rasa dhvani theory which is central to Indian poetics is felt in the narration of events. Thus, a critical study of Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata* makes the reader acquainted with the uniqueness of Indian culture, philosophy, morality and aesthetics.

Keywords: Indian, Culture, *Dharma,* War,Fair sex, Uniqueness, Aesthetics

I

In the twenty-first century when there is a declamation in the political and cultural circles that India should be the *global guru*it is high time to go through Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata* to showcase the richness of India's culture, philosophy, morality and above all aesthetics. Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata* selects, translates, and trans creates the messages and the splendid poetry of Vedavyasa, the author of the *Mahabharata* in Sanskrit, a classic which defies time and reads like an *epic of humanity*. In accordance with the perception of Oscar Wilde, the proponen to faes theticism, this book is moral, rather than the assessment that it has 'morals'; it means morality presented in this literary masterpieceflashes in between the lines of the plot which is organic. All the stories have been combined together to reflect the moral of this book: the triumph of virtue over vice, the good over evil, heroism over villainy.

The famous lines of the *Bhagavad Gita,* the vital part of the *Mahabharata*, sums up the uniqueness of Indian culture and philosophy:

> *yadâ yadâ hi dharmasya glânir bhavati bhârata*
> *abhyutthânam adharmasya tadâtmânaA s[ijâmyaham*
> *paritrâGâya sâdhûnâA vinâúhâya cha duchk[itâm*
> *dharma-sansthâpanârthâya sambhavâmi yuge yuge*
> *(Chapter 4, Verse 7,8)*

Whenever there is a decline in righteousness and an increase in unrighteousness, O Arjun, at that time I manifest Myself on earth.To protect the righteous, to annihilate the wicked, and to reestablish the principles of Dharma I appear on this earth, age after age**.** (BG 4.8: Chapter 4, Verse 8 - Bhagavad Gita, The Song of God – Swami Mukundananda)(www.holy-bhagavad-gita.org/chapter/4/verse/8/)

The quintessence of the Indian culture and philosophy lies in reposing faith in an invisible power, the creator of the universe, who controls, directs the affairs of the mortals on this Earth. In the above stanza it has been stated that the creator descends in human form in "Bharata (India)" in times of moral crisis; he restores the good and demolishes the forces of evil only to establish peace and order upon this planet- robust optimism, indeed! *Bharata* (India), is and shall be the *Guru* of the world for the reason that God incarnates here.

All down the ages the cultured Indians believe in two important things to go ahead in worldly life: confidence in self as rationalists do and faith in God as theists and mystics experience. In the *Mahabharata* it is implicit that there is an inscrutable divine power that controls the affairs of the humans. Thus, in Indian philosophy there are two worlds: the visible and the invisible; the physical and the metaphysical and Srikrishna represents both, as *Vyasa* reveals that *Shri Krishna*, in his times, is the incarnation of the Divine to protect the virtuous and save mankind from the deterioration of human values and the crisis of morality.

Rabindra Nath Tagore, the Nobel-awarded literary genius of India, puts this lesson from the *Mahabharata* in his *Gitanjali* in a different way. He prays to the Almighty that the Indians should be awake to the reality "where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection" (Quoted by Chatterji: 58). Tagore admits that this visible or material world is imperfect; just to make it beautiful or perfect, the Indians should strive ceaselessly. Persistent endeavor is the solution to existential crisis.

In the present scenario, war has been the condition of human consciousness.'War' not only connotes external war or civil war, but also war in the consciousness between the forces of good and evil; it also refers to the clash between the heart and the head, emotion and intellect. Conviction is essential to do the right kind of action, which has been spelt out in the *Mahabharata* in the character of Srikrishna. The author of the *Mahabharata* answers aptly to the prick of conscience of W. B. Yeats, who was horrified at the spectacle of genocide in the global wars:

The best lack all conviction,

The worstarefull of passionate intensity

(The Second Coming) (Jaidka: 21)

Yeats perceives that the crises in the world are due to the fact that the individuals who are the personification of goodness lack power and conviction to shape the world beautifully and meaningfully. On the contrary the corrupt people develop conviction to make history. In this critical juncture the answer of Vyasa is clear; he creates a personality like Srikrishna to convincehis right disciple like Arjuna to muster up courage and battle against the forces of evil. He calls it 'religious' to kill the persons who deviate from the path of righteousness. Rajagopalachari through the mouth of Bhishma justifies war. He says that "A Kshatriya does not wish to die of disease or old age in his bed but prefers to die on the battlefield (Rajagopalachari*:* 273)".

Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata*, containing 484 pages, is the mini-*Mahabharata*; it retainsthe wisdom of Vyasa, the celebrated seer-poet. The book embodies the main episodes of the original book; even if it is written in English, the thought of Vedavyasa gets reflected in appropriate language. When a reader gifted with Indian sensibility goes through it, he realizes the comment of Mahatma Gandhi on C. Rajagopalachari that he is the "Conscience-Keeper". The placement of 'a' in the final position of the word '*Mahabharata*' points to the passion of Rajagopalachari for the Sanskrit language, and the omission of 'the' in the title of the book points to the humility of the author towards Vedavyasa - this reverence and humility is the quintessence of Indian culture and philosophy.

This research paper has been divided into five sections. The opening section spells out the design of the paper. It reflects upon the contemporary relevance of Indian culture and philosophy as reflected in the *Mahabharata*. In this section the message of the *Mahabharata* is brought to light through the words of *Shri Krishna*, the marvellous creation

of Vyasa. The *Gita,* the central part of the *Mahabharata* finds the special mention here because the immortal words of *the Gita* that sum up the quintessence of the Indian culture are interpreted here. The second section revolves round the fair-sex: women who teach mankind about ideal motherliness, the successful role of wife in the systems like polygamy and fraternal polyandry. Sufficient hints are dropped about empowerment of women. The third section sheds light upon the symphony of ideas through the narration of spectacular events. The fourth section highlights the literary device of the author for the generation of aesthetic pleasure. The fifth section is the conclusion in which it is shown how Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata* brings out the essence of Indian culture, philosophy, morality and aesthetics. It reflects the superiority of Indian classic like *Mahabharata* over western myths.

II

The representation of the fair sex in the *Mahabharata* is deeply rooted in Indian culture in which woman is treated with respect. *A* married woman is here considered "better half" whose presence in religious rituals is a must. Yudhishthira cannot perform *Rajaswa Yajna* without the presence and assistance of Draupadi.

The picture of Draupadi, the woman protagonist of the epic, emerges unlike that of Helen, a seductress in the Greek myth. Draupadi is the embodiment of chastity; her feminine beauty attracts many heroes in the Swayamvara; Arjun wins in the competition. However, she gets married to five Pandavas in order to honour the words of Kunti, the revered mother-in-law. Fraternal polyandry works well. The Pandavas who stand for the forces of good, maintain self-control in sexuality and win over the forces of evil represented by the Kauravas. The author, here, rejects the dominance over women as practised in the patriarchal set-up. Draupadi the wife is the source of inspiration for the *Pandavas* for the acts they do. She is at once the "mistress", "the companion" and "the nurse" for her husbands:she performs the duty of a wife perfectly as Francis Bacon the essayist advises.

Draupadi is the embodiment of sexual fidelity to husbands; she refuses the sexual advances of Jayadratha or Kichaka. In the Greek myth in context of Helen, sensuality wins over chastity but in the *Mahabharata*, chastity wins over sensuality. Hence here, a spouse is considered to be the soul-mate, a partner and a companion. The role of woman is much more significant, sacred, and serious than that of her western counterpart.

The role of mother is very significant in the *Mahabharata*. As Kunti the mother voices that all her five children should marry Draupadi; her children obey; her voice becomes the order. Kuntiis the embodiment of feminism that is strikingly Indian. She offers hospitality to Durvasa in such a way that she gets blessed with a boon. She marries Pandu who is cursed, but that curse proves to be a blessing. She chants the 'mantra' given to her by Durvasa and gets blessed with powerful and virtuous sons like Yudhisthir-the paragon of righteousness; Bhima-the person if ication of physical strength; and Arjuna-

the expert in archery, a skilled personality. Kunti is kind to Madri, her co-wife, in helping her to be blessed with handsome princes like Nakula or pragmatist like Sahadeva.

Vyasa makes a point that a married Indian woman can be blessed with powerful offsprings if she has faith in the Divine and is blessed by the Sages who have communion with the Divine. Supernaturalbeings play a role in the creation of children who can be both powerful and good. Through the narration of stories of Draupadi and Pandu, Vyasa hints that both the types of marriages-polyandry and polygamy-work in society if there is the blessing of the Divine. The motherhood for which woman is glorified is not merely a biological process; the intervention of the Supernatural can't be ignored. A child who has potential goodness or greatness is the gift of the Divine.

Thus, motherhood or wifehood is delineated with superb skill. Women, here, are not treated as second sex; they have their own independence; there is awakening of intelligence in them.

III

Mahabharata is replete with thought-provoking episodes that serve the twin functions of literature: instruction as well as delight. Building and burning wax house teaches how to learn the art of survival. The Kauravas, in their madness for power long to eliminate their cousins,thePandavas,but their criminal conspiracy gets leaked out to Vidura,the well-wisher of the Pandavas who chalks out the plan for their rescue. The plan succeeds. In between the longing to live and the criminal conspiracy and the passionate desire to kill and grab property, the former wins. The moral of the story is that to survive in this hostile world demands intelligence and association with the good souls.

Warm hospitality is another feature of Indian culture. On one occasion Durvasa becomes the guest of the Pandavas when there is only a grain of rice left in the vessel. Draupadi offers it to Srikrishna who eats it and the result is that all the hungry sages are satisfied. The moral of the story is that if we satisfy the Lord of the universe who descends upon this earth in the guise of our fellow beings, we can satisfy all. Thus, the author of the *Mahabharata* establishes an inseparable link between the creature and the creator, man and God, soul and super-soul. Wordsworth's perception is that'A motion and spirit that impels/ All thinking things (Tintern Abbey) 'is realized. The doctrine of pantheism is inherent in the story in the sense when Lord Krishna's appetite is satisfied, all the saints experience equal satisfaction.

The four pillars of Indian cultureare: Dharma (religion, righteousness), Artha (wealth), Kama (desires), and Moksha (liberation). When three are fulfilled by the Pandavas, they intend to leave the earth for Heaven. It is the question of liberation-freedom from the bondage of suffering, birth and rebirth. Yudhisthir, the personification of virtues or right eousness, succeeds; the others fall. The moral of the story is that righteousness leads to liberation.

IV

Rajagopalachari is careful about the maintenance of aesthetic pleasure in the text. When Yudhishtir, the dice player, loses Draupadi in the game and Duryodhana wants to undress her publicly, Draupadi gets terribly disgusted with her husband. She scolds him in the following language:

> Even abandoned professional gamblers would not stake the harlots who live with them, and you, worse than they, have left the daughter of Drupada to the mercy of these ruffians. I cannot bear the injustice. You are the cause of this great crime. Brother Sahadeva, bring fire. I am going to set the fire to those hands of his which cast the dice. *(Rajagopalachari: 112)*

When Vikarna, the brother of Duryodhana, protests against the undressing of Draupadi in public Karna rebukes him:

> *O Vikarna, forgetting that there are elders in the assembly you lay down the law though you are but a stripling by your ignorance and rashness, you are injuring the very family which gave you birth, just as the flame generated by the agani destroys its source, the stick. It is an ill bird that fouls in his own nest.(Rajagopalachari: 113)*

Both the passages evoke Vibhatsa Rasa, the sense of disgust or aversion. The author chooses the metaphors in such a manner that the passages become suggestive, emotive and educative.

V

Rajagopalachari's *Mahabharata* is a classic in the sense Mark Twain defines: a literary classic is one which "everybody wants to have read, and nobody wants to read." (Quoted by Jane Gleeson-White: 9). Twain is disgusted at the vicarious pleasure that modern men long for. Reading a book like *Mahabharata* is the need of the hour. Unlike the titles of the epics of the distinguished poets like John Milton and T S Eliot, Rajagopalachari's choice is different. Milton entitles his epic as *Paradise Lost*; it means the loss of paradise. Eliot titles his master poem *Wasteland*; it refers to barrenness of the land. But Rajagopalachari visualizes the bliss of heaven or greenness of the land. Thus, the author is optimistic. He is never a pessimist.This book pictures what India stands for.In Greek myth Helen is a seductress, but Draupadi of *Mahabharata* is a chaste lady. Her chastity wins over Helen's sensuality. er femininity is admired by sensitive readers. Bhishma of *Mahabharata* is an exemplary character. His resolution is matchless and unparalleled. *Mahabharata* war lasted for eighteen days but its implications and complications amaze all thinking human beings. In a war-torn world of ours the reading of such an epic in miniature is imperative, at least, to study war ethics and conduct in interpersonal relationship. ■

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Rhythm, Ritual, and Rhetoric:
An Ethnomusical Study of Pahariå Songs in Translation

Sourav Singha

The Pahariå tribe of Chhattisgarh and Odisha upholds a vibrant, living oral tradition of folk songs that constitutes the cultural and social backbone of their community. Spanning diverse themes—including marriage, harvest, lullabies, and work chants—these songs function far beyond mere artistic expression or entertainment. Instead, they act as critical instruments for communal identity formation, emotional articulation, and the preservation of ancestral heritage. This paper critically investigates the Pahari oral tradition through rhetorical and ethnomusicological lenses, specifically examining how these lyrics enable community-building and knowledge preservation. Byexaminingmetaphors, rhythmic structures, and communal performance practices, this study illustrates how Pahariå songs embody the tribe's distinct agrarian worldview, intimately link individuals to their local environment, and sustain their cultural lineage amidst rapid modernisation. The findings underscore the urgent need to safeguard these oral traditions, as they hold the definitive key to understanding the Pahariå tribe's collective memory, ethical values, and way of life.

Keywords: Cultural preservation, Community-building, Ethnomusicology, Folk literature, Marriage songs, Oral tradition, Pahariå tribe, Rhetorical analysis.

Introduction:

A profound diversity of tribal communities marks the ethnographic landscape of central and eastern India, each with distinct cultures, histories, and linguistic traditions. Among these, the Pahariå tribe, primarily localised within the geographic and cultural boundaries of Chhattisgarh and Odisha, is a compelling subject of anthropological and ethnomusicological inquiry. The community's name is deeply intertwined with its geographical origins. The term "Pahariå" is etymologically derived from the word *pahar*, which translates directly to "mountain," thereby designating the community as the people dwelling in the mountainous terrain. Renowned anthropologist K.S. Singh notes in his extensive ethnographic survey that the community's name Pahariå is "believed to have been derived from the word *pahar* meaning hills" (2704). For the Pahariås themselves, this is not merely a geographic descriptor but a profound aspect of their genealogical and historical identity. Certain groups within the Pahariå community trace their ancestry to a mythological sage, firmly believing that their enduring historical identity as sovereign hill-dwellers naturally led to the approval of the name Pahariå.

However, the tribe's socio-economic progression has introduced difficulties into its identity and classification. Over time, as the community increasingly adopted bamboo craftsmanship as a primary means of subsistence, they were simultaneously referred to as "Kamars" in various regional and administrative contexts (Elwin 163). The primary occupational identity of the contemporary Pahariå revolves heavily around basketry and bamboo work. This shift in occupational perception is documented by a comprehensive 2001 socio-economic survey conducted by the non-governmental organisations Sajag and Sahabhagi Vikash Abhiyan, which definitively confirms that the Pahariås residing in Nuapada and its adjoining districts are frequently known by the alternate designations of Kamars and Banabashi (Swain and Majhi 5). Adding a layer of historical complexity to this etymological debate, historian Fanindam Singh Deo offers a different perspective, arguing that the term Pahariå does not merely signify geography but derives from the word *pahara*, meaning "to guard". According to Deo's analysis, this vocabulary indicates the community's historical and socio-political role as the designated protectors of crops and vital cattle resources for broader regional populations.

In the modern administrative system, official government records frequently categorise the Pahariås of Southwestern Odisha under the umbrella term of Kamars, legally classifying them within the Other Backward Classes (OBC) registry of the state (Bhatt 156). However, rigorous anthropological studies consistently demonstrate a critical distinction: the Pahariås keep no traditional, historical, or cultural association with ironwork or blacksmithing, a fact that directly contradicts the occupational implication of the name "Kamar" as it is traditionally understood in other Indian regions. Instead of metallurgy, their indigenous cultural practices, daily economic survival, and societal structures revolve entirely around intricate bamboo craftsmanship, primitive agrarian agriculture, and remarkably rich oral traditions. This stark distinction is crucial, as it underscores their unique and autonomous identity within the broader sociocultural landscape of India.

Within this agrarian and artisan lifestyle, Pahariå folk songs are deeply and inextricably rooted. Drawing their primary metaphors, thematic structures, and rhythmic cadences from thenatural surroundings, these songs function as living, breathing archives. Through dynamic communal performances, the oral tradition serves as a repository of the tribe's history, social values, and complex spiritual beliefs, continuously reinforcing social bonds and shared identities. Despite immense external pressures brought about by globalisation and cultural homogenization, the Pahariå people actively maintain the relevance and vitality of their oral traditions by continuously adapting their lyrical and performative contexts to navigate contemporary realities.

Literature Review:

The academic study of Indian folk songs has long established the inherent, unbreakable link between oral traditions and the socio-cultural fabric of agrarian, rural, and tribal communities across the subcontinent. Oral traditions in India are not monolithic; they

are highly localised, dialect-specific, and inextricably tied to the rhythmic cycles of nature and human labour. To fully appreciate the specific ethnomusicological dynamics of the Pahariå oral tradition, it is necessary to contextualise it within the broader landscape of Indian folk music scholarship.Nisha Sahai-Achuthan, in her comprehensive analysis of the folk songs of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), provides a vital comparative framework. Sahai-Achuthan highlights how regional folk music possesses an "unbroken record of its rich cultural traditions" (395), encompassing a vast and diverse body of work that covers every possible aspect of village life. She notes that "there appears to be no theme of village life on which folk-songs have not been sung," covering the entire human life-cycle from the birth of a child and the separation of lovers to the cultivating of fields and the departure of a bride (395). Sahai-Achuthan categorises these vast oral archives into three broad structural typologies: seasonal songs, ceremonial songs, and occasional songs.

Seasonal songs, such as the *Kajris*, *Barahmasas*, and *Chaitis*, are deeply intertwined with the climatic shifts of the Indian subcontinent. *Kajris*, for instance, are sung during the rainy season and chiefly dwell on themes of love, longing, and the profound separation of women from their beloveds; the gloom cast by the monsoon rains is believed to intensify feelings of geographic and emotional isolation. In these lyrics, the natural environment is frequently weaponised as a symbolic device, with the cries of the *Papiha* bird serving to remind separated women of their husbands, or the *Kaga* (crow) acting as a symbolic messenger traversing the distance to faraway lands. Similarly, the *Chaitis*, sung during the middle-spring month of Chait, symbolically associate the blossoming of spring flowers with fertility, romance, and the renewal of life. Ceremonial songs, or *Sanskara* songs, accompany major life transitions, including *Sohars* sung in chorus by women to celebrate childbirth, and a wide variety of *Vivah* (marriage) songs that dictate engagement ceremonies, the application of bridal henna (*Mehndi*), and the poignant departure of the bride (*Vidai*). Finally, specific occupational groups sing occasional songs, such as the Birha, sung by herders, and the Jantsar, Nirai, and Ropni, sung by peasants, during the rhythmic, repetitive tasks of sowing, reaping, and harvesting (399).

Crucially, Sahai-Achuthan's research underscores the performative and ethnomusicological dimensions of these traditions. She emphasises that folk singing is fundamentally a communal act. In group-singing contexts, a strong, driving accent on rhythm is dominant. This rhythmic foundation—essential for coordinating collective agricultural labour or facilitating group dance—is achieved through the strategic deployment of traditional folk instruments. Instruments such as the *chimta* (a rhythmic percussion tool made of iron blades), the *manjira* (metallic cymbals), the *dholak* (a double-ended drum), and the *ektara* (a basic single-stringed instrument) provide the vital acoustic architecture that transforms a recited poem into a compelling communal event (402-403).

While pioneers such as Devendra Satyarthi, Verrier Elwin, and W.C. Archer have made monumental efforts to document and analyse these diverse folk traditions, scholarship has frequently shown the gradual decline of these oral cultures. The "imperceptible

urbanisation of rural culture," the prevalent impact of commercial film music, and a general socio-political indifference have all contributed to the destruction of authentic folk singing. Furthermore, as Sahai-Achuthan astutely points out, the dominant academic trend among folklorists has traditionally been to study the "literary-cum-sociological content of the folk-songs and not so much its musicological aspects" (400), often neglecting the crucial elements of rhythm, tuning, instrumental accompaniment, and physical performance contexts.

This observation leads directly to the critical research gap this paper addresses. While the folk songs of regions such as Uttar Pradesh have been accurately categorised and analysed, and while broad anthropological, socio-economic, and historical data exist concerning the Paharias/Kamars of Central India, focused literary and ethnomusical analyses of the Pahari oral tradition remain notably, and problematically, scarce. Specifically, there is a distinct lack of rigorous scholarship examining how the poetic metaphors of the Pahariå people, as translated into English, intersect directly with their communal performance practices to resist modern cultural erasure actively. How do the specific linguistic choices, environmental symbols, and antiphonal dialogic structures of Pahariå songs function not just as texts, but as dynamic, community-building musical events? This study seeks to answer these questions, shifting the academic gaze from mere sociological documentation to a holistic ethnomusicological and rhetorical critique.

Research Objectives and Methodology

The primary objective of this paper is to bridge the aforementioned academic gap by conducting a rigorous analysis of the Pahari oral tradition. Specifically, this study aims to systematically analyse the rhetorical devices—such as natural metaphors, visual symbols, and dialogic structures—embedded in Pahariå songs, while simultaneously evaluating the performative and ethnomusicological contexts in which these songs are performed. The ultimate goal is to demonstrate how these lyrical compositions function holistically: serving simultaneously as sophisticated literary art, enduring historical repositories, and dynamic communal rituals that actively preserve tribal identity amid modernisation.

The methodology employed in this study is grounded in qualitative textual analysis combined with an ethnomusicological theoretical framework. The primary texts selected for close reading are English translations of Pahariå songs meticulously compiled and translated by Mahendra Kumar Mishra in his seminal work, *Pahariå Oral Tradition* (Sahitya Akademi, 2021), excerpts of which were recently published in the esteemed journal *Indian Literature* (19-20). By applying an ethnomusicological perspective—which inherently treats music as a social process rather than a static acoustic product—this study interprets the translated lyrics not merely as poetry isolated on a page, but as textual representations of dynamic, living performances. The analysis will examine how the Pahari community utilises inherent musical rhythms, antiphonal (call-and-response) dialogue, and localised agricultural symbolism to sustain their tribal worldview, enforce social norms, and collectively process their environmental and socio-economic realities.At the heart of Pahariå's lyrics lies a profound reliance on natural

metaphors and environmental symbolism. Because the Pahariå worldview does not strictly split the human experience from the natural environment, their poetry frequently allows ordinary, down-to-earth experiences and indigenous vegetation to convey the most profound emotional, romantic, and cultural meanings. The tribe's deeply poetic appreciation of nature is evident in their romantic lyrics, where human aesthetics and natural forms become beautifully inextricably linked.In the song titled "Purple Coloured Bean Flower Compared to the Beauty of a Maiden," the singer systematically evaluates the comparative beauty of local vegetation to elevate and express the aesthetic supremacy of his beloved:

Semi flower is beautiful
The Gania flower is more even
Still more does my beloved fascinate(Mishra 20)?

In this concise, visually powerful, and evocative stanza, the local *semi-flower is readily acknowledged as a baseline of natural beauty. At the same time,* the *Gania* flower is positioned above it, symbolising a heightened, more "even" or perfect sense of admiration. By concluding the verse with a rhetorical question— "Still more does my beloved fascinate?"—the singer masterfully suggests that the physical appeal of his beloved transcends even the most enchanting and esteemed aspects of the natural world. This is not merely a private declaration of love; the reference to specific, recognisable flowers as symbols of femininity provides a common, shared linguistic code that the entire community utilises to express admiration and define desire. This collective metaphor thus creates a communal understanding of what is culturally considered beautiful, successfully linking the intense, private emotion of romance to the broader, shared natural environment that the tribe navigates daily.

An even more potent example of this environmental interconnectedness is found in the use of the *tol* seed as a central visual and romantic metaphor. The *tol* seed, which is the fruit of the culturally and economically significant *mahua* tree, carries immense semiotic weight in tribal societies. The physical act of venturing into the forests to gather these seeds in the spring month of *Chait* (March) transcends mere agricultural labour; in the song, it becomes a highly charged ritual of love and longing. In the Pahariåimagination, the distinctly round shape of the tol seed is romantically linked to the beloved's captivating eyes. This profound, nature-based connection is beautifully captured in the verses of "Tol Seed Compared to a Pahariå Maiden's Eye":

O kandamalien,
Went out! For tol' in spring
Eyes of my kandamalien bewitch
O kandamalien, you bewitch, too (Mishra 20).

The *tol* seed here serves as an emotional foundation, embodying the purity, innocence, and magical allure of the young maiden, affectionately known as *kandamalien*. Her eyes are explicitly described as having the power to "bewitch," drawing a direct parallel between

the magnetic pull of romantic love and the magical, life-sustaining allure of nature itself. Ethnomusicologically, the communal performance of this song serves to bridge the physical, acoustic environment with the landscape of human emotion. When the youth consider the *tol* seed while singing, the entire community collectively understands, shares, and validates this symbol. Through the vehicle of song, a routine, physically demanding seasonal agricultural task—gathering seeds in the spring—is culturally transmuted into a shared, lyrical imagery of romance that actively reinforces the tribe's agrarian lifestyle and their deeply spiritual, integrated worldview.

InPahariå culture, the performance of a song is rarely anunsocialendeavour; it is an inherently communal event explicitly designed to foster social cohesion, shared identity, and mutual understanding. Wedding songs, in particular, serve as massive, community-wide participatory events. Structurally, these songs are often composed as playful, antiphonal (call-and-response) dialogues between groups of young men and young women. Rather than mere entertainment, these rhetorical, musical exchanges serve as a culturally emotional connection, providing a safe, public framework for negotiating the agitated traditions of courtship, familial alliances, and rigid gender roles.In the text titled "Marriage Song (Dialogue between young boys and girls)," the male narrator initiates the performative exchange by utilising seemingly innocent, rough observations of local nature to mask his underlying romantic and matrimonial pursuit. He then gradually shifts the lyrical narrative toward local economic hubs and distinct social obligations:

> The ant is climbing the tenapati-water lifting log. I will give a nose pin
> To the beautiful girl looking like chini.
> Bought bamboo basket topla in the Boden weekly market, I found my uncle's daughter always alone.
> I bought potato in the weekly market of Boden. The forest bears came in her way,
> As my uncle's daughter was on their way (Mishra 19).

The opening image of the tiny ant slowly climbing the massive *tenapati* water-lifting log acts as a brilliant, subtle metaphor for the girl's gradual, natural, and perhaps inevitable movement into the young man's life. The subsequent promise to give her a "nose pin," combined with the comparison of her physical beauty to *chini* (sugar), is a critical material and linguistic gesture of affection. In the context of Pahari performance, offering a nose pin is not merely a lyrical flourish; it is a legally and culturally recognised symbol of serious affection and a potential formal marriage proposal. When sung publicly, this gesture becomes a shared communal experience, observed and validated by the larger social structure, including participating families and elders.

Furthermore, the specific lyrical references to commerce—buying a *topla* (bamboo basket) and potatoes at the "Boden weekly market"—ground the romantic, performative lyrics in the tribe's gritty, everyday economic reality and geographical situation. The *topla*

explicitly points back to the Pahariå's primary occupational identity as bamboo weavers. The boy's direct observation of his "uncle's daughter" walking alone establishes the traditional, kin-based parameters of romantic pursuit, highlighting the specific social customs and generational family roles operating within the community. Finally, the abrupt lyrical introduction of "forest bears" crossing her path introduces a vivid, thrilling element of danger to the song. Ethnomusicologically, this is a dramatic shift in the song's narrative tension. The bears are not merely a literal threat in the woods; they symbolise the myriad communal, economic, and environmental challenges that young lovers—and the tribal community at large—must bravely navigate together to ensure survival and prosperity.

When compared with the folk traditions of Uttar Pradesh analysed by Sahai-Achuthan, an interesting divergence in tone is observed. While the U.P. tradition features highly competitive marriage songs where groups hurl "taunts and mocks" and even "abuses... verging on vulgarity" at one another (Sahai-Achuthan 398), the Pahariå "Marriage Song" analysed here operates through a more subtle, nature-infused, and narrative-driven dialogue, reflecting a unique communal ethos.Harvesting crops is the main component of agrarian occupations, requiring immense physical exertion and collective coordination. Consequently, harvest songs form another crucial element of the Pahariå oral tradition. These songs are performed collectively and loudly during rigorous fieldwork, serving the dual ethnomusicological purpose of enhancing group solidarity and lightening the psychological and physical burden of intense manual labour. Structurally, these chants are characterised by driving, rhythmic repetition that perfectly mimics the cyclical, physical nature of agricultural work (e.g., the swing of a sickle, the gathering of sheaves). In doing so, the music effectively transforms the mundane, exhausting act of physical work into a shared, transcendent communal ritual.

Rhetorical devices embedded in these harvest songs frequently invoke divine powers and sacred geographies, seamlessly weaving spiritual reverence directly into the sweaty act of harvesting. The translated "Harvest Song" perfectly exemplifies this holistic synthesis of physical labour, romantic love, and spiritual devotion:

> While cutting the paddy, the hay fell down,
> I will show my palainarinchini
> The place of gods and goddesses – Rajim
> I assure I will not cheat,
> I will take her to Rajim – the place of the goddess (Mishra 19).

The opening imagery of "cutting the paddy" immediately establishes the song as a ritualistic activity inextricably tied to the harvest season. The image of the "hay fell down" serves as a potent visual metaphor for the perpetual cycle of life, representing the triumphant end of the growing season and the simultaneous beginning of the consumption and regeneration phase of agricultural labour.The lyric, "I will show my palainarinchini," reflects the singer's immense pride and profound desire to showcase the bountiful fruits of his labor to his

beloved, paired intimately with anearnest, binding promise to lead her on a pilgrimage to Rajim. Rajim is explicitly identified within the song as "the place of gods and goddesses," a deeply sacred geography. By repeatedly and rhythmically promising to take his beloved to Rajim, the singer elevates the physical act of harvesting from anexhaustingchore to a deeply spiritual journey.From an ethnomusicological standpoint, the live performance of this song in the open fields serves to bridge the material reality of the harvest with the transcendent spiritual realm. The rhythmic repetition not only dictates the pace of the work but also reinforces the community's connection to the divine. It powerfully reflects how the act of undertaking a spiritual journey to a place like Rajim is never merely an individual, private commitment; rather, it is a highly public, communal act that constantly reinforces the tribe's shared ethical values, collective beliefs, and profound reverence for sacred spaces.

Beyond their immense aesthetic value and vital role in community-building, Pahari folk songs serve as critical, living repositories of the tribe's historical knowledge and social architecture. In non-literate or semi-literate societies, song is the primary vehicle for preserving and transmitting crucial data. These songs meticulously encode explicit information regarding social structures, defined gender roles, and vital environmental relationships.For instance, the seemingly simple lyric "I will give a nose pin / To the beautiful girl" explicitly documents and formalises the traditional, patriarchal practice in which men offer specific types of jewellery as part of formal courting and marriage arrangements. It acts as an auditory manual for socially acceptable behaviour. Similarly, the repeated, forceful promise in the Harvest Song to "take her to Rajim" subtly but firmly reinforces the traditional role of men as the primary protectors, guides, and decision-makers within the marital relationship. The songs also map out the tribe's ecological dependency, directly connecting agricultural practices—like the cutting of paddy—to the relationship between the people, their sustenance, and the seasonal cycles. Furthermore, the invocation of deities and sacred locales such as Rajim anchors the tribe's identity within a much broader, enduring cosmological framework, ensuring deep cultural continuity despite the insistentinvasion of external, modernising influences.

Crucially, through oral transmission, these songs serve as essential, highly effective educational tools. Sung across generations, from the elderly to the very young, they actively impart core ethical values, historical narratives, and practical agricultural and social knowledge to younger community members. This uninterrupted transmission is what ensures the fundamental survival of the tribe's heritage, equipping future generations with the specific cultural tools required to navigate their distinct agrarian world. Despite immense external pressures from modernisation, economic shifts, and rapid urbanisation, the Pahariå community's remarkable ability to continuously adapt its songs to reflect contemporary contexts highlights the incredibly dynamic, living nature of its oral traditions. These songs are not archaic museum pieces; they are highly capable of preserving core ancestral cultural values while simultaneously, and necessarily, embracing inevitable change.

Conclusion

The Pahariå folk songs, skilfully translated by Mahendra Kumar Mishra, are rich and profound reflections of the tribe's enduring cultural identity. By blending complex rhetoric, poetic rhythm, and communal performative traditions, these songs effectively express deep human emotions, reinforce societal norms, and preserve historical and ecological knowledge. Utilising vivid, localised natural metaphors (like the tol seed and the Gania flower), rhythmic patterns that closely mimic the physical demands of agricultural life, and extensive cross-generational participation, these songs create an essential shared acoustic space. This space allows for both intense individual emotional expression and the preservation of collective tribal memory. By rigorously analysing these oral traditions through a combined rhetorical and ethnomusicological lens, this study highlights their profound significance. They should not be seen merely as static literary texts to be read in silence but as dynamic, vital, and auditory elements of the Pahariå's social and spiritual fabric. As rapid modernisation, globalisation, and cultural homogenisation pose serious threats to indigenous traditional practices, it is crucial to preserve, document, translate, and critically study these performative texts. Only through such thorough, multi-disciplinary scholarship can we hope to safeguard and genuinely understand the Pahariå tribe's unique, beautiful, and resilient cultural heritage. ■

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The Postmodern Literary Ensemble: A Theoretical Study of Select Postmodern Texts

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The term "postmodernism" has been applied in various contexts, but there is no consensus regarding its definition and scope. It is noteworthy that while the term has gained a significant presence in critical discussions, issues related to its definition and possibilities continue to confuse critics and scholars alike. Like many terms in contemporary critical discourse, "postmodernism" does not lend itself to a strict or closed definition; instead, it is flexible enough to accommodate different interpretations and ideological positions. In its simplest form, postmodernism can be defined as modernism turned against itself, just as poststructuralism can be seen as structuralism in conflict with itself. However, when approaching the term and its usage, it is more productive to understand the contexts closely related to it rather than rely on assumptions or simplistic definitions that may lead to a reductive assessment. In the latter half of the twentieth century, historians, geographers, anthropologists, sociologists, and architects have adopted the term to address issues pertinent to their respective disciplines. Despite its varied applications, there is a common thread in how the term "postmodern" has traversed different fields and challenged the boundaries of conventional literature. This study will explore how Derrida's deconstruction of textual instability and Foucault's analysis of power-discourse networks converge to illuminate the postmodern literary landscape—a fragmented array of narratives in select texts that resist closure, reveal simulated realities, and navigate agency amidst constraint. This critical perspective highlights that postmodernism is not merely a stylistic play, but a profound critique of fixed truths and closures, reflecting recent views on its lasting impact in challenging cultural ideologies.

Keywords: Discourse, Difference, Logocentrism, Modernism, Postmodernism

Introduction

At the elementary level, postmodernism – because of the very obvious prefix 'post' – suggests a rupture or a cleft from the phenomenon recognised and understood as 'modernism.' Postmodernism, so far as it functions as a combinatory word bringing together 'post' and 'modernism,' inevitably invites comparisons with what just preceded it and inaugurates its own definition through the lens of difference. It can therefore be argued that

postmodernism involves a departure from what constituted modernism, a process that has now become characteristic of understanding the etymological baggage by appreciating what it is not. This is an interesting way to begin analysing the discourse of postmodernism – by coming to terms with what it is not – but this is by no means peculiar, for in previous ages too, terms have surfaced and consolidated in critical discourse by an emphasis on difference. In this connection, it would be worth mentioning that in English literature, Romanticism appeared as a reaction to the rigid demands of Neoclassical discourse and Modernism itself sought to cultivate a distance from the principles that were understood as essential to the preceding aesthetics of Victorianism. However, in assuming that these "—isms" are vexed with a polarity of difference, there is the danger of viewing the ideological parameters as reflecting homogeneity. For instance,one of the major problems of following a strictly historical trajectory is to superimpose a semblance of linearity upon developments that were neither necessarily engaged nor followed as a matter of course. Hence, as one seeks to draw a map about developments constituting the prehistory of the postmodern condition, it is necessary to recognise this fact and remember that postmodernism does not augur well to the polemics of a linear and chronological development of discourse.

Whether we see postmodernism as a break or a continuity (as some critics would categorically claim), one must work out his/her reading apparatus in a way that is consistent and engaged; in organising the priorities of both modernism and postmodernism,the same status list doesn't need to hold good for everybody. The viewing positions will considerably differ as will the imperatives involved in such exercises, but it is important to acknowledge that other perspectives may be valid as well. Postmodernism has thus inaugurated a novelty in suggesting that hierarchical reading structures, canonical constructions, cultural privileges and customary givens must be subjected to scrutiny.

A major feature of postmodernism is the focus on the interrogative potential inherent in any phenomenon, including what constitutes itself. This ideological affront has resulted at a very immediate level, the collapse of traditional institutions, dogmatic principles and parochial ideas which were previously not considered worthy of academic engagement. It has introduced irrelevance into haloed portals, questioned homogeneous assumptions and debunked hierarchies. Postmodernism offers space to all, but does not privilege any. It celebrates fragments and mocks origins. The logocentrism reflected in the literature of the nineteenth century, the presence of the omnipotent narrator, the *ur*-narrative (grand narrative) of the classic-realist texts and the idea of fixity has not only been challenged but rendered dysfunctional with the advent of poststructuralist theories like Deconstruction that emphasised fluidity as governing criteria of any causality.

The Emergence and Context of Postmodernism

The context of postmodernism is deeply rooted in the intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic transformations that shaped the latter half of the twentieth century, producing a complex framework for theoretical engagement and literary analysis. Postmodernism

transcends traditional boundaries of genre and discipline, challenging grand narratives and the notion of a singular "truth" while embracing plurality, fragmentation, and irony. It emerged as a reaction against the certainties and structures of modernism, representing a move beyond the optimism embodied by many modernist artists and intellectuals concerning progress, rationality, and universal truths. While the term was first introduced by Arnold Toynbee in 1939, the movement itself flourished in literature, art, and architecture in the postwar decades, particularly from the 1960s onwards. Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*: *A Report on Knowledge* (1979) defined postmodernism as "an incredulity toward metanarratives (Lyotard 21)", articulating scepticism toward the grand, explanatory systems that had dominated Western thought. In this view, postmodernism is both a historical period (post-1950s) and a stylistic category marked by cultural plurality, indeterminacy, and relativism. The paradigm shift from modernism to postmodernism involves a questioning of the Enlightenment ideals of progress, objectivity, and human reason. Instead, postmodernism foregrounds textuality, language games, and the instability of meaning. Its intellectual origins are influenced by notable thinkers such as Nietzsche, who critiqued concepts of absolute truth and the foundations of knowledge, sowing the seeds for later poststructuralist and postmodern critique.

Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* (1979) succinctly analyses the notion of the formal ending of the grand narratives or metanarratives. He defines the 'postmodern' as: 'incredulity towards metanarratives', where metanarratives are understood as 'totalizing stories about history and the goals of the human race that ground and legitimise knowledge and cultural practices (Lyotard 21)'. Through his theory of the end of metanarratives, Lyotard develops his own version of what tends to be a consensus among theorists of the postmodern—postmodernity as an age of fragmentation and pluralism.J.M. Fowles'celebrated novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*(1969) is a brilliant exposition of the debunking of the nineteenth century mythic approximation of the novel as a fiction where the boundaries of reality and illusion get blurred. Moreover, the idea of 'authorial intrusion' in the plot progression and the presence of the three different endings highlight the central tenets of the postmodern condition.

Drawing upon the Greek philosophy of Heraclitus where he talked of the idea of "universal flux", the postmodern condition indeed has been one to celebrate the idea of 'change'.The significance of the idea of 'organic unity' as espoused by Aristotle in *Poetics*, Longinus in his treatise "On Sublimity", Immanuel Kant in *The Critique of Judgment* (1790), Sir Philip Sidney in *An Apology for Poetry*(1595) or S.T. Coleridge in his magnum opus *Biographia Literaria*(1817) has been torn asunder with poststructuralist belief in the notion of 'play' and 'deference'.It exerts pressure upon taken-for-granted foundations and calls for readings that does not submit to any one position, least of all to those conditioned by 'tradition' or 'history.' Hence, the condition of 'multiple endings' in a postmodern novel such asJ.M. Coetzee's *Foe*(1986) or JohnFowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*(1969). Mikhail Bakhtin's theoretical postulation of the narrative structure in novels as evinced

from his book *The Dialogic Imagination*(1981) takes into cognizance the polyphony of voices in a novel. So a postmodern reading of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*(1847)for instance, throws out a wide array of dialogical narratives that refutes the conditional accreditation of it being a prime example of the classic-realist text.The polyphony of narrative voices in the novel irrefutably accounts for the induction of the postmodern perspective. The recognition of the presence of plural perspectives and multiple endings must inform the readings or subject positions that seek to understand 'postmodernism,' as something that decries the traditional idea of pre-conceived formulaic structures.

Defining the Postmodern

Postmodernism eschews fixed meanings and clear boundaries, favouring fragmentation, parody, pastiche, intertextuality, and metafiction. This paper therefore, attempts to devise a parameter to view the recurrent themes and varied theoretical manifestations under the rubric of a homogenised world order that calls forth an ensemble of anything that is postmodern. The need to configure such a strategy is due to the lack of any unanimous range or context of postmodern literature. The common standards set for literary works of such category can be ascribed to fragmentation which abandons any linear structure in favour of fractured narratives, abrupt shifts, and discontinuous composition and the idea of metafiction where texts foreground their own artificiality, reflexively drawing attention to their own status as artefacts (e.g., John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*). Another interesting feature is the use of intertextuality as a mode of interwoven references to other works, genres, or styles (e.g., Jorge Luis Borges's *Ficciones*, Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* etc.). Postmodernism resists unified narratives of identity, opting instead for multiplicity, hybridization, and the dissolution of "the center", while at the same time also seems contesting themes of uncertainty, simulated realities, and unreliable narrators. Irony pervades postmodern texts, questioning the seriousness and the sincerity of the narrative voice. Some of the prominent literary theorists and critics such as Linda Hutcheon, Brian McHale, and Fredric Jameson have analysed these tendencies in detail, linking them to broader cultural, political, and philosophical currents shaping the postmodern era. Through close textual analysis, the paper seeks to uncover how these aforementioned works embody fragmentation, metafiction, and ironic multiplicity, echoing contemporary scholarship on postmodernism's role in amplifying marginalized voices amid hyperreal fragmentation.

It is not surprising, in such a context, to see that postmodernism has introduced the culture of critique so that 'stable' ideas and accepted theories are opened up for cross-examination and serious self- scrutiny. Linda Hutcheon in her seminal work *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989) highlights the ways in which the postmodern modalities actually aid in the process of critique. Hutcheon specifically suggests that postmodernism works through parody to "both legitimise and subvert what it parodies" (Hutcheon 101). She elaborates further as: 'Through a double process of installing and ironising, parody signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference (Hutcheon93).'

It would be pertinent in this context to link up what Hutcheon tries to assert in her earlier book *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) where she goes on to coin the term 'historiographic metafiction' to describe those literary texts that assert an interpretation of the past but are also intensely self-reflexive. Novels like Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*(1981), Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*(1988) are brilliant illustrations of the *fiction-within-a-fiction* framework where the 'past' is re-created in a manner that challenges the authenticity of the vital truth. Saleem Sinai's parental origins and identity in *Midnight's Children*(1981) keeps continually altered as he keeps discovering the truths and the multiple realities he encounters in the process of his growing up. Likewise, Tridib's death which happened decades ago alters the possible realities and truth regarding identity, nationhood and history for the unnamed narrator in *TheShadow Lines*(1988). It must therefore be borne in mind that postmodernism does not suggest an alternative to a dominant version – it facilitates the movement of multiple discourses, rewriting history playfully, blurring facts and inventions, incorporating those that in earlier critical paradigms did not circulate as easily.

Theoretical Foundations: Lyotard, Derrida, Foucault, and Baudrillard

The theoretical basis of postmodernism is a tapestry woven from the works of key French theorists, particularly Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean Baudrillard. Lyotard's scepticism about "metanarratives" led to a valorisation of local narratives and heterogeneous discourses, an approach that spurns universalising tendencies in favour of smaller, contingent stories. Derrida's deconstruction reveals the 'fluidity' and 'instability' of language (Derrida 47), showing how texts may undermine their own claims to coherence or unity. Postmodernism, in Derrida's wake, becomes attentive to intertextual irony, undecidability, and multiplicity of interpretations. Foucault's genealogical approach reframes history as a series of ruptures and discontinuities, examining how discourses shape knowledge and power. Baudrillard's simulacra and "hyperreality" point to the collapse of distinction between representation and reality, a theme of central importance to postmodern art and literature Baudrillard 24).

Theoretical Application on Select Postmodern Works

Thomas Pynchon's novel *Gravity's Rainbow*(1973) epitomizes postmodern techniques, employing nonlinear narrative, parody, and encyclopedic intertextuality. The text destabilizes meaning through playful treatment of conspiracy theories, unreliable narration, and pastiche. Drawing on Lyotard's formulation, the novel's skepticism toward explanatory systems is expressed via its refusal to offer any singular "solution" or authoritative voice, instead presenting a labyrinthine multiplicity of plots and styles very much akin to John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*(1969).Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) interrogates Baudrillard's concept of simulacra and hyper-reality. The protagonist, Jack Gladney, faces a media-saturated world where authentic experience and images blur together, dramatising the collapse of distinctions between the real and the

simulated. The novel's treatment of death, technology, and family exemplifies postmodern skepticism about the ability to access or communicate any "real" truth beneath the layers of mediated experience.

In Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985),the narrative blends autobiography with fiction, employing self-reflexivity, intertextual allusions, and nonlinearity to blur boundaries between reality and story. The text's open-ended structure and play with narrative convention echo Derridean deconstruction, suggesting that identity and meaning are not fixed but continually reconstituted within discourses.Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*(1981)exemplifies both postmodern and postcolonial themes, utilising pastiche, magical realism, and self-reflexive narration. The protagonist's life is entwined with the fate of India, suggesting a decentered history narrated from the margins. Rushdie engages in what Hutcheon terms "historiographic metafiction" (Hutcheon 5),rewriting history with a skeptical, playful voice that refuses any grand narratives or straightforward truths.

Foucault: Power, Knowledge, and Discourse

Foucault's approach, which this paper attempts to juxtapose with that of Derrida's emphasis on linguistic undecidability,prioritises the interdependence of power and knowledge, viewing them as co-constitutive forces enacted through discourse, which is always a construct. Rather than seeing power as repressive or centralised, Foucault articulates a networked, dispersed model: power is seen to operate through localised institutions (prisons, universities, families) and diffuses across social practices, defining what counts as legitimate knowledge. In narrative terms, postmodern fiction often exposes or subverts the discourses that shape characters and readers alike. For instance, in DeLillo's*White Noise* (1985), Foucault's framework illuminates how media, technology, and institutions regulate reality. The media is seen as an agency that blurs real and simulated death. The protagonists are shap---ed by the discursive practices of academia, consumer culture, and medicalisation, never existing outs---ide the reach of these truth-producing apparatuses. The narrative demonstrates Foucault's insight that even knowledge about "truth" is constructed by power-laden institutions, not discovered from a neutral position.

Likewise, Winterson's *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) can be analysed through Foucault's lens by examining how religious, familial, and sexual discourses define and police identity formation. The protagonist Jeanette'sexistence is negotiated within matrices of institutional and community power, and the novel critiques how stories—scriptural, familial, national—work to discipline subjects and dictate permissible modes of existence. Furthermore, another like Foucaultian perspective can be applied to *Midnight's Children*(1981) where Rushdie's narrative foregrounds the contest over historical narratives, dramatising how postcolonial identity and national history are products of competing discourses and power struggles, not of singular truth.

Derrida: Deconstruction and Textual Instability

Derrida's deconstruction challenges any fixed or essential meaning in texts, emphasising the instability and undecidability of language. One of the key principles includes the play of binaries (presence/absence, centre/margin), the impossibility of transcendental meaning, and the focus on *aporia*(Derrida 10), sites of irreconcilable contradiction or ambiguity. Deconstruction as a literary theory therefore, re-examines how texts subvert their apparent meanings, how authorial intent is destabilised as explicated in Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, and how gaps, silences, or paradoxes undermine closure, mirroring semantic overflow.

In Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*(1973), a Derridean reading highlights the persistent play of signifiers: the novel is a dense matrix of intersecting stories, voices, and genres that resist synthesis. Meaning here is constantly deferred—the proliferation of conspiracy theories, symbols, and contradictory plot-lines generates a sense of semantic overflow, refusing any singular narrative closure. For instance, Tyrone Slothrop's quest dissolves into proliferating conspiracies, where rockets symbolise deferred threats. A Derridean *aporia* emerges in lines like the V-2's silent boom—"past, present, future, a roar" (Pynchon 3)—subverting causality. Foucaultian discourses of war and science police bodies, yet Slothrop's fragmentation asserts elusive agency. This resists Jamesonian "flattening of interest" (Jameson 6), instead fueling narrative insurgency.

Similarly, the novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985) can be prospectively deconstructed to show how binaries such as sacred/profane, natural/unnatural, and male/female are interrogated and inverted. The text is self-reflexive, ironically undermining claims to authoritative narration and refusing to stabilise the protagonist's identity: meaning is always produced in play, never fixed. For instance, Winterson embeds fantastical stories within the realistic narrative, often using them to parallel Jeanette's own life. These tales function as a form of "metafiction" (writing about writing), reminding the reader that they are consuming a created, subjective narrative rather than raw truth.In the chapter "Joshua" the narrator switches to allegorical stories—the tale of Winnet and the legend of Sir Perceval—which mirror her own search for identity and struggle against authority.Again, the title of the novel itself is a self-reflexive commentary on the limitation of perspectives. The mother insists that "Oranges are the only fruit" (Winterson 18), representing a single, rigid reality: heterosexuality as a dogma. Jeanette contrary to her mother's perspective discovers there are other fruits, highlighting alternative, queer lifestyles. This forcibly asserts the paper's emphasis on postmodernism's demystification to identity politics.

Again, in *Midnight's Children*(1981), Derrida's notion of différance can be used to explain how Saleem Sinai's narrative constantly refers to, yet postpones, definitive meaning regarding self, nation, and history. Arguably enough, the novel is seen as a palimpsest of memories, legends, and official records, all in conflicting tension; yet unable to supply a final version of truth. Saleem's telepathic conference embodies a *polyphonic nationhood* (italics

mine), but the perforated sheets veil truths, enacting Derridian *différance*. Foucauldian power can also be seen contesting history via Emergency-era sterilizations, paralleling postcolonial magical realism as Hutcheon's theoretical postulation of the standards of a metafiction.

Integrative Framework

This humble effort of bringing Foucault and Derrida, two stalwarts of postmodern theory together, accentuates how power operates not only through institutions and discourses but also through language itself, which is always fragmentary and under discursive erasure. Foucault's theory clarifies the mechanisms through which identities and truths are constructed, re-constructed and contested, while Derrida exposes the inherent undecidability and open-ended multiplicity of textual meanings. Applied to postmodern literature, this combined framework encourages reading for contradiction, agency within constraint, and the impossibility of any fixed or stable closure—precisely the preoccupations that define the postmodern literary condition. Merging Derrida and Foucault spotlights contradiction as postmodern essence, which is what the paper has hitherto tried to assert.

Contemporary Critiques and Legacy

Postmodernism's eclectic embrace of pluralism and its suspicion toward metanarratives have been extensively debated, with critics questioning whether the movement's irony, relativism, and fragmentation lead to cultural paralysis, nihilism, or disengagement. Nevertheless, postmodernism has been credited with opening up new spaces for minority, feminist, postcolonial, and queer expressions, allowing for multiplicity and resisting exclusionary canons.While some have declared an imminent "post-postmodernism," the influence of postmodern techniques and theoretical perspectives persists in contemporary literature, visual arts, and digital culture. The movement's insistence on the constructed, mediated nature of experience continues to animate works at the cutting edge of artistic production.

Interestingly enough, recent scholarship critiques postmodernism in literature for fostering nihilism, relativism, and stylistic exhaustion, while paving the way for successors like Meta-modernism—oscillating between irony and sincerity, reconstruction and deconstruction. It rejects a full metanarrative dismissal, embracing hope, holism, and authenticity. Works such as Julian Barnes's *The Sense of an Ending* (2011),Jennifer Egan's *The Candy House* (2022),and Zadie Smith's *The Fraud* (2023) blend nonlinearity with introspective truth-seeking. Meta-modernism navigates the "metaxy"—a liminal space between extremes—embracing pluralism, emotional depth, and tentative grand narratives like global connectivity or ecological holism (Vermeulen 2). Unlike pure postmodern play, it seeks reconstruction without naivety.

Conclusion

The tracing of a genealogy of postmodernism is by no means an easy task. Technically, to arrive at a closure about what postmodernism means would constitute a

violation of its very character, for postmodernism desists categorisation; instead, it celebrates fragmentation and accommodates a variety of modes, some of which are at cross-purposes with one another. It must be agreed that any map charting the genealogy of postmodernist territory is one of many ways through which the subject may be approached,but also an extremely provisional one. At a time when the absoluteness of definitions is questioned, it would be self-defeating to argue that postmodernism can be submitted to a rigid structure; this is because it resists theories and assumptions about its very 'nature,' which is one of the hallmarks of postmodernism. The presence of heterogeneous discourses within the rubric of 'postmodernism' points to a condition of fluidity that refuses to concentrate into one whole – it instead suggests that postmodernism affords and accommodates a variety of structures, some of them conflicting and contesting one another. In tracing the genealogy of postmodernism, then, it is necessary to appreciate that its prismatic multiplicity does not necessarily have just one center, for centrality of any form is what postmodernism critiques.

[1]**(Endnotes)** [1]By the term 'self-reflexive' Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* seems to refer to those writers who are critical of their own version of truth as being partial, biased, incomplete, etc. ■

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Urban Dreamscapes: Space, Identity, and Belonging in *All We Imagine as Light*

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Cinema serves as a powerful medium to explore the intricate relationships between urban landscapes and the lived experiences of its inhabitants. *All We Imagine as Light* (2023), directed by Payal Kapadia, presents a nuanced portrayal of the city as a dynamic space that shapes and is shaped by its residents, particularly through the lens of migration, gender, and class. This paper examines the representation of city and space in the film, analyzing how urban environments function as both a site of opportunities and constraints for its characters. Drawing from spatial theory and cinematic urbanism, the study interrogates how the film constructs the city as a contested space—one that reflects socio-economic hierarchies, personal aspirations, and emotional dislocations. Through a close reading of mise-en-scène, soundscapes, and narrative structures, this paper argues that *All We Imagine as Light* redefines the cinematic cityscape by foregrounding marginalized voices and their negotiations with space. The film's exploration of interior and exterior spaces, movement within the city, and the tension between belonging and alienation underscores the complex interplay between individual agency and the urban environment. By situating the film within the broader discourse on spatial politics and cinematic representation, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how contemporary cinema reimagines the city as a site of both struggle and transcendence.

Keywords: Cinema and urban space, spatial theory, cinematic urbanism, migration, gender, class, socio-economic hierarchies, spatial politics, cityscape, belonging and alienation, movement in the city

Introduction

Cinema has long served as a lens through which urban landscapes and their socio-cultural implications are explored. *All We Imagine as Light* (2024), directed by Payal Kapadia, offers a poignant meditation on the intersection of space, identity, and belonging within an urban setting. Through its depiction of city life, the film delves into the complexities of migration, gender, and class, presenting the city as both an enabler of dreams and a site of alienation. This paper examines how *All We Imagine as Light* reconfigures urban space by foregrounding marginalized experiences and interrogating spatial politics within contemporary cinematic discourse.

All We Imagine as Light (2024) is a quiet, lyrical film about three women in Mumbai and the emotional spaces they inhabit—loneliness, friendship, desire, and small hopes—set against the pulse of the city. The story mainly follows Prabha, a middle-aged nurse who lives a disciplined, emotionally restrained life. Her husband migrated to Germany years ago after an arranged marriage and has almost completely disappeared from her life. Though technically married, Prabha exists in a limbo—neither wife nor single woman—carrying silent loneliness and unfulfilled intimacy. Her roommate Anu, a younger nurse, is very different. She is in love with a Muslim man, Shiaz, and their relationship has to remain secret because of religious and social constraints. Anu struggles between personal desire and the expectations imposed by family, society, and communal boundaries. The third woman, Parvaty, works as a cook in the hospital. She faces eviction after her husband's death because she lacks legal documents to prove ownership of her home. Her story highlights the brutal realities of urban development and how the poor—especially older women—are pushed out of the city. When Parvaty decides to return to her coastal village, Prabha and Anu accompany her. This journey away from Mumbai becomes a moment of emotional release and transformation. In the quieter, open landscape, suppressed feelings surface, relationships soften, and the women briefly experience freedom—from the city, from fear, and from imposed roles.

The film does not rely on dramatic twists. Instead, it uses silence, everyday routines, light, rain, and city sounds to explore inner lives. The title itself suggests how hope and warmth are often imagined rather than fully possessed. At its core, *All We Imagine as Light* is about: women's emotional invisibility, migrant life and urban alienation, love constrained by social norms and friendship as quiet resistance. It's a film that feels more than it explains—gentle, political, and deeply human.

Spatial Theory and Cinematic Urbanism

The theoretical framework of this study draws from spatial theorists such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Marc Augé, whose works illuminate the relationship between space and social structures. Lefebvre's concept of the production of space (1991) is instrumental in understanding how urban environments in the film serve as contested sites, shaped by socio-economic hierarchies. Similarly, de Certeau's notion of everyday spatial practices (1984) provides insight into how the characters navigate and reclaim the city, while Augé's theory of non-places (1995) helps to contextualize transient urban settings and the alienation they evoke.

Lefebvre, Spatial Criticism, and *All We Imagine as Light*

Henri Lefebvre's concept of the production of space offers a crucial framework for understanding how urban space in *All We Imagine as Light* functions as a contested terrain shaped by socio-economic power relations. Lefebvre famously asserts that: "(Social) space is a (social) product" (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 26). This statement dismantles the idea of space as a neutral or passive backdrop and instead foregrounds it as something actively produced

through ideology, labour, law, and everyday practice. In the film, Mumbai emerges not merely as a setting but as a constructed urban reality that privileges capital, legality, and efficiency over lived experience.

Lefebvre's spatial triad—spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space—helps map how power operates in the film.

1. Spatial Practice (Perceived Space)

Spatial practice refers to the material and routine organization of everyday life. The film repeatedly shows hospital corridors, cramped living quarters, public transport, and nocturnal cityscapes. These repetitive movements underline how urban space disciplines bodies—particularly female, working-class bodies.

Prabha's mobility is restricted to functional spaces of labour and rest, reflecting Lefebvre's observation that modern cities produce subjects who are efficient yet emotionally constrained. As Lefebvre notes: "Every society produces its own space" (1991, p. 31). Mumbai produces Prabha as a caregiver and worker but denies her emotional and spatial autonomy.

2. Representations of Space (Conceived Space)

Representations of space are the dominant, planned visions imposed by institutions such as the state, urban planners, and capitalist forces. This dimension is most visible in Parvaty's eviction. Despite decades of residence, she is erased by the city's legal logic because she lacks documents. Lefebvre critiques this abstract, bureaucratic understanding of space: "Abstract space is a product of violence" (1991, p. 285).

The violence here is not physical but structural. Urban redevelopment transforms lived homes into exchangeable real estate, displacing vulnerable populations—particularly widowed, ageing women like Parvaty. The city's conceived space thus clashes violently with lived space.

3. Representational Space (Lived Space)

Representational spaces are spaces of emotion, memory, imagination, and resistance. These are the spaces most closely aligned with the film's aesthetic. Prabha's room, Anu's secret encounters, and the women's shared silences create intimate geographies that resist the city's abstract logic. Lefebvre describes lived space as: "Space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols" (1991, p. 39).

The film's title—*All We Imagine as Light*—signals this reliance on imagination as a form of survival. Hope, intimacy, and freedom exist largely in imagined or fleeting spatial moments rather than stable urban locations.

Lefebvre's work forms a cornerstone of spatial criticism, a mode of analysis that foregrounds space as a site of power. Edward Said's idea that space is central to systems of

domination resonates strongly here. Like colonial spaces in Said's work, Mumbai is organized through exclusion and hierarchy, determining who may belong and who must be displaced.

Similarly, Michel Foucault's concept of disciplinary space is visible in institutional settings such as the hospital, where bodies are regulated through schedules, surveillance, and professional norms. The hospital becomes what Foucault would call a heterotopic space—a site that reflects social order while masking inequality.

Together, Lefebvre, Said, and Foucault enable us to read the city in the film as:a space produced by power, a mechanism of social regulation and a site where quiet resistance emerges through lived experience.

Through Lefebvre's concept of the production of space and the broader framework of spatial criticism, *All We Imagine as Light* exposes how urban environments are shaped by capitalist abstraction, gendered labour, and legal hierarchies. The film ultimately suggests that while the city may dominate material space, lived and imagined spaces remain crucial sites of resistance and human connection.

The significance of spatial theory lies in its ability to decipher how films construct and deconstruct the urban experience. Films, particularly those engaging with themes of displacement and migration, serve as visual texts that articulate the lived realities of city dwellers. The urban landscape, as depicted in cinema, is a site where historical and contemporary discourses on power, mobility, and resistance intersect. In the case of *All We Imagine as Light*, the film does not merely portray the city as a passive backdrop but as an active participant in the narratives of its protagonists.

de Certeau's Everyday Spatial Practices in *All We Imagine as Light*

Michel de Certeau's theory of everyday spatial practices, developed in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), provides a vital lens for understanding how marginalized subjects negotiate and subtly reclaim urban space. While urban space is largely structured by institutional strategies—planning, law, surveillance—de Certeau foregrounds the tactics employed by ordinary individuals who operate within these systems without fully controlling them.

De Certeau defines tactics as practices that lack a proper place and must operate within spaces controlled by others: "A tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus" (de Certeau 37). In *All We Imagine as Light*, the women's lives unfold within strategic urban spaces such as hospitals, rental rooms, and transit networks. Yet they tactically inhabit these spaces through everyday actions that momentarily suspend dominant controls.

Prabha's repetitive movement through Mumbai—walking to work, commuting, returning to her small room—illustrates what de Certeau calls the enunciative function of walking. He argues: "Walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language"

(97). Prabha's walks do not alter the city's structure, but they produce meaning, memory, and emotional presence within it. Her quiet pauses and routines transform regulated urban pathways into lived, intimate spaces.

Anu's clandestine relationship with Shiaz further exemplifies tactical spatial practice. Their secret meetings rely on fleeting opportunities and marginal locations that escape sustained surveillance. De Certeau observes that tactics: "must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers" (37). Through these brief encounters, Anu reclaims the city as a space of desire, challenging communal, moral, and spatial boundaries imposed on women's bodies.

Parvaty's long-term inhabitation of her home represents a deeply rooted everyday practice, built through years of routine use. However, her eviction exposes the fragility of such tactics when confronted with aggressive urban strategies. As de Certeau notes, tactics do not accumulate power: "What it wins, it cannot keep" (37). Parvaty's displacement thus underscores the limits of everyday resistance within capitalist urban regimes.

The film's movement away from Mumbai toward the coastal village offers a contrast to the city's tactical demands. Outside the city, space no longer requires constant improvisation, highlighting how urban life forces marginalized subjects into continuous negotiation simply to exist. By applying de Certeau's framework, *All We Imagine as Light* reveals how walking, waiting, meeting, and remembering function as spatial acts of quiet resistance. The film complements Lefebvre's structural critique by showing how power is not only imposed from above but also lived, negotiated, and momentarily unsettled through everyday practices.

City as Lived and Affective Space

Payal Kapadia's *All We Imagine as Light* constructs Mumbai as a lived, dynamic urban space that continually oscillates between inclusion and exclusion. The city is not presented as a static backdrop but as an affective landscape shaped by class, gender, labour, and legality. As the protagonists navigate diverse urban geographies—hospitals, rented rooms, streets, transit systems, and marginal neighborhoods—they encounter both the possibilities of mobility and intimacy and the limitations imposed by their social positions.

The film's mise-en-scène foregrounds a persistent contrast between personal and public spaces. Domestic interiors—particularly the shared room occupied by Prabha and Anu—function as spaces of temporary refuge and negotiation. These interiors are modest, dimly lit, and sparsely furnished, yet they allow moments of emotional vulnerability: Prabha's silent contemplation of her absent husband's gift, Anu's whispered phone conversations, and the women's small acts of care toward one another. These interiors become sites where private desires and anxieties can be tentatively expressed, even if never fully resolved.

In contrast, the exterior cityscape embodies both aspiration and restriction. Streets, hospital corridors, and public transport systems are crowded, noisy, and impersonal. The

hospital—framed through long shots of corridors and repetitive routines—emphasizes regulation and anonymity. Prabha and Anu are visually absorbed into institutional space, reinforcing how urban systems value them primarily as labouring bodies rather than emotional subjects. The city offers employment and movement, but rarely belonging.

Kapadia's use of cinematic techniques plays a crucial role in rendering the city as an affective landscape. The film's sound design oscillates between the constant cacophony of Mumbai—traffic, trains, hospital machinery, overlapping voices—and moments of near silence. These quieter moments, often occurring indoors or at night, allow introspection and emotional resonance. The contrast between noise and silence reinforces the tension between public visibility and private interiority, between being present in the city and feeling emotionally displaced within it.

Movement is another key expressive element. Repeated sequences of commuting—walking, waiting, travelling—underscore a sense of motion without transformation. Characters are constantly on the move, yet their social circumstances remain largely unchanged. This reinforces the paradox of urban modernity: mobility does not necessarily translate into freedom.

The interplay of light and shadow further reflects the protagonists' fluctuating relationship with the city. Night-time sequences bathed in artificial light convey both intimacy and isolation. Light often falls unevenly on faces and interiors, suggesting partial visibility—lives lived in fragments, never fully illuminated. The title itself gestures toward this idea: light exists as something imagined, desired, and fleeting rather than fully possessed.

Spatial Justice and Urban Inequality

The film also engages powerfully with the concept of spatial justice, foregrounding the unequal distribution of urban resources, security, and access. Parvaty's eviction is central here. Her neighborhood—marked as informal, precarious, and undocumented—is rendered vulnerable to erasure by redevelopment and bureaucratic governance. Despite decades of residence, her lack of legal documentation renders her spatially disposable.

This depiction reflects broader socio-political realities in Indian cities, where urban planning privileges economic elites while marginal communities are pushed to the peripheries. Class and gender intersect sharply: as an elderly, widowed, working-class woman, Parvaty's mobility and security are severely restricted. Her displacement exposes the violence of planning processes that recognise property over presence and legality over lived history.

Similarly, Anu's restricted romantic mobility—her need to conceal her relationship due to religious and social boundaries—demonstrates how gendered and communal norms regulate access to urban space. Certain neighborhoods and spaces remain conditionally accessible, reinforcing the idea that the city is experienced differently depending on one's social location.

Through its careful attention tomise-en-scène, sound, light, and movement, *All We Imagine as Light* presents Mumbai as a city that is felt as much as it is inhabited. The film exposes the contradictions of urban life: opportunity alongside exclusion, movement alongside stasis, visibility alongside erasure. By foregrounding everyday experiences of women navigating institutional, domestic, and marginal spaces, Kapadia critiques the uneven spatial logics of contemporary urbanism and calls attention to the emotional costs of inhabiting a city that offers survival but withholds belonging.

Gender, Class, and the Politics of Urban Space in *All We Imagine as Light*

The film's engagement with gender and class dynamics is central to its spatial discourse. *All We Imagine as Light* reveals how women's experiences of urban space are shaped by patriarchal structures, economic precarity, and institutional control, while simultaneously foregrounding moments of resistance, resilience, and female solidarity. As Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (2001) argue, cinematic representations of the city are never neutral; they either reinforce or challenge dominant ideological formations. By centering the everyday lives of working-class women rather than narratives of mobility, success, or spectacle, Kapadia's film subverts conventional urban imaginaries and instead foregrounds the vulnerabilities that structure women's access to the city.

Mumbai is depicted as a space that is both empowering and alienating. For Prabha and Anu, the city offers employment and relative independence, yet this autonomy is deeply circumscribed. Their mobility is largely limited to functional routes—home, hospital, transport—suggesting that women's access to urban space is mediated through labour and necessity rather than leisure or pleasure. Leisure spaces, when they appear, are carefully negotiated and often temporary, underscoring the uneven distribution of urban freedoms.

Public spaces in the film frequently operate as zones of surveillance and constraint. Night-time travel, crowded buses, and anonymous streets are imbued with a quiet tension, reflecting women's heightened awareness of vulnerability in public space. Anu's romantic relationship, for instance, cannot unfold openly within the city; it must be hidden in marginal or transient locations, illustrating how gendered and communal norms regulate intimacy and visibility in urban settings. These spaces, though technically public, remain socially exclusionary.

Class further intensifies these gendered spatial restrictions. Parvaty's eviction demonstrates how working-class women are rendered spatially precarious, their long-term presence erased by bureaucratic and developmental priorities. Her displacement exposes how urban governance systematically privileges economic elites while denying security and permanence to marginalized residents. In this context, the city's promise of opportunity is revealed as conditional and unevenly distributed.

Yet the film does not portray women merely as victims of spatial oppression. Instead, it highlights acts of everyday resistance: shared living arrangements, quiet companionship,

tactical navigation of the city, and moments of care that create alternative spatial meanings. Female solidarity becomes a counter-spatial practice, enabling the women to endure and re-imagine the city on their own terms. These gestures may not dismantle structural inequalities, but they allow for temporary reclamations of agency within an otherwise restrictive urban environment.

Through its focus on gendered and classed experiences of space, *All We Imagine as Light* challenges dominant cinematic narratives that associate cities with progress, freedom, and success. Instead, Kapadia presents the city as a site of negotiation—where empowerment coexists with alienation, and where women's lives unfold in the interstices between constraint and possibility.

Migration, Urban Precarity, and Emotional Geographies in *All We Imagine as Light*

Migration plays a crucial role in shaping the identities and spatial experiences of the protagonists in *All We Imagine as Light*. The film's portrayal of migrant life in Mumbai resonates strongly with David Harvey's understanding of urbanization as both a spatial and economic process, inseparable from capitalist restructuring and labour mobility. In *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1989), Harvey emphasizes that urban spaces are continuously reshaped by flows of capital and labour, producing instability and uneven development. Kapadia's film visualizes this instability through the everyday lives of migrant women whose presence in the city is economically necessary yet socially precarious.

Prabha, Anu, and Parvaty occupy Mumbai as internal migrants, individuals who sustain the city's healthcare and service sectors while remaining marginal to its promises of permanence and security. Their living conditions—shared rooms, rented spaces, informal neighborhoods—reflect what Harvey describes as the flexibilization of labour and life under late capitalism, where stability is replaced by constant negotiation. The protagonists are always in transit, both physically and emotionally, navigating an urban terrain that offers livelihood but withholds rooted belonging. Their search for stability—whether through work, relationships, or home—reveals the fragility of migrant identity in a city structured by displacement and renewal.

Parvaty's eviction is particularly emblematic of Harvey's argument that urban development often proceeds through "accumulation by dispossession" (137). Her removal from a long-inhabited home demonstrates how migrants' claims to the city remain vulnerable when confronted with redevelopment agendas that privilege capital over lived history. The city's transformation thus produces not only spatial displacement but also emotional rupture.

Alongside these material conditions, the film foregrounds emotional geography—the ways emotions are attached to specific places and movements. Mumbai in *All We Imagine as Light* is not mapped solely through streets and buildings but through memory, longing, and affect. Ordinary urban spaces—hospital corridors, train compartments, small rooms—accumulate emotional meaning through repetition and association. Prabha's room, for

instance, becomes a site of suspended intimacy, where memories of an absent husband coexist with present solitude. The space holds emotional residue, transforming a functional interior into a landscape of waiting and unresolved desire.

Kapadia uses visual metaphors to convey these emotional geographies. Reflections in glass, rain-soaked streets, dim interiors, and night-time lighting blur the boundary between inner states and external environments. Mundane urban spaces are thus reimagined as sites of longing and endurance. The city is not merely inhabited; it is felt, remembered, and imagined. This is particularly evident in the film's quieter sequences, where minimal dialogue allows space itself to carry emotional weight.

The journey away from Mumbai toward the coastal landscape marks a shift in emotional geography. Here, space opens up, sound recedes, and the women's affective relationship to their surroundings changes. This contrast underscores how the city compresses emotion, forcing migrants to internalize longing and loss, while alternative spaces allow for emotional articulation. Yet even this movement does not fully resolve displacement; it only temporarily reconfigures it.

Through its engagement with migration and emotional geography, *All We Imagine as Light* presents urban belonging as tentative, fragmented, and deeply affective. The film suggests that for migrants, the city is never fully possessed; it is continuously negotiated through labour, memory, and emotion. In doing so, Kapadia aligns with Harvey's critique of urban modernity while extending it into an intimate, gendered exploration of how cities are lived from the margins.

Aesthetic Strategies and the Cinematic Construction of Urban Space

The aesthetic choices in *All We Imagine as Light* play a crucial role in shaping its nuanced representation of urban space. Kapadia's cinematography foregrounds the interplay of light and shadow, producing a dreamlike visual texture that reflects the liminal condition of the characters, who exist between belonging and displacement, intimacy and isolation. This emphasis on ambiguity aligns with André Bazin's argument that cinematic realism does not lie in spectacle but in allowing reality to "reveal itself in time and space" (Bazin 35). By avoiding overt visual manipulation, the film allows the city to emerge organically as a lived environment rather than a stylized urban fantasy.

Night-time cityscapes illuminated by artificial light, rain-soaked streets, and dim interiors blur the boundary between realism and reverie. These images evoke what Gilles Deleuze describes as the time-image, where cinema no longer organizes space through action and causality but through duration, perception, and affect. In such moments, the city is not something the characters act upon; instead, it presses upon them, shaping their emotional states. The prolonged shots of Prabha alone in her room or walking through the city at night exemplify Deleuze's claim that modern cinema reveals characters who are "no longer agents but seers" (Deleuze 2).

The film's use of long takes and observational camera work further situates it within realist and slow cinema traditions. By lingering on everyday activities—commuting, waiting, working—the camera emphasizes duration and repetition, allowing viewers to experience the city's rhythms rather than merely observe them. This strategy resonates with Matthew Flanagan's understanding of slow cinema as a form that foregrounds "contemplative temporality" and resists the accelerated pace of mainstream urban narratives. Crowded streets convey density and exhaustion, while extended shots of hospital corridors and domestic interiors highlight stillness and emotional suspension.

Sound design plays an equally significant role in constructing urban space as an affective environment. Drawing on Michel Chion's concept of the soundscape and ambient sound, the film layers traffic noise, construction sounds, distant conversations, and mechanical hums to create an immersive auditory field. According to Chion, sound does not merely accompany images but "spatializes emotion", shaping how viewers perceive space and mood (Chion 47). In *All We Imagine as Light*, moments of near silence—particularly in interiors or late-night scenes—become charged with emotional intensity, offering temporary relief from the city's sensory overload and enabling introspection.

The film's fragmented narrative structure further mirrors the disjointed experience of urban life. Rather than following a linear, goal-oriented plot, the narrative unfolds through episodic sequences and pauses, reflecting the unpredictability of city living. This approach aligns with neorealist traditions, where, as Bazin notes, narrative coherence is often subordinated to the "moral weight of everyday reality" (Bazin 40). Encounters appear and disappear without resolution, reinforcing the sense that urban existence is shaped by contingency rather than control.

By combining observational realism, affective soundscapes, and a non-linear narrative, Kapadia situates *All We Imagine as Light* within a cinematic tradition that resists spectacle-driven representations of the city. Instead, the film constructs urban space as something to be felt, endured, and negotiated, particularly by marginalized subjects. Its aesthetic restraint becomes a political gesture, making visible the slow violence, emotional labour, and quiet resilience embedded in everyday urban life.

Conclusion

By situating *All We Imagine as Light* within the broader discourse of spatial politics and cinematic urbanism, this study demonstrates how contemporary cinema can reimagine the city as a space shaped simultaneously by structural inequality and intimate human experience. Kapadia's film resists viewing urban space as a neutral or purely functional entity; instead, it foregrounds the city as a lived, contested, and affective environment where identities are continuously negotiated. Through its focus on gendered labour, migration, and everyday spatial practices, the film exposes the uneven distribution of visibility, mobility, and belonging that defines urban life.

Kapadia's portrayal of working-class women unsettles dominant cinematic narratives of urban progress and success, replacing them with a vision of the city marked by precarity, resilience, and solidarity. The film's engagement with gendered spaces reveals how patriarchal and class-based structures regulate women's access to public and private realms, while its depiction of migration underscores the fragility of belonging in cities shaped by economic flux and displacement. At the same time, the film's attention to emotional geography highlights how urban spaces are invested with memory, longing, and affect, transforming ordinary locations into sites of quiet endurance and resistance.

Aesthetically, *All We Imagine as Light* employs a poetic visual language—through its use of light and shadow, long takes, ambient soundscapes, and episodic narrative structure—to align form with political meaning. These stylistic choices enable the film to register the slow rhythms, silences, and emotional textures of marginalized urban lives, offering an alternative cinematic grammar that privileges observation over spectacle. In doing so, the film not only critiques existing urban hierarchies but also gestures toward the possibility of more humane ways of inhabiting the city.

Ultimately, this paper contributes to ongoing conversations in spatial theory and film studies by demonstrating how cinema functions as a powerful mediator of urban experience. *All We Imagine as Light* exemplifies how film can both reflect the realities of contemporary urban life and imaginatively reshape them, inviting viewers to reconsider notions of space, belonging, and justice in the modern cityscape. ■

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Edith Wharton and the Silent Architecture of Race

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Edith Wharton has long been celebrated as a formidable critic of class stratification and gendered oppression within elite American society. However, critical attention to her treatment of race, particularly the construction and normalization of whiteness, has often remained marginal. This article of mine examines the intricate intersections of Race, Class, and Gender in Wharton's fiction, with specific focus on *The House of Mirth* (1905) and *Summer* (1917). Drawing upon the critical insights of Elizabeth Ammons, Toni Morrison, and Edward Said; my paper argues that while Wharton incisively exposes the entrapments faced by women within patriarchal and class-bound structures, her narratives simultaneously reinforce racial hierarchies rooted in Anglo-Saxon supremacy. Lily Bart's tragic trajectory exemplifies a racialized master plot in which whiteness functions both as cultural capital and existential confinement, while Charity Royall's portrayal in *Summer* mobilizes tropes of darkness, primitivism, and sexual excess to justify patriarchal control. Through close textual analysis and contextual reading, my article demonstrates that Wharton's fiction occupies an ambivalent position-critiquing gender oppression while remaining deeply invested in racial privilege. By situating Wharton within the racial imagination of early twentieth-century America, the study reveals how her work both unsettles and sustains the intertwined ideologies of whiteness, class, and empire.

Keywords: Racial ideology, class, gender, whiteness, patriarchy, marginalization, primitivism.

Introduction

Race in Edith Wharton's fiction is rarely articulated overtly. It does not announce itself through explicit commentary or dramatic confrontation, yet it operates persistently beneath the polished surfaces of manners, decorum, and social ritual. Like an unseen architectural framework, Race silently shapes the moral, aesthetic, and social universe of her novels. Wharton's world-often perceived as exclusively concerned with class anxiety, marriage politics, and feminine constraint-rests upon an unexamined foundation of racial privilege that demands critical attention.

Wharton wrote at a historical moment marked by imperial expansion, scientific racism, and the widespread belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority. The early twentieth century witnessed the consolidation of racial hierarchies through immigration policies, colonial ventures, and cultural narratives that aligned whiteness with refinement, rationality, and moral authority. Although Wharton is frequently read as a writer who challenged social

hypocrisy and gendered injustice, her fiction simultaneously absorbs and reproduces the racial ideologies of her age.

This article seeks to examine that paradox. It argues that Wharton's feminist critique is inseparable from and often compromised by her investment in racialized notions of belonging and value. In *The House of Mirth*, Lily Bart's celebrated beauty and tragic downfall are deeply entangled with her performance of Anglo-Saxon whiteness, which functions as both her social currency and her existential limitation. In *Summer*, Wharton reverses this racial coding by portraying Charity Royall as dark, unruly, and sexually dangerous; thereby legitimizing her subjugation through white patriarchal authority.

Multidimensional Aspects

Edith Wharton's fiction is often celebrated for its acute depiction of gendered constraints within elite New York society, yet the subtle scaffolding of race underpins much of her social critique. In novels like *The House of Mirth* and *Summer*, Wharton constructs a world in which social norms, aesthetic standards, and moral hierarchies are deeply intertwined with racial ideology. While she interrogates patriarchal expectations, particularly through the struggles of her heroines, the unspoken privileging of whiteness persists as a foundational element of her narrative universe. Lily Bart, for example, is at once a figure of resistance and of racialized conformity: her beauty, charm, and social capital are inseparable from her Anglo-Saxon identity. "The noble buoyancy of her attitude, its suggestion of soaring grace, revealed the touch of poetry in her beauty."(Ammons17)

This duality exemplifies what Elizabeth Ammons identifies as a "racialized master plot" within Wharton's fiction, where whiteness functions as both a currency and a constraint. Lily's position in society is precarious not merely because of her gender, but because the elite social order she navigates is inseparable from racialized hierarchies that valorize Anglo-Saxon heritage and exclude others. The construction of whiteness in Wharton's works is most evident through her meticulous attention to aesthetic performance. The tableau vivant in *The House of Mirth* crystallizes this interplay of race and gender. When Lily assumes the guise of Mrs. Lloyd, an emblem of Anglo-Saxon purity, her body becomes a living testament to social and racial ideals. "It was as though she had stepped, not out of, but into, Reynolds's canvas."(Ammons56)

By contrast, the exoticized figure of Cleopatra, with her associations of sensuality and racial otherness, is consciously avoided, demonstrating Wharton's implicit alignment of social virtue with racial whiteness. This act of performative whiteness situates Lily not merely as a participant in society but as a visual symbol of its normative ideals. Here, race operates relationally: it is defined in opposition to the exoticized or racialized "other," echoing Toni Morrison's framework of Africanism, in which whiteness requires the construction of subordinate categories to define and maintain its supremacy. The subtlety of Wharton's racial coding ensures that whiteness is both unmarked and omnipresent, shaping the possibilities of self-expression, social mobility, and moral judgment.

Wharton’s depiction of social outsiders further underscores this dynamic. Simon Rosedale, the Jewish suitor in *The House of Mirth*, exemplifies early twentieth-century anti-Semitic stereotypes: his physical description-”small, glossy-looking man” with “sidelong eyes”-signals otherness and contrasts with the pale, “sweatless perfection” of Lily Bart and her peers. “He was a small, glossy-looking man, with a face of strongly Semitic type.”(Ammons92)

Yet Rosedale’s social ambition also reveals the hypocrisies of the Anglo-Saxon elite. In positioning him as both morally suspect and socially inferior, Wharton reinforces the normative whiteness of her main characters while simultaneously critiquing the social system’s reliance on exclusionary hierarchies. The interplay of class, gender, and racial identity here is significant: Rosedale’s “outsider” status is not merely economic or cultural but is deeply racialized, emphasizing how Wharton’s critique of social mobility is inseparable from prevailing notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority.

Wharton’s subtle racial coding extends beyond social outsiders to her portrayal of elite women, whose worth is often inseparable from their alignment with Anglo-Saxon ideals. Lily Bart’s struggles, while framed in terms of gender oppression and financial precarity, are also bound up with the unspoken requirement of racial conformity. Her failure to secure a socially acceptable marriage is amplified not only by patriarchal expectations but also by the invisible scaffolding of whiteness. “She had been brought up to believe that a woman’s chief asset was her beauty.”(Ammons22)

In this sense, Lily’s narrative demonstrates a paradox: she critiques the oppressive mechanisms of society for women, yet her power and vulnerability are always measured against an unmarked standard of racial purity. The ideological weight of whiteness permeates even intimate social spaces, dictating aesthetic judgments, moral assessments, and the boundaries of social acceptance.

The dynamics of race in Summer offer a complementary perspective, revealing how Wharton’s rural settings mediate gender and racialized hierarchies differently. Charity Royall, the protagonist, is cast as dark, wild, and unruly, a figure marked by her otherness in opposition to the white patriarchal authority embodied by Harney. “She was a dark girl, with sullen eyes and roughened skin.”(Ammons23)

Her sexualized and racialized depiction reflects a broader societal anxiety about female autonomy among racialized bodies. Charity’s subjugation through marriage and motherhood illustrates the persistent alignment of gender control with racial and class hierarchies: her desires must be disciplined by white authority to preserve social order. Wharton’s feminist critique is present but constrained; the intersection of race, class, and gender means that when these axes of identity conflict, the imperatives of racial and social hierarchy dominate. Charity’s narrative thus parallels Lily Bart’s story in its exploration of female resistance, yet the mechanisms of control are more explicitly racialized and

geographically situated, highlighting Wharton's attentiveness to both social and spatial distinctions in her construction of hierarchy.

Travel writing and personal memoirs provide further insight into Wharton's racial imagination. In *A Backward Glance* and *In Morocco*, she frequently situates herself in relation to non-white populations, often through the lens of superiority or exoticism. Descriptions of local people and customs, while occasionally admiring, are framed by a comparative discourse that privileges European and Anglo-American standards. "The motionless groups of veiled women had the fixity of figures in a frieze."(Goldman116)

Her interactions with African American domestic workers, Mary Johnson and Susan Minneman, similarly reveal relational constructions of Race: their labor, physical appearance, and culinary skill are foregrounded not merely for appreciation but to illuminate the refinement and moral authority of the white household. "The Negro cook ruled the kitchen with a despotism tempered only by her genius."(Goldman-45)

Toni Morrison's concept of Africanism is particularly relevant here; the presence of racialized others in Wharton's texts functions to define and reinforce the social and psychological identity of whiteness. In this sense, even acts of praise or attention cannot be disentangled from the broader ideological framework that positions whiteness as normative and aspirational.

Wharton's engagement with imperialist ideology further situates her work within global racial hierarchies. Wealthy characters, moving across continents, display a sense of entitlement and proprietorship reminiscent of colonialist perspectives. The elite are portrayed as cosmopolitan, yet their mobility and cultural authority are implicitly justified by assumptions of Anglo-Saxon superiority. *The House of Mirth*, for example, aligns Lily Bart's social struggle with broader structures of racialized global consciousness: elite New Yorkers navigate the world as if it belongs to them, their actions and desires informed by unexamined imperialist and racial ideologies. "She had been accustomed to think that she could command her world."(Goldman178)

Such portrayals underscore the inseparability of race from social critique in Wharton's fiction; even in narratives focused on gender oppression, racial hierarchies remain foundational, shaping character interactions, social mobility, and the consequences of transgression.

The entanglement of race, gender, and class in Wharton's fiction becomes particularly pronounced when examining the moral and social consequences of her characters' actions. Lily Bart's demise in *The House of Mirth* is not simply a tragedy of social or economic failure, it is a coded reinforcement of racial and moral norms. Her beauty, privilege, and social skill, though exceptional, are circumscribed by the unspoken rules of racialized society.

"She had learned by experience that she had neither the aptitude nor the moral constancy to remake her life on new lines."(Goldman88)

When she flouts social expectations or navigates spaces outside sanctioned roles, the consequences are severe, signaling the limits of female agency within the intersecting structures of patriarchal and racial authority. Lily's death, in this sense, operates symbolically: it validates the supremacy of Anglo-Saxon social norms while simultaneously dramatizing the dangers faced by women who resist those norms. Wharton thus stages female resistance against a backdrop of racialized social power, illustrating the tensions inherent in a society that valorizes whiteness as both aesthetic and moral standard.

Racialized spatial dynamics in Wharton's fiction further illuminate these hierarchies. Elite characters' movements across urban and rural spaces are often guided by subtle markers of racial and cultural belonging. In *Summer*, Charity Royall's marginalization is both geographic and social: she inhabits a rural landscape that marks her as other, physically and symbolically distant from the centers of white, Anglo-Saxon authority. "She felt herself a stranger in the ordered world about her."(Ammons45)

The landscape itself is coded with racial and class distinctions, emphasizing the ways in which social and physical mobility are mediated by hierarchical norms. Charity's vulnerability is compounded by her gender, demonstrating how racial and gendered constructions intersect to circumscribe freedom and agency. Harney's paternalistic oversight, under the guise of social propriety, enforces the racial and patriarchal order, illustrating Wharton's awareness that women's autonomy is always constrained by broader social hierarchies, particularly those grounded in race and class.

Wharton's use of omission and selective visibility is another critical tool in her construction of whiteness. African American and non-Anglo characters are often present only to serve as contrastive figures, their histories, perspectives, and interiorities largely unrepresented. In *The House of Mirth*, for instance, the absence of African Americans from elite social spaces is a deliberate narrative strategy: whiteness is normalized by erasure, creating a social world in which the Anglo-Saxon elite appear unmarked and universally representative. "It was characteristic of her that she always roused speculation."(Goldman33)

Similarly, Jewish characters like Simon Rosedale, though vividly depicted, function relationally, serving to illuminate the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within the elite social order. "He continued to smile with the confident assumption that he would someday be admitted to the inner circle."(Goldman35)

These omissions and selective representations underscore the ways in which literature can actively participate in the construction and reinforcement of racial ideology. Wharton's novels, while critiquing gender oppression, simultaneously naturalize racial hierarchies, ensuring that even subtle social critiques remain tethered to the unexamined privileging of whiteness.

The relational construction of race is also evident in Wharton's deployment of aesthetics and morality. Characters' appearances, comportment, and taste operate as markers

of racialized identity. Lily Bart's elegance, her polished manners, and her refinement are all coded as markers of Anglo-Saxon superiority, distinguishing her from those deemed socially or racially inferior. "She was so evidently the victim of the civilization which had produced her."(Ammons55)

In contrast, Charity Royall's physicality and rural demeanor signify wildness and otherness, legitimizing her subjugation within patriarchal and social hierarchies. Wharton's meticulous attention to these markers demonstrates that race in her fiction is rarely overtly discussed; rather, it operates silently through aesthetics, social codes, and the consequences of transgression, shaping the contours of both female ambition and societal expectation.

Wharton's racial coding also intersects with economic privilege, producing a layered understanding of social exclusion and mobility. Wealth, in her fiction, is never neutral; it is inextricable from the unspoken standards of race and culture. Simon Rosedale, as a Jewish character aspiring to join the Anglo-Saxon elite, exemplifies this dynamic. His financial success is insufficient to grant full social acceptance, as his racialized identity continuously marks him as other. "He meant to succeed where others had failed."(Goldman67)

By contrast, characters such as Lily Bart, whose social and cultural upbringing aligns with Anglo-Saxon norms, navigate elite spaces with a seemingly natural ease. The implication is clear: economic capital alone cannot transcend racial and cultural hierarchies. Wharton's narratives thereby expose the invisible scaffolding of privilege, showing how social mobility is not merely a function of wealth or ability but also of alignment with entrenched racialized codes.

In addition to social and economic codes, Wharton's fiction encodes racial hierarchies through moral expectations. The failures and successes of her characters often hinge upon their conformity to these unspoken norms. Lily Bart's flirtations with independence are punished not only by social censure but also by the narrative consequences of her nonconformity, reinforcing racialized ideals of propriety. "She had to pay with her person for the freedom she had enjoyed."(Ammons76)

Similarly, Charity Royall's subjugation in Summer is justified within the narrative framework by her divergence from white, patriarchal norms. Harney's governance of her choice, though framed as concern, underscores the persistent association of morality with racialized authority. In both novels, Wharton presents female autonomy as inherently constrained: resistance is possible, yet it is circumscribed by the imperatives of racial, economic, and moral hierarchies.

Travel narratives and memoirs expand this framework to a global stage. In In Morocco, Wharton situates herself as an observer of non-white populations, emphasizing contrasts between European or Anglo-American refinement and local custom. Her descriptions oscillate between admiration and condescension, producing a dual effect: on one hand, the text acknowledges difference; on the other, it constructs that difference as

inferior or exotic. “The motionless groups of veiled women had the fixity of figures in a friezeon.”(Jameson 77)

Similarly, in her memoir A Backward Glance, African American domestic workers are depicted with detailed attention to their physicality and labor, yet their interior lives and subjectivity are minimized. “The negro cook ruled the kitchen with a despotism tempered only by her genius.”(Jameson89)

This pattern aligns with Toni Morrison’s theory of Africanism: racialized others are instrumentalized to define whiteness relationally. In Wharton’s work, these figures reinforce social hierarchies, highlighting the interconnectedness of gender, race, and labor in both domestic and public spheres.

Wharton’s literary techniques further embed racialized hierarchies within narrative structures. The careful selection of who is foregrounded and who is omitted, the aesthetic valorization of Anglo-Saxon characters, and the moral framing of transgressions all contribute to a literary world in which whiteness remains normative and unmarked. Even acts of critique, such as exposing the restrictions placed on women, cannot escape the racial logic of the text. Female characters may resist patriarchal control, but their agency is continuously mediated by racial and class expectations, producing a paradox in which critique and reinforcement coexist. By examining these narrative strategies, readers can understand Wharton’s work not merely as social realism, but as an active participant in the cultural and racial imagination of early twentieth-century America.

The narrative construction of whiteness in Wharton’s work reaches its fullest expression in the intersection of gendered and racialized moral judgment. Female characters’ social failures are not merely personal tragedies; they serve as cautionary exemplars within a society organized around Anglo-Saxon ideals. Lily Bart’s social demise and Charity Royall’s constrained existence illustrate how gendered transgression becomes a site for policing racial and class norms. “She stood there like a figure in a picture, the embodiment of the scene she represented.”(Ammons124)

Lily’s rejection of the marriage market, framed as independence, ultimately fails because her autonomy cannot escape the implicit racial and cultural codes that define acceptability. Charity’s story, conversely, presents a rural inversion of these norms: her “darkness” and perceived wildness justify her containment within patriarchal authority. “She felt herself in the grasp of powers stronger than her own.”(Ammons127)

In both cases, Wharton highlights the limits of female agency while simultaneously reproducing racial hierarchies. Autonomy, therefore, is relational, dependent upon conformity to the unspoken rules of race and class, and contingent upon moral codes aligned with Anglo-Saxon ideals.

Literary aesthetics further consolidate these hierarchies. The tableau vivant in The House of Mirth, in which Lily Bart embodies Mrs. Lloyd rather than Cleopatra, exemplifies

the performance of whiteness. Lily's body becomes a site for social consumption, displaying racialized purity and virtue as a spectacle for elite viewers. "It was as though she had stepped, not out of, but into, Reynolds's canvas."(Jameson120)

This performative dimension underscores Wharton's subtle mechanism for encoding racial hierarchies: aesthetics, comportment, and moral propriety converge to create an idealized racialized femininity. The tableau operates as both social commentary and reinforcement, illustrating how women navigate spaces of visibility and evaluation in a society structured by race, class, and gender expectations. Similarly, Charity's physicality and comportment in Summer are narratively coded to signify wildness and otherness, rendering her subject to regulation by patriarchal authority. In these contrasting contexts, Wharton explores the relational dynamics of race, gender, and power, emphasizing that identity and autonomy are never neutral or independent.

Wharton's treatment of exclusion and otherness extends to Jewish characters, African Americans, and non-white others, demonstrating the breadth of her engagement with racial ideology. Simon Rosedale, the ambitious outsider, embodies anti-Semitic stereotypes and highlights the barriers to social inclusion based on racialized identity. "He was a small, glossy-looking man, with a face of strongly Semitic type."(Goldman121)

African American domestic workers in her memoir are instrumentally foregrounded to reinforce the social and racial status of white characters. In both cases, Wharton's literary practice reflects a wider cultural logic: social, racial, and gender hierarchies are mutually reinforcing, shaping both opportunity and constraint. Critically, this intersectionality reveals that even as Wharton critiques one axis of oppression-gender-she participates in reproducing another: racial privilege. Her fiction, therefore, offers a complex site for examining the simultaneous critique and reinforcement of societal hierarchies.

Finally, situating Wharton within the context of early twentieth-century racial imagination illuminates the paradoxical nature of her literary enterprise. She critiques gendered oppression with remarkable insight, yet her narratives remain tethered to racial norms and exclusions. The consequences are profound: readers are offered a socially and morally nuanced vision of elite society, yet that vision is constructed through the implicit privileging of whiteness, moral propriety, and class hierarchy. Wharton's fiction, when read attentively, exposes the mechanisms by which race, class, and gender intersect to shape identity, autonomy, and social evaluation, revealing both the critical potential and the limitations of her work as a mirror of her society.

Conclusion

Edith Wharton's fiction presents a complex and often contradictory engagement with the social realities of her time. While she offers a powerful critique of gender oppression and class rigidity, her narratives remain deeply invested in the ideology of Anglo-Saxon whiteness. Race in Wharton's work is not absent; it is silent, structural, and pervasive.

From Lily Bart's tragic embodiment of racialized femininity to Charity Royall's subjugation under patriarchal control, Wharton's heroines reveal how race, class, and gender intersect to shape narrative possibilities. Her selective omissions, aesthetic choices, and character constructions normalize whiteness as the unmarked standard of value and belonging. Reading Wharton through the lens of race does not diminish her literary achievement; rather, it deepens our understanding of its cultural work. Her fiction stands as both critique and complicity, reflecting the anxieties of early twentieth-century America while contributing to the construction of racial ideology. In acknowledging this duality, contemporary readers are invited to confront not only Wharton's world but also the enduring legacies of race, privilege, and power within literary and cultural imagination. ■

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The Eastern Roots in American Transcendentalism: Indian Thought in Emerson and Thoreau

Jaya Nalini Ekka

The encounter between American Transcendentalism and Eastern philosophy observed a broadening of the intellectual and spiritual landscape of 19th century America. This paper makes an attempt to explore the influence of Indian philosophy, on transcendentalist like Ralph Waldo Emerson and David Henry Thoreau, demonstrating how Indian philosophy and ethical ideas profoundly contributed to the reframing of their ideas of self, the divine, nature, and spirituality. They were introduced to an alternative philosophy through their engagement with translated Indian texts like the *Upanishad, Manu Smriti,* and *Bhagavad Gita*, that challenged popular Western ideas built upon materialism, religious orthodoxy, and Western dualism. Though Emerson and Thoreau's engagement with the Indian philosophy was through limited translations and selective interpretation, the engagement had a transformative effect and played an indispensable part in bringing about a revolution in the intellectual, philosophical, and spiritual landscape in America. This paper attempts to argue that their interaction with Eastern thought was an early cross-cultural philosophical dialogue that contributed to the enrichment of American philosophy.

Keywords: American Transcendentalism; Indian Philosophy; Emerson; Thoreau; East-West Philosophy

Introduction

An unprecedented development in 19th century America witnessed the broadening of its intellectual, literary, and spiritual landscape. The century heralded the Transcendentalist movement that was a part of the broader American Renaissance that laid emphasis on intuition, spirituality, and the presence of the divine in nature. It saw the rise of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, the champions of transcendentalism, who with their revolutionary ideas and philosophies profoundly affected the philosophical and intellectual landscape of not only America but also the world at large. These were among those who encountered the vast wisdom that the Orient had to offer, their works bear a testimony to their engagement with Indian philosophy that far from being episodic and ornamental became a constant and perennial source of inspiration that contributed to

expanding their intellectual horizons. In their engagement with Indian philosophies, they found an alternative spiritual and philosophical framework that challenged the dominant Christian institution and Western materialism. Their writings mark their sustained encounter with the Hindu scriptures, such as *Bhagavad Gita, Upanishad and Manu Smriti.* This paper makes an attempt to examine how Indian philosophy contributed to restructuring Emerson's metaphysical idealism and Thoreau's ethical praxis, while acknowledging the limitations and contemplations involved in their judgments. However, one must keep in mind that, their engagement doesn't create a faithful reproduction of Indian philosophy but has immensely enriched the American intellectual, spiritual, and philosophical landscape.

Nineteenth-Century Intellectual Setting of America and India

The age witnessed a growing popularity of Indian philosophy, owing to the English translation made available by Oriental scholars that coincided with the rise of Transcendentalism. Hindu scriptures were introduced by thinkers such as William Jones and Wilkins as the repository of ancient philosophical, spiritual, and intellectual wisdom. For the American Transcendentalist, Hindu scriptures profoundly contributed to the conception of an alternative framework that challenged the Western dualism between God and nature, spirit and matter, and self and the world. It also challenged the Western theology that stressed original sin and external authority; it instead stressed inward authority, moral sense, and unity of existence. The Transcendental belief that truth can be attained only through intuition and self-realisation rather than any external authority, it aligned closely with the wisdom revealed in Hindu scriptures. Thus, this engagement with Indian philosophy, far from being an exotic and episodic cultural crossover became an integral part that seamlessly blended into the American philosophical and spiritual fabric. It gave an opportunity to the thinkers to articulate a more universal and non-dogmatic spirituality.

Emerson's Engagement with Indian Sacred Texts

Emerson was profoundly influenced by Indian philosophy, and his works bear testimony of his active and intensive engagement with Hindu scriptures such as the *Bhagavad Gita, Vedas, Upanishads,* and *Laws of Manu.* Scholars such as F.I. Carpenter argue:

> His reading of Indian literature forms one of the most important chapters in the study of his literary developments; for not only did he owe his poems "Brahma" and "Hamatreya" entirely to Hindu works, but large parts of his essays on "Plato", "Fate", "Illusions," and "Immortality" are based on Hindu thought, and his famous "Sphinx" probably shares in it. (Carpenter 104)

It must be kept in mind that, Emerson did not derive his core ideas directly from the Hindu scriptures; he found in these ancient Indian articulations of wisdom that he had already reached them through his personal meditations and Western idealism. Scholars such as Dale Riepe argue that, Indian thought for Emerson served as a confirmatory experience,

rather than being directly derived from the ancient Indian repository of wisdom. Indian thought thus supported and reinforced his conviction that spiritual truth is derived from inward intuition and self- realization and is universal and timeless. For Emerson, Indian philosophy served a confirmatory function without implying doctrinal dependence. He treated the wisdom gained from ancient Indian philosophy as evidence that his ideas were not culturally isolated but rather had the confirmation of the wisdom rooted in the East, making them more timeless and universally appealing.

Emerson's epistemology was profoundly shaped by Indian thought. Emerson privileged intuition over external authority, rejecting the traditional Christian dogma that insisted on the superiority of an external authority. It aligned with the Upanishadic doctrine that insisted on intuition over empirical and external authority. Emerson rejected institutional authority and insisted on creating a direct relation with the divine. He writes.

> Why should we not also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should we not have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? (Emerson, 35)

This epistemological stance reflects that, spiritual truth cannot be mediated by any institution, priest, or external authority but rather by knowing thyself; in other words, self-realization leads to spiritual truth. This stance aligned with the Upanishadic idea of "janana" or spiritual knowledge, can only be attained through self-knowledge. Thus, Indian philosophy reinforced and supported Emerson's rejection of traditional dogma and his advocacy of self-reliance. He insisted that, God is omniscient, and to feel His presence, one needs to open oneself to nature and look within.

The Indian philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, or the doctrine of non-dualism, has significantly influenced Emerson's conception of the concept of the Over-Soul articulated in his essay "The Over-Soul." The Vedantic idea of Advaita Vedanta, or the doctrine of non-dualism, asserts the essential unity of all beings. That is the unity between the Atman(Individual soul) and Brahman (the universal spirit). Brahman in Vedic philosophy is the ultimate reality, the supreme being, and the essence of every being in the universe. Everything in the universe is created, designed, and governed by this underlying principle, Brahman. Emerson, in his articulation of Over-Soul, found confirmation in Indian thought. Robert C. Gordon, in *Emerson and the Light of India,* states that, Emerson's reading of Hindu texts such as the Vedanta and the Bhagavad Gita has influenced him to articulate the idea of the Over-Soul, which resonates with the ideas of non-duality. He writes, "Emerson's Over-Soul is an Americanized, poeticized Brahman—impersonal, infinite, and the true Self of all beings" (Gordon 92). Similarly, Richard argues, "The Over-Soul is Emerson's most enduring legacy—the articulation of the divine as immanent, silent, and ever-present. It remains America's purest mystical vision (Gerald 54). In his seminal essay "Nature," he articulates his idea of the Over-Soul that has a striking resemblance to the Upanishad's concept of Brahman.

> Within these plantations of God, a decorum and the sanctity reign, a perennial festival is dressed, and the guest sees how he should tire of them in a thousand years. In the woods, we return to reason and faith. There I feel that nothing can befall me in life—no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair. Standing on the bare ground—my head bathed by the blithe air and uplifted into infinite space – all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I see all; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part and parcel of God (Emerson 38-39).

Eastern thought seeks to dissolve the idea of duality between self and nature, nature and divine, and divine and self and rather reinforces the idea of non-duality, asserting the essential unity of all beings. This idea challenged the Western assertion of duality. For Emerson, divine was not something external in the traditional Christian sense, but an all-pervasive spirit, immanent within the human soul and natural world. This idea bears a close resemblance to the Upanishadic assertion that spiritual knowledge is revealed when one recognizes the divine within rather than worshipping a distant deity. He opines

> ..... human beings live in "succession, in division, in parts, in particles," and it is within them "the soul of the whole; the wise silence; the universal beauty, too, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE." (Emerson 207)

However, scholars like Russell Goodman caution against equating these ideas too closely. He acknowledges strong Indian influence in Emerson but interprets it as a part of a hybrid, cross-civilization philosophy not entirely dependent on Hindu ideas. He insisted that, Emerson used the Hindu ideas selectively. He accepted those ideas that foregrounded inner divinity and unity of all beings but rejected those ideas of Hindu metaphysics that weakened moral responsibility, reshaping them to suit his ideas of ethical principles focused on self-reliance and moral responsibility.

Emerson's ethical thought was profoundly influenced by the Indian concepts of "karma" and "dharma" as articulated in Hindu scriptures like *the Bhagavad Gita* and *the Laws of Manu.* Karma says, every action has ethical consequences, and no one can escape it. The law of karma in Brhadaranyaka Upanisad IV.4.6 mentions that "This is what happens to the man who desires. To whatever his mind is attached, the self becomes that in the next life. Achieving that end, it returns again into this world." (qtd. In Herman 131). This has a close parallel with Emerson's idea of compensation as articulated in his essay of the same name. He argues that, the universe inherits a structure of moral balance, where no action can escape its corresponding ethical consequences.

> Crime and punishment grow out of one stem…Cause and effect, means and the ends, seed and fruit, cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end pre exists in the means, the fruit in the seed. (Select Writings 101)

Thus, this philosophical and moral framework reinforced his idea of self-reliance. Unlike the traditional Christian moral framework that was based on divine judgement, the Indian

concept of karma presented a more universal and impersonal moral law. Thus, he articulated an ethical and moral framework that was not based on punishment and reward but on a natural harmony of cause and effect.

Emerson's study of the Indian texts, such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, also had a profound influence on his moral philosophy. He writes:

> I owed, my friend and I,-owed a magnificent day to the Bhagavad Gita. It was first of books, it was as if an empire spake to us, nothing small or unworthy but large, serene, consistent, the voice of an old intelligent which in another age and climate had pondered and thus disposed of the same questions which he exercises us. (qtd. in Mudge 386)

The doctrine of karma Yoga as articulated in the *Bhagavad Gita* teaches action without attachment to the results. It teaches that, individuals should perform their duties without any expectations of personal gain and should dedicate their actions for a higher spiritual purpose. Emerson's moral stance that true action stems from fidelity to the inner self rather than any external authority or reward has a close resemblance to this concept. The idea of detached action strengthened Emerson's critique of materialism and his insistence on inward authority. Thus, Indian philosophy helped him to articulate a philosophy that was grounded in spiritual freedom and moral responsibility.

Practicing Philosophy: Indian Ethical ideas in Thoreau

Thoreau's engagement with Indian philosophy represents one of the most sustained and philosophically rich encounters between American Transcendentalism and Eastern thought. While Emerson's engagement with Indian thought was at a philosophical and metaphysical level, Thoreau looked upon Indian philosophy as a guide for ethical living. His reading of ancient texts like *the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishad,* and *the Laws of Manu* reflected both his advocacy of moral living and his intellectual outlook.

> That title, "The Laws of Manu with the Gloss of Culluca," come to me with such a volume of sounds as if has swept unobstructed over the plains of Hindostan; and when my eye rests on yonder birches, or the sun in the water, or the shadows of the trees, it seems to signify the laws of them all. They are the laws of you and me, a fragrance wafted down from those old times, and no more to be refuted than the wind. When my imagination travels eastward and backward to those remote years of the gods, I seem to draw near to the habitation of the morning, and the dawn at length has a place. I remember the book as an hour before sunrise (qtd. in Christy. 188)

His experiments at Walden Pond reflect Indian thought, particularly his insistence on self-discipline, simplicity, and renunciation. He opines that excessive material possession clouds ethical judgement and obscures spiritual clarity, thus advocating a simple and disciplined life. This aligned well with Indian ascetic ideals. Unlike many of his contemporaries who

approached Indian texts with detached curiosity, Thoreau engaged with them as guides for simple ethical living rather than abstract metaphysical ideas.

> I cannot read a sentence in the book of the Hindus without being elevated as upon the tableland of the Ghauts. It has such a rhythm as the winds of the desert, such a tide as the Ganges, and seems as superior to criticism as the Himaleth Mounts. Even at this late hour, unworn by time, with a native and inherent dignity it wears the English dress as indifferently as the Sanscrit. The great tone of the book is of such fibre and such severe tension that no time or accident can relax it. (qtd in Christy 188-89)

Thoreau had direct access to the translation of Indian texts through the intellectual networks of New England Transcendentalism. Scholars like Reipe have noted that he considered Indian philosophy as a repository of ancient knowledge that denounced excess materialism. During his stay at Walden, he read the translated text of the Bhagavad Gita and was profoundly influenced, and it became a model for his ethical, disciplined living and moral independence. His rejection of Western materialism and advocacy of voluntary poverty can be seen as the practical applications of Indian philosophy in an American context.

In contrast to the Western theological traditions that paid allegiance to external authority, the Eastern thought appealed to him with its emphasis on inward authority and the art of simple living.

Thoreau's engagement with Indian thought also influenced his understanding of nature as a site for spiritual insight. In the works of Walden, nature is not treated as an object of scientific experiment but as a site for contemplation and spiritual renewal. Just like Emerson, he saw nature as a living spiritual energy that connects all beings. It is this deep spiritual connection that binds man to nature and nature to the divine. Nature then becomes something not to exploited at will but a manifestation of the divine that is worshipped and revered.

> May we not see God? … When the common man looks into the sky, which he has not so much profaned, he thinks it less gross than the earth, and with reverence speaks of " the Heavens," but the seer will in the same sense speak of "the Earths," and his father who is to them. (Thoreau 73-74)

Thoreau's attention to rhythms of seasons, natural cycles, and moments of stillness reflects a contemplative sensibility that aligns with Indian thought that regards nature as a medium of self-realization rather than domination. His engagement with nature bears close affinity with yogic practices of self-discipline and renunciation. He perceived nature as a safe haven where one can shed all suffering and melancholy and experience the spiritual healing of nature. He writes:

> The indescribable innocence and the beneficence of Nature,-of sun and wind and rain, of summer and winter-such health, such sympathy have they ever with our

> race, that all Nature would be affected, and the sun's brightness fade, and the clouds rain tears, and the wood shed their leaves and put on mounting in midsummer, if any man should ever for a just cause grieve.(Thoreau 132)

Thoreau's idea of labour and action reflects his engagement with Indian philosophical tradition. The doctrine of "Karma Yoga" as articulated in *the Bhagavad Gita* supported and reinforced his idea of detached action. Thoreau critiques excessive labour and economic ambition. He argues that modern men are enslaved by excessive labour sacrificing their inward freedom for material comfort. This closely parallels the *Gita*'s doctrine of detached action, in which work is meaningful only when it does not bind the individual to materialistic desire. This doesn't mean that Thoreau advocated passivity but rather emphasized that purposeful labour should be guided by inner necessity, not by external reward. Indian philosophy also influenced his idea of simplicity. His decision to live at Walden Pond was not merely an aesthetic preference or a social protest but an attempt to experiment a lifestyle based on simplicity and moral disciplined.

> I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. (Thoreau 89)

Indian philosophy that laid emphasis on self-control and renunciation as a means to achieve freedom and clarity provided Thoreau with philosophical justification for voluntary poverty. "Most of the luxuries, and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only dispensable but positive hindrances to elevation of mankind." (Thoreau 19)

Nevertheless, one must keep in mind that Thoreau's simplicity differs from Indian traditional asceticism in the sense that he never permanently withdrew from the society and civilization. Instead, it reflects a selective adaptation of Indian ethical discipline to a modern, individual-centered context.

The study of Indian philosophy also had an influence on Thoreau's conception of self-knowledge. Indian philosophy especially those articulated in the *Upanishad* laid emphasis on inward authority and external authority, which are the cornerstones of spiritual truth and disciplined ethical life. For him, moral authority is not derived from social institutions or external authorities but rather from self-realization and disciplined awareness. Thus, Indian philosophy reinforced his idea of living a simple yet authentic life requires one to turn inward rather extending conformity outwardly.

It is important to understand that Thoreau did not adopt the Indian philosophy in a doctrinal manner. His understanding was shaped by limited and selective information. He selectively took those doctrines that reinforced and supported his ideas on ethical and disciplined living without engaging with their metaphysical debates. However, diminishing these influences as mere decoration and superficial denies it intellectual and philosophical productivity.

The engagement of towering figures of Transcendentalism with Indian philosophy contributed to a uniquely distinct American philosophy. This engagement, far from being superficial and mere adornment, had a transformative presence in the American philosophical and spiritual landscape. By looking outside the traditional dominant Western thought, the Transcendentalist challenged the Eurocentric philosophy and tradition and also demonstrated that philosophical and spiritual insights transcend cultural boundaries.

Conclusion

Emerson and Thoreau's engagement with Indian thought had been transformative and formative on the American philosophical and intellectual tradition. This engagement, far from being a wholesome enterprise, was based on selective interpretation. Indian thought helped them to validate their own philosophy, which was refined by Western intellectual tradition of Romanticism and Transcendentalism. It supported and reinforced their commitment to inward authority, moral and ethical responsibility, and spiritual unity while staunchly criticizing institutional authority and materialism. Emerson's engagement with Indian philosophy was primarily at a metaphysical and philosophical level that reinforced his idea of spiritual unity, the over-soul, action and its corresponding consequence that he terms compensation, and detached action. Whereas Thoreau's engagement was practical and experiential, Indian philosophy affirmed his ideas of simple living, rooted in ethical and moral discipline rejecting excess economical ambition. Thus, the study comes to a conclusion that Emerson and Thoreau's engagement with Indian philosophy was neither accidental nor an exotic decoration but rather played a crucial role in restructuring their ideas of self, the divine, and nature which broadened the intellectual and spiritual landscape of America. ■

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Universal Human Concerns and Post-Apartheid Realities in Nadine Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present*

Sarita Chauhan

Kusum Tripathi

Nadine Gordimer's *No Time Like the Present* (2012) critically explores the social and moral complexities of post-apartheid South Africa. Through the experiences of the characters Steve and Jabu, the novel addresses broader human concerns such as migration, political disillusionment, environmental anxiety, gender injustice, and the conflict between private life and public responsibility. Gordimer employs a narrative style rooted in the realist tradition, as highlighted by Miriam Allott, who emphasised the importance of "probable characters" in fiction. The novel presents individuals grappling with social change, expressing uncertainty, hope, and contradictions. Although apartheid has officially ended, the story reveals that economic inequality, corruption, and social tension continue to shape everyday life. Through the use of satire, irony, and psychological realism, Gordimer examines the challenges of building a democratic society after a history of oppression. As a result, the novel transcends its immediate political context and engages with universal dilemmas surrounding freedom, responsibility, and moral choice.

Keywords: Disillusionment, Migration, Nadine Gordimer, Realism, Social Justice.

1. Introduction

In *Novelists on the Novel*, Miriam Allott emphasises that the vitality of fiction depends upon the presence of "probable characters" whose actions resemble those of real human beings (Allott 7). According to her view, literature achieves seriousness when it represents the complexities of social experience rather than presenting idealised heroes or villains. She therefore praises writers such as Henry Fielding, who portrayed individuals drawn from different layers of society. In his novels, Fielding presented landlords, teachers, clergymen, labourers, and servants to depict a living social world (Allott 275). At the same time, he rejected the idea that fictional characters should represent perfect virtue or complete evil, insisting instead that human nature is essentially mixed and contradictory (Allott 277).

This emphasis on realistic characterisation later became central to the tradition of the English novel. Jane Austen, for instance, limited her fictional universe largely to the domestic lives of a few rural families. Yet her characters appear convincing because they reflect the emotional and social behaviour of ordinary people (Allott 277). Differently, Charles Dickens extended the realist tradition by depicting the hardships of industrial society and the sufferings of the poor. His novels reveal how literature can function as a mirror of social life.

The fiction of Nadine Gordimer belongs to this wider tradition of social realism, although it is shaped by the historical experience of South Africa in the twentieth century. Throughout her career, Gordimer explored the moral and political consequences of apartheid and the complex relationships between race, power, and identity. Critics have often observed that her novels combine political awareness with psychological depth (Head 98).In *No Time Like the Present*, Gordimer turns her attention to the period following the abolition of apartheid. The novel centres on Steve, a white academic, and Jabu, a black lawyer who had participated in the anti-apartheid struggle. Their marriage symbolises the possibility of racial reconciliation, yet their lives reveal the uncertainties of a society transforming.

The narrative method of the novel also reflects certain modernist influences. Virginia Woolf famously argued that the novel should capture the impressions that flow continuously through the human mind (Allott 290). Gordimer similarly explores the inner reflections of her characters as they respond to social and political change. Through these reflections, the novel examines a range of universal concerns, including migration, disillusionment, environmental crisis, and the search for moral direction.

2. Socio-Political Realism in the Novel

One of the most striking features of *No Time Like the Present* is Gordimer's detailed representation of post-apartheid South Africa. The novel acknowledges the historic achievement of ending racial segregation, yet it also reveals that the new democratic order faces numerous challenges. Economic inequality, administrative corruption, and social insecurity continue to shape everyday life.A recurring issue in the narrative is the possibility of migration. Many educated individuals contemplate leaving South Africa for countries such as Britain, Canada, or Australia. For Steve and Jabu, the idea of migration represents both hope and uncertainty. Australia appears to offer stability and professional opportunity, yet the prospect of leaving their homeland produces emotional conflict.

Gordimer treats this situation with characteristic irony. Migration may promise security, but it also involves a painful separation from cultural identity and personal history. In this respect, the novel reflects a broader global phenomenon often described as "brain drain," in which skilled individuals leave developing societies for wealthier nations.Political disappointment forms another important theme in the novel. Although apartheid has formally ended, many citizens feel disillusioned with the functioning of the democratic system. Allegations of corruption and misuse of power have weakened public trust in political

institutions. Gordimer's narrative frequently suggests that freedom achieved through struggle does not automatically produce justice in everyday life.

This perspective resonates with the ethical vision articulated by Nelson Mandela. In an interview broadcast on Africa Web TV, Mandela emphasised that political freedom must be accompanied by social welfare and responsible governance (Mandela, Interview). For him, democracy should protect the weakest members of society and promote inclusive development. Gordimer's fiction similarly insists that liberation must be followed by moral responsibility.Environmental concerns also appear prominently in the narrative. Gordimer refers to global debates about water pollution, climate change, and the destruction of marine life. Through Jabu's sceptical reactions to international conferences, the novel exposes the tendency of political gatherings to produce elaborate discussions without effective solutions.

Another disturbing problem portrayed in the novel is xenophobia. Immigrants arriving from neighbouring African countries often encounter hostility from local citizens who fear economic competition. Gordimer describes the conditions of refugee camps and the uneasy coexistence between migrants and local communities. These tensions illustrate the contradictions of a society attempting to reconcile humanitarian values with economic insecurity.Gender violence represents yet another dimension of social injustice. Gordimer refers to cases of sexual assault that remain unresolved due to weaknesses in the legal system. Such incidents reveal the continuing vulnerability of women despite the constitutional recognition of human rights. Feminist critics have frequently observed that Gordimer's fiction exposes the structural inequalities affecting women in both political and domestic spheres (Driver 213).

Economic inequality remains perhaps the most persistent challenge confronting the new South Africa. Although educational opportunities have expanded, many citizens continue to live in poverty and informal settlements. Gordimer therefore presents the post-apartheid era not as a period of simple triumph but as a complex phase of transition.

3. Private Life and Public Responsibility

The tension between private life and public responsibility forms one of the central ethical dilemmas of the novel. During the years of the anti-apartheid struggle, Steve and Jabu shared a clear sense of political purpose. Their participation in the movement created a strong feeling of solidarity and moral certainty.However, after the achievement of political freedom, that clarity gradually disappears. The couple now confronts practical questions about family security, professional advancement, and the future of their children. Their consideration of migration intensifies this dilemma because leaving South Africa may appear as a betrayal of the ideals for which they once fought.

Gordimer approaches this conflict with notable restraint. She does not condemn the characters for their doubts; instead, she presents their hesitation as a deeply human response to changing circumstances. As Dominic Head observes, Gordimer's fiction often

emphasises the moral ambiguities of political life rather than offering simple ideological conclusions (Head 105).The struggle between personal fulfilment and collective duty therefore becomes a universal human experience. Individuals in many societies must decide how far they should sacrifice private interests for public commitments. By leaving this question unresolved, Gordimer preserves the ethical complexity of the narrative.

4. Freedom, Fear, and Disillusionment

Another significant theme in *No Time Like the Present* is the paradoxical coexistence of freedom and fear. The legal abolition of apartheid created expectations of security and prosperity, yet many citizens continue to experience anxiety. Crime, unemployment, and political uncertainty contribute to a climate of instability.Gordimer thus challenges the assumption that political liberation automatically produces emotional security. The characters' fear is not irrational; it emerges from the realities of everyday life. Their contemplation of emigration reflects the dilemma faced by individuals living in transitional societies: whether to remain and endure uncertainty or to seek safety elsewhere.Closely related to this theme is the gradual emergence of disillusionment. The revolutionary optimism of the anti-apartheid movement begins to fade as the complexities of governance become apparent. Institutions that once symbolised hope now appear inefficient or compromised.

Yet Gordimer does not present this disillusionment as a failure of the liberation struggle. Rather, it represents the inevitable difficulty of translating political ideals into practical reality. As Damian Grant notes in his study of realism, literature often reveals the gap between aspiration and experience that shapes modern social life (Grant 72).Through this realistic portrayal of disappointment, Gordimer emphasises that freedom is not a fixed achievement but a continuing process requiring vigilance and ethical commitment.

5. Migration, Identity, and the Question of Belonging

One of the most significant concerns explored in *No Time Like the Present* is the question of migration and its implications for identity and belonging. In the contemporary global context, migration often appears as a practical response to economic insecurity, political uncertainty, and professional stagnation. Gordimer situates this dilemma within the lives of Steve and Jabu, who begin to consider the possibility of emigrating to Australia in search of stability and opportunity. Their reflections reveal the tension between personal aspiration and emotional attachment to their homeland.

For many educated South Africans in the post-apartheid period, migration represents both hope and anxiety. On the one hand, countries such as Australia and Canada promise professional security, better educational prospects for children, and a relatively stable social environment. On the other hand, the decision to migrate involves a painful separation from cultural memory, social networks, and historical responsibility. Gordimer presents this dilemma with characteristic subtlety, showing that migration is not merely an economic choice but also a deeply moral and emotional one.

Steve and Jabu's hesitation illustrates the complexity of belonging in a rapidly changing society. Both characters had actively participated in the anti-apartheid struggle and believed in the possibility of building a just and democratic South Africa. Their contemplation of migration therefore, produces an uneasy sense of guilt, as though leaving the country might signify a withdrawal from the collective project of national reconstruction. Gordimer does not present their doubts as weakness; rather, she portrays them as evidence of the difficult decisions individuals must make in uncertain social circumstances.

At the same time, the novel raises broader questions about the meaning of national identity in an increasingly globalised world. Migration often creates hybrid identities in which individuals remain emotionally connected to their homeland while adapting to new cultural environments. Gordimer suggests that the modern experience of belonging is rarely fixed or absolute; it is shaped by mobility, memory, and personal relationships.Through this exploration of migration and identity, *No Time Like the Present* extends its focus beyond the immediate political realities of South Africa. The dilemma faced by Steve and Jabu reflects a universal condition experienced by many individuals who must decide whether to remain in their homeland or seek opportunities elsewhere. In this way, Gordimer's narrative highlights the psychological and ethical dimensions of migration in the modern world.

6. Conclusion

No Time Like the Present provides a thoughtful examination of the moral and political challenges confronting post-apartheid South Africa. Through the experiences of Steve and Jabu, Gordimer portrays a society attempting to reconcile the ideals of liberation with the realities of economic inequality, social tension, and political uncertainty.The novel demonstrates that the end of institutional oppression does not automatically resolve deeper structural problems. Migration, unemployment, gender violence, environmental degradation, and political corruption continue to influence the lives of ordinary citizens.By presenting these issues through psychologically convincing characters, Gordimer fulfils Miriam Allott's concept of "probable characters" in fiction. Her narrative avoids heroic simplification and instead emphasises the ambiguities of human experience.At the same time, the novel addresses concerns that extend beyond South Africa. The dilemmas of migration, political disillusionment, and moral responsibility appear in many societies undergoing historical change. Through its combination of social realism and philosophical reflection, *No Time Like the Present* confirms the continuing relevance of the novel as a medium for exploring universal human concerns. ■

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Voices from the Periphery: Reading Gopinath Mohanty's *Harijan*

Soumya Sangita Sahoo

Mahatma Gandhi's Harijan Andolan was one ofthe landmark events of the Indian freedom struggle. The Andolan aimed at upholding the spirit and dignity of the Dalits by according them inclusion in the narrative of the nation. This movement also aimed at eradicating untouchability from society. While Indians got freedom from colonial rule in the year 1947, the discriminatory paradigms of caste segregations were hard to wipe out. Indian society has traditionally thrived on the varna system, justifying marginalization of people and communities. Caste demarcation has been carefully curated to ensure the dominance of people and social hierarchies. Gopinath Mohanty's *Harijan* written in the year after India's independence questions the lack of pity, humanity and laws for ensuring holistic growth of socially marginalized communities. This article highlights the layers of deep-rooted discrimination embedded in Indian psyche. The article further highlights the binary existence of communities living side by side in semi-urban and urban localities, where cohabitation does not imply coexistence.

Keywords: marginalization, dalit, discrimination, caste, social hierarchy

> There's no sin in stealing, he will tell you, but losing is a sin.
> We become thieves without stealing,
> sinners without sinning. What do we have to lose?
> Some are born clever; they come into the
> world loaded with money and can afford
> to sit back while their slaves sweat for them!
> (Sania to Puni in Harijan)

Representing politically turbulent times is one of the toughest challenges that a writer can encounter. Indian National Freedom struggle is one such event which has been commemorated through various perspectives. The backdrop of such narratives is deeply rooted in national interest. Gopinath Mohanty in his narrative *Harijan* (1948), as the title suggests, has depicted the class-based struggles as the urgent topic to be highlighted. Mohanty has very subtly predicted that freedom from Britishers was an easier challenge when compared to the achievement of classlessness in Indian society. This article intends to

highlight the discriminatory patterns promoted by caste barriers in society that conspire to keep the poor forever downtrodden and destitute.

Gopinath Mohanty, the acclaimed writer and a champion of human rights has raised important questions regarding the treatment of dalit and downtrodden in Indian society. Gopinath Mohanty is known for his groundbreaking work, *Paraja,* the tale known for wonderful depiction Paraja tribe in their vitality and vividness. This was way before Koraput was highlighted by any other significant work. Gopinath Mohanty is also popular for his other two works which have dominated the consciousness of Odia readers, namely *Dadi Budhha* and *Amrutara Santaana.*

Gopinath Mohanty's literary career spans almost five decades and paints a real picture of Indianness amidst the pre-colonial and post-colonial Indian state of Odisha, then known as Orissa. Mohanty was neither backward for his times not did he anticipate a future that was just speculative fiction. His writing depicted characters who were men and women responding to life situations, grim or elated. Mohanty has been one of the relevant writers that helped develop the tribal discourse in Indian literature. Where male dominate majority of his works as protagonist, the female charactersrepresented the voices that became the centre for dissent and rejection for the masculinitic dialogues.

Mohanty has been careful in creating characters that delineate the social and historical reality of an age. Mohanty's female characters are not entirely feminine and reflected the consciously thinking individuals who eventually exuded power in their denial, apprehensions and role-reversals. Very much like his literary predecessor, Fakir Mohan Senapti's female characters who defied all rule of traditional femininity in Odia households, Mohanty gave us women characters who were multifaceted.

In more than one way, Mohanty's female characters were the women living under the rubrics of two prominent hierarchies one being colonization and the otherpatriarchal zamindari. When Fakir Mohan's characters nurtured the desires of self-improvement, Mohanty's women living a century later, carefully curated their response and expressed a strong desire for their overall physical, psychological and sexual well-being as compared to Fakir Mohan's women aspiring for spiritual and philosophical wellbeing alone, none of their aspirations actually getting materialized.

Gopinath Mohanty's *Harijan* was written in Odia in 1948 and translated into English in the year 2021. The ideas and plot take immense inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi's Harijan Andolan.Mohanty's novel is based on the mahenter communities in Odisha who belong to dalit caste. This post-Independent narrative is a critique of Indian societies that foster hierarchies and pushes people to inferiority and exploited circumstances. It is a powerful portrayal of dalit experiences in day-to-day life.*Harijan* depicts a heart-wrenching story of caste-based discrimination and oppression encountered by Jema and her daughter Purnima alias Puni of the mahenter community living in a basti adjacent to the wealthy and powerful zamindar Abhinash babu and their associates in the colonial Odisha. Mahenter

community refers to an officially recognised scheduled caste from Odisha. Historically they have been associated with cleaning works and were considered untouchables. Due to prevalence of varna system in India, they have been subjected to inhuman occupation of manual scavenging, sweeping, garbage cleaning, and also associated with death rites- all making them untouchables. They belong to dalit community and have been recognisedfor reservations and economic assistance from government. They are commonly identified as Doms and Chamars in Odisha.

Harijan has contextualized the story of the dalit-mahenter community who were manual scavengers and had to clean human excreta with their own hands from the dry latrines of upper-class people. Mohanty has been careful in placing the pity and horror and disgust of the life of this community with the affluent upper classes, this juxtaposition possible only in urban and semi-urban spaces. The rural set-up that boasts of strict belief in religious system, obedience of varna and maintenance of sanctity, believes in division of villages on the basis of caste.Trespassing those invisible boundaries was out of question especially for the untouchables.

The central characters Jema (meaning a princess) and Puni(shortened form of the name Purnima meaning full moon) lead lives contrary to their given names. Jema is the middle-aged maheterani whose regular day would start when she sets out for cleaning latrines of people of the upper classes. Puni, the symbolic full moon in Jema's life, had to eventually descend down the same career path as chosen by her mother. "A child born of human parents was going to descend to a lower than that of the lowest beast! To wallow in filth and be entombed in excrement" (Mohanty, 86). Neither the mother nor the daughter could choose any other alternative for the birth into such communities dictated by the fates of its people even before they were born.

Puni had the most carefree life for the longest time, she was confident that despite being a mahenter child, her mother will never let her descend into filth, "No matter what else she does, there's one thing that Bou will never do-send me to work!People have grown tired of telling her, but will she listen?No means no! She might be drowning in filth herself but she'll never let Puni go!(Mohanty, 34). The normalcy of Puni's life is shattered the day she replaces her mother in her work, when her mother gets beaten black and blue for stealing a cabbage for her daughter. Acting as a proxy for her mother and stepping into her shoes for a day brings her close to her birth reality of being inferior in society:

> She would go to work. Just as he friends, Ranga, Tabha and Kajalmati were doing. Walking through the basti with the basket of filth under her arm, covered with saal leaves. Kneeling on the ground behind the latrines-then the baskets again. Once again that stinking world buzzing with flies. Her karmakshetra, the world where her destiny lay, where the actions of her past life took her(63).

By the end of the day, her enthusiasm for financial independence had completely been sapped off her spirit. Puni continues to vomit for days at her work, till filth becomes inevitable part of her life. No amount of bathing with perfumed soaps and oils would make her clean anyone, for she believed that she had been defiled.

> Again and again, not once. She would have to drown in the stinking darkness of that hell and struggle to raise herself again. Her basket would be refilled and emptied repeatedly. Face, hands, mouth and her entire body-everything would get smothered in filth. That's how the world was. Entirely. The faith and hope that had taken fourteen years to grow within her were dead. The feeling of hopelessness was growing(Mohanty, 92).

Hunger, filth and alcohol were inevitable to their despicable lives. Puni fails to understand that in spite of working harder, the conditions of the mahenter community never improves. Her strength wades in undergoing the transformation from being a mahentarani's daughter to being a mahentarani herself. The initial days of association with filth dampens the spirit of Puni, but gradually the satisfaction of giving rest to her mother and be able to arrange proper food for her mother, provides reassurance in the job where she had replaced her mother. A mahenter never goes to work for gathering wealth or building sky-scrappers, just so she could get a mouthful to eat, just enough to satisfy the most basic needs of a living being(63). Basic needs drive the spirit of the Dalits even though that spirit is crushed daily while undertaking dehumanising odd jobs.

Dalits in India have been treated with no dignity to lead their lives, Jema and Puni being no exception to this. Men and women of mahenter community start their jobs from the first ray of daylight and easily wrap up their work by late afternoons. After going home and after bathing in perfumed soaps and oils they decorated themselves in the ways known to them and by washing themselves off in the village pond, each one renewed themselves. The daytime identity is washed off and the new self emerges towards the evening. They usually owned the night as their sole custodian who allowed them freedom, right to rejoice and dance to their own tunes. Daytime often made them dance to the tune of rich men, in the day they had to look keeping their vision low and night coaxed them do dance freely with their heads held high. Daytime imposed inferiority on them by reminding them of their lowly jobs, however the night equalized all, when all were drunk and danced to their own tune of celebration.

Mohanty has carefully juxtaposed the households of Abhinash babu, the rich and affluent shahib with that of Puni and Jema's slum. Characters also stand in contrast to one another, the luxurious life of Manomayee (Abhinashbabu's daughter)to the life of poverty that Puni and her mother had to undergo. While Manomayee listened to music on gramophone leisurely through the day and sang classical music, Puni emerged herself in filth for earning a meal for herself and her mother. Aghorebabu's leisurely spending of the hours of the day

stand in stark contrast to Sania who rode the carriage that carried filth to be dumped in the outskirts of the town. The glimpse of urban and rural, the rich and the poor, the filth of the mind and the defiled body are kept in closed proximity yet at the level of not touching one another. Manomayee and Puni are binaries that have no place or occasion to interact.

Indian society that Mohanty depicts in its utmost reality, thrived on the basis of hierarchies in the society-of rich/poor, man/woman, sahib/ghulam, zamindars/mahenters. In this novel the boundary wall beneath Abhinash babu's house(the richest and most influential personality of that town)made the demarcation evident with the slum-dwellers who resided on the other side of the wall. The boundary wall kept these two worlds separate and the distinctions very clear. The rule was very clear that there was no trespassing needed on either side, intrusion would not be considered any lesser than molestation and violation.

Untouchability depicted by Gopinath Mohanty might look out of fashion and our daily lives, but their practice continues to this day. Untouchability acquiring a new name of hygiene and discriminatory attitude adapting newer and subtler modes of practicing its disregard of people and communities. The concerns raised by Mohanty in his works are timeless in Indian context be it untouchability or caste-based hierarchy, class-based atrocities. The recent times have witnessed a major surge in such events despite the growth and awareness of its populations. The biases and prejudiced machinery adopting newer modus operandi and equally prevalent in rural and urban spaces. Mohanty has not posed a solution to the caste-based and class-based demarcations in society, rather he has been seen upholding the spirit of humanity in characters despite their class. Mohanty being the greatest advocates of human rights and human voices, has depicted the victory of human spirit and resilience in characters such as Puni or Aghorebabu. His characters fail at times through their circumstances but what keeps them going is the faith and hope in ultimate human existence. His characters through their zeal for life win despite their challenges and sufferings. ■

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Women and Food in Indira Goswami's *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*

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Food is not merely a necessity for survival; it is also a matter of celebration, ritual, and cultural expression. Our eating habits reflect our personality traits and our belonging.In contrast to others who have already read Indira Goswami's *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* primarily as a socio-religious novel, this paper argues that the novel's most significant contributions to the discourse of foodarecomprehensive in manner and content. The plot not only adheres to both social and religious issues but also accelerates the category of food that employs social standards and cultural significance, traditional values and individual amplification.The metaphorical essence of food thatisanalysed in the first part of this article revolves around the correlation between food and women and food and social integrity. The different food items, at times, serve as asoul-searching component and at other times as a personal amplifier. Whatever the pretext is, it rationalises the community spirit and cultural profundity. This paper lens food as a regional glory that epitomises human relationships with organic resources. The second part of this article illuminates the textual interpretation of the Assamese cuisine. The paper discusses this edible phenomenon through an examination of Goswami's narrative framework. The novel's structural base introduces her as a social activist and reformer, who, in her narrative, explores how food in a particular society and within a designated class rejuvenates human will, wisdom, and performance.

Keywords: Assamese, food, individual, society, woman.

Introduction:

Indira Goswami is one of the most celebrated novelists in the history of Northeast Indian writing in English. She is the recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1983, and many more awards are to her credit. Her novels talk about individual identity, societal orientation, food culture and indigenous knowledge. When her career was at its peak, she wrote *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker,* where she dealt with Assamese Brahmin society, the *sattra* culture, widowhood, regional landscape and traditional Assamese food and beverages.The structure of the novel encompasses individual identity, collective feminine sensibilities, slavery, social categorization and psychological insight. The novel begins with the protagonist Indranath in 1948 with reflections on the *sattra* culture, food values and

traditional upbringing along the coastal area of the South Kamrup district of Assam. The paper aims to explore the element of food as a metaphor that employs the concept of existence, sustainable growth and comprehensive development of women in general and the community in particular.

Food is life. It is a required commodity that regulates both mind and body. It not only furnishes energy and stability but also redefines cultural and traditional practices. The choice of food exemplifies one's cultural beliefs, gender implications and rich heritage. The Indian way of preparing and taking food is always juxtaposed with the regional setup and natural landscape. This paper attempts to analyse the metaphorical taste of northeast cuisine in particular and Indian cuisine in general,which rejuvenates the richness and harmony of human life and exists in oblivion with organic resources and cultural sensitivities.

Discussion:

Food contributes towards understanding ourselves. This paper intends to read Indira Goswami's novel from the perspective of food studies. The main focus is to explore her representation of food to explicate the emerging practices of capitalism, culinary culture and identity formation. The rhetoricof food defines the socio-cultural environment, geographical location, religious system and symbolic rationale. Northeast is known for its organic and culture-specific food habits. The panorama of food commissions distinct identity and specific history. The historic semblance is associated with individual choice. The choice of food acknowledges one's social values, traditional beliefs and religious norms. At the advent of colonial rule, the pre-colonial and post-colonial food pattern defines the lifestyle and culture of people. Food is a concept that rejuvenates the idea of choice and habit. The choice varies from man to man, and habits are established norms framed by family, society and community.

Assam is known as a land of rivers. As the Brahmaputra River defines the cultural heritage of Assam, the Jagalia River in the said novel defines the natives of the South Kamrup district of Assam. This paper examines the myriad cuisines of the Assamese people of Assam. Sangeeta Baruah Pishatory, a well-known author cum journalist, showcases the diverse features of the Assamese community and their food habits in relation to their feminine sensibilities in her book *The Assamese: A Portrait of a Community*.

K.T. Achaya is a pioneer in the field of food studies. In his *Indian Food: A Historical Companion,*Achaya considers food as a story. Every food conceives a process during preparation, and the product that remains becomes a memory. He writes: "… food, mood and character are all strongly linked" (Achaya131). Regarding Assam,Achaya says: "A favourite curry was an alkaline salty extract of banana roots, cooked with certain aquatic green plants, and also with fish" (Achaya133). In *The Story of Our Food,*Achaya writes in the preface: "Behind any of the foods that we eat every day lies history and geography, botany and genetics, processing technology and high romance" (Achaya).The novel also encompasses the legacy of established Brahmin families. The higher-class Brahmins, i.e.

the DamodariyaGossain, bring in a "basketful of rice, oil, potatoes, jaggery, vegetables and a big fat rohu fish" (Goswami 36-37) along with *naksa*[2], *kushti*[3] and *sidha*[4]. The food items being cited indicate the traditional cuisine as shaped by geographical and climatic factors. It also identifies community values and customary beliefs. Moreover,Roland Barthes aspires that: "… food has a constant tendency to transform itself into situation" (Barthes 26).

The novel hinges on the women characters, namely Durga, Saru Gossainee and Giribala. Goswami explores the aspect of widowhood that acts in vengeance against traditional values and cultural communication. There are certain male characters among whomIndranath appears to manifest societal reflections and responses towards familial conventions and ancestral standards. Her female character, namely Durga, was Indranath's paternal aunt. She became a widow when she was quite young. Her character embodies submission and seclusion. Another female character, Saru Gossainee, was the widow of Mahaprabhu's brother. During one of the annual festivals of the sattra, her husband died in a firework display. After her husband's death, she was allotted her share of the land by the Gossain. She could manage her lands with the help of her disciples. She was conservative and extremely orthodox. Goswami calls her a 'ritual addicted widow' (Goswami 17). She symbolises desire and apprehension. With the observance of the *amoti*[5] ritual, Goswami introduces the third female figure named Giribala. Meanwhile, we come across the rules and regulations of the Assamese Brahmin society. The widows are not allowed to eat meat or fish, nor are they expected to touch the stove meant for cooking fish. Giribala was Indranath's younger sister and a widow of a tender age. Giribala symbolises revolt and incitement. Emily Contois writes in "What is Food Studies?" that food studies are an "... art that examines the relationship between food and all aspects of human experience, including culture and biology, individual and society, global pathways and local contexts" (Contois).

The novel emanates from various socio-cultural implications, keeping Indranath at the centre. When Goswami talks about Indranath, she focuses more on his benevolence to preserve and protect his aesthetic values and social history. Time and again, Indranath recollects his childhood memory- when he used to see the red pumpkins and their seeds. The novel begins with Indranath riding his cycle in the direction of the sattra, reaching Dibakar Bhagawati's hut. The reference to food rightly initiates with Bhagawati, the contractor of the Base Camp who "used to supply pigeons, ducks and rice to them" (Goswami 4). Molly Wizenberg writes: "Food is never just food. It's also a way of getting at something else: who we are, who we have been, and who we want to be" (Wizenberg).

Colleen Taylor Sen, a Chicago-based scholar, has written extensively on food history in India. Her *Food Culture in India* talks about the role of food in nourishing human culture. In the Series Foreword, Sen remarks: "Food provides the daily sustenance around which families and communities bond" (Sen Series Foreword). Moreover, in *Feasts and Fasts: A History of Food in India*, Sen talks about the history of India as a continent of diverse cultures, languages, religions, customs and cuisines. The Indian delicacy has become a

global phenomenon. Food appears in the form of incarnation. The agricultural products, indigenous plants, and spices make the food history rich. The soil of Assam is very rich. Sen, in her book, manages to deal with different ingredients, cooking techniques, everyday eating recipes and occasional eating habits. The reference to amoti corresponds to some of the customary rituals of widowhood. During that period, Durga was not allowed to eat any kind of cooked food. For three days, Durga had to consume only "raw vegetables and fruits" (Goswami 11). She writes: "Early morning to the open-air toilet, then a quick bath by the side of the well. Her clothes still dripping with water, she would go to the room where the wooden sandals of her forefathers and her husband were kept, and she would offer prayers" (Goswami 12). Her food habits lead her to be a pessimist. Her pessimism alienates her from society. Mary Douglas writes that meals symbolise"social codes" (Douglas 61).

Lévi-Strauss conceptualises cooking as a symbolic system in which the transformation of food—raw, cooked, and rotten—mediates between nature and culture (28–30).The servants in Indranath's house used to eat boiled rice and jaggery, which helps in giving strength and will to work sincerely. This also corresponds to the ancestral orientation of providing food to the servants of the house, which is one of the timely and important tasks of the day, which was bestowed upon Durga. Indranath's memory of the "odour of old jaggery stored in earthen pots…" (Goswami 23) strengthens his ancestral legacy of maintaining the food culture at home. When Durga understands that she will never get her share of property from her in-laws, she weeps. She thinks within herself: "Indranath was right. She would not get any share of her right; she would have to go to the court at Gauhati. She shuddered" (Goswami 13). She then questions: "Could she go to Gauhati to demand her share of property? Impossible! Impossible!" (Goswami 14). At that time, "The fragrance of *kagji lime*[6]blossoms permeated the air" (Goswami 14). The lime is one of the traditional delicacies of the Assamese indigenous people. The odour and sour taste help in digestion and increase one's appetite.It also motivates Durga to develop positivity and endurance.

Indranath, while walking across the *batghar*[7],is reminded of his school days when he used to play and run along the lines and observe red pumpkins and *pan*[8] leaves. In every Assamese household, pan remains the most common and significant item. It acts as a stimulant, antiseptic and breath-freshener. Further, it signifies Assamese cultural practices and traditionality. Pan leaves are also used to welcome and greet people. It also refers to the age-old legacy of offering a pan to the guests, signifying hospitality. Prashanta Goswami writes: "Then there is the ubiquitous tamul pan (areca nut and betel leaf)without which Assamese hospitality is incomplete" (Goswami). Indranath also talks about *ahu*[9]paddy and its beautiful fragrance. The sattra was known for the cultivation of ahu paddy.The river Jagalia appears throughout the narrative. Indranath seems to observe the young chaps from the village playing with *turi*[10]fish- one of the local fish of Assam. Rhiannon Scharnhast quotes Anita Mannur's 2009 work,*Culinary Fictions,*who writes: "... too often literary food studies simply become a method of shorthanding the experience of others as a way to make differences palatable" (Mannur17).

J. Michelle Coghlan writes: "… food has long served as a cultural marker of complex and oft-conflicting desires, affiliations, and identities- national belonging and regional attachments, class distinctions and racial stereotypes, gender norms and sexual appetites, agricultural policies and imperial legacies, public agendas and personal tastes" (Coghlan 1). Food appears to be a sensation. Indranath was also intoxicated by the fragrance of 'honeyed odour of the sugarcane'(Goswami 42). The Gossains had sugarcane fields as well. The fragrance of tender coconuts also captivates his mind. The sour taste of the curd is also an important trait of the Assamese people. For every occasion, the curd is a mandatory food. The character of Indranath relies on the traditional usage of curd and lime in earthen pots. This again sanctifies the local vigour and oriental action. He was a witness to everything in the village. Besides the jackfruits, big earthen pots of curd, baskets of paddy, wooden jars of jaggery, betel nuts and pan leaves, Goswami also refers to the combination of roasted rice, curd and newly made jaggery. Goswami reflects on "The *bogori*[11] fruits" that "have ripened and taken the colour of old muga silk" (Goswami 75) during December.

The narrative also projects the importance of planting rice in Assamese society. Pounding betelnuts symbolises an emotional semblance between women and the environment. It is also related to women's psychological sense of being. This sort of pounding makes them empowered, making their nervous system alert and strong. It triggers their mind to retain their communal heritage and class principles. The bullock carts always seem to carry "jackfruits and big earthen pots of curd" (Goswami 126). Goswami once said: "There's no one here now! All these women have gone some to plant rice in the fields, others are pounding rice" (Goswami 129). In one instance, Giribala seems to run to the open kitchen where she sees "The level of cooked rice in the rice pits... had gone down. Even the stock of mutton and black *dal*[12] stock, *labara*[13] and plain *rahardal*[14]" had also diminished (Goswami 131). The narrative reads: "The aroma of black beans cooked with mutton tickled her nostrils" (Goswami 138). Moreover, she writes:"...they must have certainly used ginger and black pepper. Probably a layer of *ghee*[15], made from cow's milk, shimmering on the surface " (Goswami 138).

The concept of *Bhajan dakshina*[16]explores Brahmin greed and lust. They are also well acquainted with the exact measurement of all the ingredients "ghee, pepper, ginger and spices" (140). During the post-prayer ritual, the Brahmin's feet are washed, and they are given a feast, money and articles. Later, they exchange those among themselves. Goswami explores the fine cooking style of the Brahmins during the 1940s. The hegemony adheres to the preparation of *joha*[17] rice as *prasad*[18]. The novel reads: "That Brahmin used to say that this variety of rice went very well with iguana flesh" (Goswami 142). Iguana tastes "sour and soft" (142) and the colour of its pieces "looked like that of mushrooms" (Goswami 242).

Food appears as a constant phenomenon in this text. Further, on a post-structuralist mode, Eagleton comments: "... Food is endlessly interpretable, as gift, threat, poison,

recompense, barter, seduction, solidarity, suffocation" (204). The chapter reads: "It was said that smelling food was almost as good as eating it" (Goswami 141). The Gossain widows consider: "It was a great sin even to smell the aromatic forbidden food, as written in the scriptures" (Goswami 141). Giribala becomes perturbed by the delicious odour and tempting aroma of the food. By seeing the thick gravy of the iguana curry, she develops "a strange surge of greed" (Goswami 144) and forgets "religion and rituals, wisdom or restraint" (Goswami 144). She, in her widowhood,was expected to take only rice and pulses boiled with vegetables with a pinch of salt and a little ghee. But Giribala has already become fed up with such a kind of diet. Goswami writes: "For the first time, a Gossain's daughter, in the manor of a sattra, had committed this heinous act"(Goswami 144). For this, purification is required.

The pounding of betel nuts "with an iron pestle" and rice are yet other customary practices being referred to by Goswami. This pounding is symbolic of Giribala's way of revolting against the orthodoxicalDamodariyaGossains. There is also a reference to *pantabhat*[19] and liquor consumption. Referring to the coming of Mahidhar, Saru Gossainee exclaims: "He will be tired and hungry. A hot meal will make him cheerful" (Goswami 224). It will provide him with fresh energy. Cooking rice in a clay oven with a big black lid also marks the traditionality of the sattra. The use of the grinding stone annihilates an Assamese household. Saru Gossain seems to grind pepper, cumin seeds, ginger and red chiles. A sour dish of tomatoes with rice powder heals tiredness and exhaustion. The mention of eating 'fermented betelnuts' (242) exhilarates identity, preservation and autonomy. Betelnuts and chewing tobacco are served on a brass *bota*[20]. The fresh smell of hot tea served in earthen pots marks the trans-local landscape of Assam. The cucumber in the backyard and preparation of *chunga pitha*[21] a sweet made of jaggery and rice powder roasted in hollow bamboo pieces.

Whenever there is a reference to an emotional outburst, Goswami raises her concern about Assamese food. For the Assamese people, food is an emotion. Assamese people's inclination towards sour (tenga) and bitter (titta)and fermented food emphasises the contemporaneity between traditionality and modernisation. Goswami critiques the masculine gaze over Eliman's body, a young and beautiful girl. His assumption of the opium eater's comments towards Eliman and his vision of the girl's body seem to converge. He says: "Her body, her soft flesh! It was like the soft, silky and sticky pulp of the *ou*[11] fruit" (Goswami 25).In Chapter Five, the youth of Giribala is compared with the *leteku*[22] fruit. Her eyes are compared with "the shell of a dried-up*phol*[253]. The varied foodways of people project not only physical but also emotional and spiritual self in the construction of one's identity.This paper insinuates how women use food as a means of expression and attachment. The portrayal of women characters highlights the cultural identity of Assam. Notably, Indranathcategorises the elements of food through the manner of cooking, preparation and presentation.

Conclusion:

In *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, Goswami presents food not just as a necessity but as a powerful medium through which issues of gender, culture, and social control are expressed. The novel shows how deeply food is intertwined with the daily lives of Assamese people, shaping both identity and relationships. For women, particularly widows, food becomes a source of restriction, discipline, and silent suffering. Their limited diets reflect the rigid norms imposed upon them, transforming food into an instrument of social regulation rather than mere sustenance. Conversely, food also provides avenues for resistance and emotional expression. Goswami's nuanced portrayal reveals that food is not neutral; it carries meanings associated with power, memory, and desire. Ultimately, the novel transforms food into a symbolic language that links the personal with the social, the body with culture, and tradition with change. By highlighting the intersection of women and food, Goswami encourages readers to reconsider how everyday practices reflect deeper structures of inequality while also possessing the potential for transformation and agency. ■

Endnotes: *sattra*[1]- centres for religious and cultural activities of the region. Sattras in Assam have tried to protect and preserve traditional Assamese culture.

naksa[2]– a visual representation of an area

kushti[3]- horoscope

sidha[4]- potful of uncooked rice and vegetables

amoti[5]- a ritual observed by the Assamese widows. It is believed that the earth menstruates during these four days, which fall in the month of Asar, i.e. June

*kagji*lime[6]- a sweet-smelling lime

batghar[7]-guest house or the courtyard

pan[8]- a species of flowering plant, commonly consumed after meals

ahu[9]- a species of paddy that is reaped and gathered in June/July

*turi*fish[10]– a local fish

bogori[11]-a kind of wild berry tree

dal[12]- lentils

labara[13]- mixed vegetables

Rahar dal[14]- a kind of yellow pulse

ghee[15]- clarified butter

Bhajan dakshina[16] – a post-prayer ritual

Joha[17] rice – a fine quality rice

Prasad[18]– a devotional offering to the Almighty

pantabhat[19]- stale rice, which is soaked in water overnight

bota[20]- a kind of tray with a stand

Chunga pitha[21]- a sweet made of jaggery

ou[22]- an acid fruit prepared with fish

Leteku23– an indigenous sour fruit

phol[24]-a kind of gourd.

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Re-rooted or Permanently Exiled? : A Study on the Quest for Identity and Dalit Aesthetics in Subodh Sarkar's Poem *I Am Krishnokoli Mahato*

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Dalit Women inherit their own aesthetic values from the earlier generation and transmit it to next generation but urban standard of beauty erases these aesthetic values ofdalits. To explore the issues of identity and aesthetic values of dalits and to bring them in the mainstream literary canon, a scholarly lens in needed. The poem *"I Am KrisnakoliMahato*" by Subodh Sarkar, unfolds a communal echo of countless displaced Dalit women who exist beyond the urban gaze and standard norms of beauty through an individual voice of women (Krishnakoli) and her lived experience and journey against the backdrop of post-partition resettlement and systemic negligence. Through this discussion the paper seeks to examine the poem through the dual frameworks of identity and Dalit aesthetics by connecting toMarianne Hirsch's theory of post memory .

Keywords: Partition, Dalit Refugee Women, Post memory, Intergenerational Trauma, Caste

Introduction

This paper delves into the significant and relevant discussion regarding the Refugee Dalit women of second generation who inherit the trauma from the earlier generation and carrying the trauma as their weapon, they proceeds in the quest for their identity. In the poem *"I am KrishnakoliMahato"* by Subodh Sarkar, the narrator Krishnakoli has been portrayed as the collective voice of all Dalit women who are in quest for their identity. Though literary it is not clear that the narrator of this poem is one of the second generation of refugee or not, but the tone of the poem supports the concept and through the voice of the narrator, this paper can analyse the situation of second generation refugee dalit women . The timeline of partition (partition of India and specifically Bengal here) and its aftermath has been depicted not only in historical documentary but also in literary creation, for instance Profullo Chandra Roy, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Swapnomoy Chakraborty, MonoranjanBapari, DebabrataSingha, SubadhSarkar and many more have drawn the condition of refugees and second generation refugees through their observation and memoir. To explicate these (partition, refugee and dalits) concepts portrayed in the literary canon, there are crowd of

scholars like SekharBondhopadhay, SumitSarkar, MustakimAnsary, Anusua Basu Roy Chowdhury, Meenakshi Mukherjee and many others and they all have brilliantly portrayed the condition of refugees irrespective of class and caste. In order to talk aboutSekharBondhapadhyay's work, Dwaipaonsen, a scholar writes "...Bandyopadhyay overestimates the degree of upward caste mobility in Bengal and underestimates the extent off real cleavage, exploitation and caste oppression."(Sen, 2018, p. 10).ShekharBondhopadhyay and Anusua Basu Roy Choudhury , in their aiticle "Partition in Bengal: Re-Visiting The caste questions, 1946-47", unfold Jaya Chatterji's view on the function of Dalit in partition which she (Chatterji) has portrayed in her book "Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947".Chatterji says, "Dalit had minor role in the Political Drama, dominated by *bhadralok*community or upper class people" (Chatterji 256-57). Bondhopadhayay and Choudhury also mention ParthaChatterjee's notion regarding the contribution of Dalitas P. Chatterjee in his book "the present history of west Bengal: Essays in political criticism", has written that "Dalit had no role in this unfolding drama, as the decision to partition Bengal was made from the top and from New Delhi"(Chatterjee 27-46). By analysing these two ctitics, Bondopadhyay and Choudhury have argued in their article, "the Dalit in Bengal did not remain untouched by or uninvolved in Partition politics and violence" (Bondhopadhyay and Choudhury 237).They have analysed the condition of Dalit and their contribution to the partition politics from Geo-Political perspective. They also quote AnirbanBhattecharjee who has focused on "Dalit Politics in Bengal but his concentration was muchmore towards the ambedkar's election in constituent Assembly from Bengal Legislative assembly that partition Politics as a whole" (Bondhopadhyay and Choudhury 236). Anusua Basu Roy Choudhury in her another essay "Nostalgia of Desh: Memories of Partition" has talked about trauma and memory of refugees by interviewing some uppercaste Hindu Refugee Women like Hiranprava Devi, Renubala Devi etcetera (Chowdhury 5654-5657).Another scholar,Mustakim Ansari has quoted Meenakshi Mukherjee who writes in "Is There Dalit Writing in Bangla?", collaborated with MonoranjanBapari that, "not only mainstream journals like Desh but also several little magazines that I read regularly-never made me aware that any such category existed in Bangla. This could either mean nothing is published in Bangla that can be separately labelled dalit literature or that there is a collective reluctance in mainstream discourse to recognise as literature any writing that is done outside the upper caste literary establishment" (Ansari, 2022, p.2). SumitSarkar has criticised the readers of subaltern studies in his essay "The decline of Subaltern in Subaltern Studies" by saying, "Subaltern studies does happen to be the first Indian historiographical school whose reputation has become to be evaluated primarily in terms of audience reponse in the west" (Sarkar 103).Though they talked about Dalits Refugees along with UppercasteHindu Refugees, but the depiction of Refugee Dalit women and the second generation of them and that also from literary perspective can rarely be found in any research paper. Adding to that MadhurimaSen in her research paper "Nostalgia, Refugee Identity and Disillusionment after partition in Sunil Gangopadhay's East-West" has written about the function of nostalgia and difficulties faced by refugees in

the attempt of resettlement and also looked with a Marxist Perspective at the difference effect of partition on different classes of refugees (sen 251). Though this research paper is from literary perpective but has focused on nostalgia and class division not the caste oppression. So, the poems like "I am KrishnakoliMahato" by Subodh Sarkar demand some scholarly lens to depict the condition of second generation of refugee dalit women as the concepts of second generation refugees, especially who are women and from rural geographical area, are rarely depicted in the scholarly papers. This research study, through the poem "I am krishnakolimahato" by Subodh Sarkar, analyses the trauma or the inner voice of second generation Dalit women who create their identity in the midst of the accumulated despotism of caste, gender and displacement. This paper also refers the concept of "post memory" given by Marianne Hirsch to discuss the influence of intergenerational trauma on dalit inheritors. She writes, "post memory describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective and cultural trauma of those who came before experiences they remember only by means of the stories, images or behaviours among which they grew up" (Hirsch, The Generation of post Memory, 1990).Hirsch tries to show that this post memory or trauma haunts the generation after generation by recalling or re-sharing the same stories. This scholarly paper presents the post memory concept in a new way by creating this trauma as a weapon to fight against the traditional oppression of upper caste and to create the identity as Refugee Dalit Women in academia through analysing the poem "I am KrishnakoliMahato". By portraying the interplay between Post Memory and Quest for Identity in Sarkar's poem , this paper proclaims for the acknowledgement of a distinct Dalit aesthetic rooted in rural lived experience and challenges the restricted norms of urban-centric literary canons.

Is Post memory a trauma or a weapon?

Marianne Hirchhas used the term "post-memory"first in her article on *Art Speigelman'sMaus* in collaboration with Leo Spitzer. She has focused extreamly on the second generation memory of the Holocaust and has written several books on family narrative in literature and photographyas she has written, "This essay elucidates the generation of post memory and its reliance on photography as a primary medium of trans generational transmission of trauma" (Hirsch, 103). Post memory can be defined as some events occurred in the past but its effect still in present which she has described in the term "living connecton". This post memory can be bitter as well as sweet but as Hirsch has explained it taking reference with Holocaust , she has presented it as a haunting post memory or tauma. In order to define it, she says, "postmemeory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceeded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated by our ancestors.It is to be shaped; however indirectly by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction on and exceed comprehension" (Hirsch 1990). Again Hoffman said, " The paradoxes of indirect knowledge haunt many of us who came after"

(2004: 25). In the essay ‘The Generation of Post Memory’, Hirsch has raised a question, “ can the memory of genocide be transformed into action and resistance”? The obvious answer is yes because the similar picture can be seen in the novel A Tale of two Cities by Charls Dickens. This poem “I am KrishnakoliMahato” is also an epitopme of this very question. The essay was begun with the transmission of Halocaust trauma from one generation to another generation which she has termed as “guardianship of the Holocaust”. But later she has analysed that poems or literature became the transmitter of this trauma as she said, “ Hillberg is recalling a dichotomy between history and memory (for him,embodied by poetry and narrative) that has had a shaping effect. But fifty years after Adorno’s contradictory injunctions about poetry after Auschwitz, poetry is now only one of the supplemental genres and institutions of transmission” (Hirsch, 105). In that sense the poem “I am KrishnakoliMahato” has also become a transmitter of memory but not as trauma but as resistance. As the photography had in particular come to play such an important role in this process of mediation, later, in the place of photograpgy literature has been crowned at that matter.

IndrajitHazra, a journalist, has written in his essay “A Time to Remember” that “Memory indeed is the engine and chassis of all narration” (Hazra 2022). Dipesh Chakraborty has argued in his research paper “Remembered villages: Representation of Hindu-Bengali memories in the aftermath of the partition”, “ a traumatised memory has a narrative structure which works on a principle opposite to that of any historical narrative” (Chakraborty 2143). Anusua Basu Roy Chowdhury writes in her essay “ Nostalgia of Desh: Memories of Partition”, “A historical narrative, often all concentrates on an event explaning its causes and the timing, but what it perhaps cannot explain whether the subjects belong to the marginalia of history like ‘accident’, ‘concurrences’ or not by quoting Pradip Kumar Bose as “memory begins where history ends” (Bose 85). Through the above mentioned essay A.B.R. Chowdhury has explored “the tone and nature of reminiscences of a few uprooted people- their childhood memories, their upbringing as well as their sense of trauma . It also tries to discuss the contrary relationship between the sweet memories and the bitter memories against the backdrop of the shared past” (Chowdhury 5654).

Though Hirsch explain ‘post-memory’ as the background or cause of trauma but the narrator in the poem “I am KrishnakoliMahato”, has made the post-memory her weapon to fight against the domination of urban aesthetics, caste marginalisation and women exploitation and to eshtablish her own identity as a Dalit Women. Fot instance,

> In the poem the narrator has pointed out thatherfather whose left hand has been blown off due to blast, has burnt her books several times. Even her mother many time demotivated her in continuation of her study as in experience of her mother, women should not be grown up.(Sarkar, 9-12 lines)

This articulation shows that narrator’s parents has a traumatised past and they are transmitting this trauma in their children’s life, just like Hirsch has defined how post memory exists as

trauma in people's mind through generation after generation. If the paper looks into the poem "Tej" by DebabrataSingha, there also it can be found that the traditional concept about dalit women actually works like post-memory or trauma that dalit women inherit. In the poem "Tej", the narrator is sajhlikuiri, a dalit marginalised women, also has portrayed similar kind of experience.

> Sanjhliis the daughter of SibuKuiri in jambuni. From when she gets consciousness, shehas been compared to soil. Her Granny used to say her that the girl who will run the kitchen of others, what will she do being educated?Theintelligentia of the village used to say that as she is the daughter of kuiripara, the only oprtion of her is to be a maid.(Singha, 41 – 46 lines)

The upper lines portrays that even now, in 20th century, the inheritance of occupation still exists. But both the narrator has broken the tradition that transmits the trauma to the 'after generation' and has used the trauma as their weapon to end the tradition and to make their own identity , fighting against the societal norms as in 'Karukku', Bama has written that being a dalit women , she has fought against the societal orthodoxy, discrimination, marginalization and being educated , she has made her own identity. In the poem "I am krishnakoliMahato", the narrator, krishnakoli has also succeded in making her own identity.

> In the poem she is writing to her mother that she has received acall from Europe. She is going to read a paper in dalit conference.Then she articulated her own identity, " I am your KrishnakoliMahato, MA, Ph.D…."(Sarkar, 13-15 lines)

It is beyond imagination that a dalit women is going to read a research paper in dalit conference, organised in Europe. This articulation of the narrator has shown that fighting against all the obstacles, they have made their own identity as in this poem 'KrisnakoliMahato, MA, Ph.D', by using the post-trauma as their weapon. Again, if the paper dives into the poem, "Tej", there also it can be seen that the trauma has become thaeir strength.

> In the poem the reporters and the politucians have come to her because she, the narrator is a maid and also a daughter of a maid. Not only that, she is from dalit community and hunger is their daily companion. Inspite of these impediments, she became first in secondary examination. (Singha, 139- 140 lines)

Before the result neither the minister nor the villagers has come to sanjhli'shut,they neither encouraged her to be educated nor helped her in study, rather, if her mother has become unable to go for work in an upper caste house, instead of her mother , sanjhli had to go. The society has always told her to maintain the tradition of their community . Like krisnakoli, sanjhli also used the post-memory as a weapon to create her own identity.

So, the analysation portrays that the second generation of dalit women are no more transmitting the trauma or post memory in their chindren's life, rather they are using this psychological barrier (trauma) as their weapon, not only to create their own dalit identity

but also to create an obstacle free space where their next generation can take breath with out any hesitation . Thus, the post-memory is no more a trauma, it is a weapon, a shield that has given voice to the dalit women.

Quest for Identity…

Identity is very much required for recognition. If it is possible to look deeply some of Dalit text, it can be seen that the people from dalit community has only one collective identity and that is Dalit. In the text *The Grip of Change* by *P.Sivakami*, it has been portrayed that the lowercaste people used to address uppercast people by saying *Esaman*, a tamil term that shows respect but on the other hand the uppercaste used address the lowercaste people by saying *Dei, Eley,Endi*which are disrecpectful term in tamil. To get respectful recognition, self-identity is required.

The text which this paper deals with, shows the quest for identity of the narrator Krishnakoli who wants to eshtablish selfhood struggling against the inherited trauma. In the very first line of the poem the narrator says,"I am KrishnakoliMahato, MA, Ph.D" (Sarkar, line 1).

The narrator, a dalit women declaring her own identity, her own selfhood to reclaim her respectful space in the society. In the poem *Tej*, *Sanjhli,*the narrator refused to be a maid and continued her study to get respectful social recognition. But the creation of identity goes beyond social recognition, it connects political aspect also as it is linked with caste, displacement, gender biasness etcetera.

> In the poem *Tej*, when the narrator stood first in the secondary examination, the minister came and wanted to give her ten thousand rupees cheque and commented regarding their distressness. (Sarkar, 138-147 lines)

But the narrator Sanjhli refused to take the cheque and claimed that the other students like sanjhli should get healthy circumstances to continue their study. This part of the poem portrays the ignorance of the state towards the dalit people.

Krishnakoli and sanjhli both the dalit women have succeed to eshatablish their respectful recognition by making the trauma and the struggle their weapon. In the poem "I am KrishnakoliMahato",Krishnakoli even got the international regognition as she has received a call to read her research paper at a conference in Europe.

This moment is merely not autobiographical but a symbol of broader collective identity in literary and educatiobal spaces which are dominated by upper caste. Here,Marianne Hirsch's concept of post memory and trauma becomes inspiration rather than burden.The inherited pain becomes fuel to create self-identity rather than accepting stereotypes. Stuart Hall Said, " Cutural Identity is matter of becoming as well as of being…". In the poem " I am KrishnakoliMahato" by Subodh Sarkar as well the reference poem "Tej" by DebabrataSingha, the narrators become the sign of becoming. They have gone beyond the silently acceptance and made the education their tool to rewrite both personal and

collective histories. Thus , this poem is not the lamentation of Dalit oppression but about self-expression where identity is not inherited but created.

Dalit Aesthetics :

The word Dalit Aesthetics does not refer the traditional beauty, rather, it defines the unique cultural expression of dalit community, their (Dalit) pain, struggle,caste based marginalisation, oppression, resistance and survival. Gopal Guru and sundarSarukkai, the rethinker of Dalit Discourse, defined dalit asthetic as "It is the lived body of the dalit that generates an aesthetic form… dalit aesthetic previledges suffering as a site of knowledge and expression." (The cracked Mirror, 2012).Sharad Patil is known as the pioneer in developing the concept of Dalit Aesthetics in his work Aesthetics of Non-Brahmanical Literature. Later Sharan Kumar Limbale developed the theory in his book Towards an Aesthetics of Dalit Literature. In Subodh Sarkar's poem "I am KrishnakoliMahato" as well as in the reference poem "Tej" by DebobrataSingha , this kind of aesthetics is vividly drawn through the raw and rural language, unsettledness, portrayal of struggle, fleshy selfhood presentation that resists uppercaste literary norms. In the poem the narrator Krishnakoli does not adopy the concept of urban beauty to make her identity , rather she has presented herself as a rural invisible dalit women. The poet has beautifully used the dalit Aesthetics when he writes, Krioshnakoli's body is like a no moon night (Sarkar, 2nd line). Usually , writers presents their narrator or female protagonist as a fair and lovely lady but, in this poem the poet Subodh Sarkar has broken the traditional norms and presented his narrator a brown women who can not be acceptable in society easily.

In the very first line of the second stanza of this poem, the poet portrays that Krishnakoli is not afraid of cockroach like the women of Garihat (Sarkar, line 8). Here, the poet wants to tell that generally, the women from urban places may afraid of minor disturbances but the women whose daily lives involve constant negotiation with nature, insects and other harsh elements are possessed with strength and fearlessness that defy urban notions of fragility.The father whose left arm is blasted out, the mother who is afraid of the growth of her daughter and krishnakoli's continuation of study with the burnt books ,all these obstacles are the emblem of the lived violence and inherited trauma. Dalit Aesthetic reaches its peak when Sarkar points out the sexual exploitation of Dalit women in academic Decorum. He writes,

> The Supervisor, under whom she did her Ph.d, that professor wanted to take her in Raichok. When she refused, he said, Ph.D would not be completed without going to Raichok.(Sarkar, 17-22 lines).

The narrator recalls the moment when she was indirectly offered to spent time in raichok with her supervisor to get her doctoral degree. This event unveiles the violence a dalit woman faces at academic forum. The Dalit Aesthetics becomes political and ethical that exposes caste gendered economy of power where dalit woman's intellect is undervalued unless she dissolves in the exploitation. Subodh Sarkar has not romanticized the sufferings

of Dalit Women but has reframed the truth. The aestheticness of this poem is not in its form or words but in narrator's power of resistence. In the sense of Dalit Aesthetic, R.G.Jadav in his essay "Dalit Feelings and Aesthetic Detachment" has said that it would be impossible for Dalits to make a detachment with their literary creation which is beyond the norms of world literary technique but on the other hand this attachment has created new aesthetic norms in the literary canvas. In this poem, the detachment has been created as the poet Subodh Sarkar is not from Dalit community but an observer of their struggle. So in this poem the norms of Dalit Aestheticism can be fulfilled as well as aesthetic detachment has also been created but the norms of aesthetic attachment is not fulfilled here.

Conclusion:

Through the study on Subodh Sarkar's poem "I am KrishnakoliMahato" it can be said in conclusion that second generation of refugee dalit women does rely upon their inherited trauma, rather they make it their weapon of resistence, through which they create their own identity. The poem raw language and imagery challenges mainstream literary canon and rural lives, struggle, marginalisation cover Dalit Aesthetic forum. Krishnokoli's journey from continuation of study from burnt book to read paper in Europe , does not portray only the personal growth but the collective reclaimation. So the narrator Krishnokoli has become a symbol who has made space for the long unheard voices. ■

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Beyond the Mirror

Prachi Verma

The mirror shows a surface bright,
A passing glance, a fleeting light.
The sculpted jaw, the practised smile,
Can captivate for just a while.
But beauty cast in a fragile mould
Is only half the story told.
True radiance does not reside
In painted lips or flawless hide
It blooms where quiet nature weaves
Itsa gentle spell among the leaves.
It's in the eye that takes the time
To see the wonder of the clime,
The subtle grace of falling rain,
The strength a tender sprout can gain.
A deeper shine, a richer hue,
Is found in all the good you do.
It's in the steady, helping hand,
The comfort that you understand.
This inner light, this brilliant spark,
That guides the hopeful in the dark
Is simple, steadfast kindness shown
A seed of goodness widely sown.
For looks will fade as seasons turn,
But what the open heart can learn,
The empathy that makes us whole,
The quiet courage of the soul
That is the beauty that will last,
A gentle spirit holding fast.
It is the truest, purest art,
The endless landscape of the heart. ■

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Determination

Hemanta Kumar Dash

Flying high
Till reaching the sky,
Little bird
With a big dream
Swinging it's
Tiny wings.
Disturbing storms
Sounding thunders
Hurdles more,
Without fear
Falling feathers
Drenched the wings,
Trying to reach
Determination strong ■

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United on Paper!

Pratiksha Karn

The day in a breathing space
They boast and bluster
In their segregated cluster
To cheer the nation
Or to shove their clique
Their scattered devotion
Their distributed unity
How would they hold?
The scantily clubbed flag.
The unified surrender
The combined admire
The integrated desire!
Now, they develop the disparity
The states , the community

How long will they hold the unity?
Republic day lie in ritual
Schools , colleges in mutual
But , Do they cater within,
The devotion to the nation?
Do they blood enrage ?
At faulty conduct against our empire
We are in republic era !
Why our soldier often set on pyre ?
Republic is the land
Republic is the boundary
Past the surrender and slaughter
All have submitted
The coveted periphery
Mother , they call
Mother , they protect
Why have you stood .
Weak with separated dialect ?
The battles won,
In the fire of soul,
The nation stood,
On the bloodshed .
We joined our hands .
We crushed the chains.
Ah! Today , Yes ! Today,
We combat within ourself .
Hope! To see her ,
Free! Reforming,
Progressing ,
Unifying peace with the states,
Generating intellects ,
And moving ahead!
We unite on paper!
We fight on states
On languages
On culture! ■

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Slithering into Silence

Debendra Kumar Bauri

I am not trees.
I am the green pulse
Before language.
I coil through your breath
Like an unfinished prayer
Forgotten at the altar of progress.
Once,
You wore me as sky wears dawn—
Without ownership.
Your footsteps were soft then,
Learning the grammar of moss,
Reading scriptures
Written in bark and wind.

Between your ribs
I planted seasons.
Between my roots
You buried fire.
We were not two shapes—
But one shadow
Moving across the first morning.

Then came the straight lines.
The measured horizon.
The alphabet of iron.
Silence thickened.
Birdsong turned
Into archived echoes.
Rivers rehearsed
The art of retreat.
You built ceilings
And called it shelter.
Yet your dreams
Kept growing leaves.
Why does your sleep
Smell of rain?
Why does your grief
Sound like falling timber?

Because I remain—
Uncut
In the marrow.

You exile me outward,
Yet I return inward.
A forest does not vanish.
It withdraws
Into the bloodstream.
And there,
In your last inhale,
I wait—
Seeded. ■

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Winter in Kanjipani

*** Bimbadhar Behera**

Winter comes, beauty blooms
The ghat Kanjipani turns into golden orchards
Flower of Ginglly and Mustards
There lives, Golden Oriole;
Echo in green tunnels, forest,
Fountains look transparent,
Dawn looks beautiful, mist covering mountain;
Everywhere soft symphony mesmerised the Bhuyan and Juang Terraine;
Tourists to stand and stare
Evening looks crimson
As colour diffuision
Magical touch of night, the entire ghat, a beautiful site;
With fell down of the starred sky
Tourists look down from high
Beauty of nature, the resoure of Keonjhar. ■

* the poet lives in Keonjhar, Odisha.

Shun the War

Anirudha Nanda

The flow of blood gives pain
To friend and foe the same;
Two streams may run
from different hearts,
Yet both are red in flame.
Behind each fallen, silent form
A grieving home remains—
A mother staring at the door,
A father clasping chains of pain.
You may destroy a hundred lives,
Another ten may fall;
But life is precious—equally
A sacred gift to all.

You may break a thousand homes,
Turn laughter into cries;
Yet dust is one in every land
Where shattered hope still lies.
The ripened corn, the shaded trees,
The tender, watchful eyes—
The mother's lap, the father's heart,
No border can divide.
The wife's deep love, the children's talk—
They are the same for you and me;

O restless mind, O blinded rage,
Let compassion set us free.
Shun the war, embrace the light,
Let human bonds be stronger—
For only love can bind this world
And make its future longer. ■

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From Where to Here

Swatee Sripada

The muted stillness enveloping
the silver luminescence,
The azure expanse juxtaposed
with the reveries of somnolent gazes.
On the banks of the nocturnal river,
How many muted murmurs
do the snowflakes convey?

Gently navigating and reconfiguring,
Meghavallars aspire to transcend solitude,
yearning for winged flight,
Scattered along dimly illuminated pathways
adorned with ephemeral snow flakes,
In rhythmic paths resonating
with sapphire ragas,
Echoing the celestial lullabies
of distant realms,
The streams flow silently,
devoid of voices,
Sighs steeped in the palette
of a fading rainbow.

Within the verdant palm of nature lies,
Peacocks descending inexplicably,
Evading the grasp of draconic wings,
A heartbeat symphony of greetings,
Dissecting the vibrant green dawns,
Warmly adorned in the embrace
of morning light.

On the canvas provided by the breeze,
Footfalls of a chilled child imprint softly,
A memory suspended at the periphery,
Leaning against the shoulder of nostalgia,
resting in sweetness.
Imagination, melting like the dew at dawn,
Remnants of clouds scattered
from the horizon,
Regardless of the multiplicity of worlds
in procession, we encounter
a rebellious epoch,
Even within the sanctum of slumber,
embers of passion remain aglow. ■

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Sharing

Saroj K. Padhi

I share my meaningful silence
with none other than my pen
who is my truest friend
in pleasure and pain,

jotting down the inexplicable feelings
in a language simple and plain,
giving voice to the inexpressible
helping them have easy drain;

my silence is my weakness
as they hardly can read it
but it's my greatest strength too
for before being written, the real transit .

Let me stay with my silence
till my last day on earth
and die into a greater, deeper silence
before being pushed into next birth ! ■

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Far from the Truth

Gajanan Mishra

Oh yes,
Justice is a joke.
And judge is the joker.
Oh yes,
Justice is a bazar.
Neither I am a creditor
Nor a debtor of that bazar.
Oh yes,
Justice is a cinema.
I would like not to
Enter into the hall
To watch.
Oh yes,
Wait, my dear
Justice is coming,
Just like my wife
And trying to keep me
Aside to extract something.
And justice, how are you?
Are you really
Far from the truth?

---

* Tapobana, Titilagarh, Balangir, Odisha.

Endless Love

Rajat Kumar Satapathy

When I knew that she loved
to see moon
I feel in love with night.
When I felt she liked
the darkness of night
I started to hate day.
But I didn't know
how much I loved her.
At the first sight
I found her unknown to me
yet I felt she was mine sometimes.
So I fell in love with my past,
When I knew that she loved
to read my writings
I fell in love with my thoughts
But I didn't know
how much I loved her.
When I found she loved
the flowers in the garden,
I was befriended with
all the butterflies.
When I saw she loved to worship
the stone idols in the temples,
I started to love
even scattered stones.
But I didn't know
how much I loved her.
When I wanted to forget her
she was recalled by me
more and more.
So I tried to be closer to her.
But I felt that she wanted
to forget me.
So I started to love and respect her
betrayal too. ■

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