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## Correspondence Address

Head Office : NARANPUR, Post: KODANDAPUR, Via: DEVIDWAR  
Dist.: JAJPUR, ODISHA, INDIA, PIN Code-755007  
Regd. Office: Plot No: 2642/3054/3130, Lane-7, Bhuasuni Nagar, Post - Janla, Dist: Khordha, Odisha-752054  
e-mail : rockpebbles2007@rediffmail.com / rockpebbles2010@gmail.com  
[http:// www.rockpebblesindia.in](http://www.rockpebblesindia.in)  
Cell - 9437009135 / 9437449490, WhatsApp-9861012630

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papers. ■

#### Editor speaks.....

In an age increasingly defined by  
turbulence- be it climate disasters, social  
unrest, global health challenges or the silent  
crisis of isolation- the role of literature  
becomes ever more indispensable. Literature  
does not merely entertain; it illuminates,  
heals, provokes and connects. In these  
fragmented times, it reminds us of our shared  
humanity, offering a mirror to society and a  
lamp to the soul.

As we bring out the June issue of  
*Rock Pebbles*, we extend a heartfelt  
invitation to writers, thinkers and readers  
across disciplines to continue contributing  
to this ever-evolving dialogue. Writing is an  
act of hope. Publishing, a step towards  
collective consciousness. We urge our  
contributors to use this platform not just to  
express but to reach- to speak to the wider  
world in a language that binds rather than  
divides.

This month, as Odisha dons the  
colours of its vibrant culture, we also  
celebrate the joy of *Rajo*, a festival of  
womanhood, fertility and the rhythms of the  
earth, and *Ratha Yatra*, the grand chariot  
festival of Lord Jagannath- a symbol of  
universal love, inclusivity and spiritual  
movement. These cultural touchstones  
remind us that tradition, like literature,  
carries timeless truths that speak to every  
generation.

Let us then read, write and publish  
with purpose. For in the pages of literature  
lies the power to endure, to inspire and to  
transform the world. ■

**Chief Editor**

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## Panopticism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Surveillance as a Mechanism of Power

Sanjukta Samal

This article presents a Foucauldian reading of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, examining how surveillance operates as an insidious mechanism of power through the lens of Michel Foucault's theory of panopticism. Orwell's dystopian society embodies the principles of the panopticon, where the omnipresence of Big Brother, relentless monitoring by telescreens, and the pervasive threat of the Thought Police cultivate a culture of self-surveillance and internalised discipline. Rather than relying solely on visible coercion, the Party weaponises the psychology of fear, conditioning individuals to police their own thoughts and behaviours in anticipation of constant observation. This analysis further explores how the Party's control extends beyond physical surveillance to epistemic domination, manipulating language and history to construct a reality in which independent thought becomes nearly impossible. Through this fusion of visibility and discursive control, Orwell vividly illustrates the terrifying potential of surveillance societies to erase personal freedom and suppress resistance at its very roots. Situating *Nineteen Eighty-Four* within Foucault's theoretical framework reveals the novel's enduring relevance, offering a chilling reflection on the modern world's increasing entanglement with surveillance technologies and authoritarian impulses.

**Keywords:** Panopticism, Surveillance, Self-Discipline, Language and Power

### INTRODUCTION:

The interplay of power, surveillance, and control has long fascinated scholars seeking to understand the mechanisms by which societies regulate individuals. Michel Foucault's theory of Panopticism, as elaborated in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, offers a profound framework for dissecting the intricate relationship between observation and authority. Foucault draws upon Jeremy Bentham's concept of the Panopticon: a circular prison structure that allows a single watchman to observe all inmates without them knowing whether they are being watched at any given moment. This architectural metaphor becomes, in Foucault's analysis, a pervasive model of disciplinary power in modern society. He argues that such systems of surveillance internalize control within individuals, compelling them to

regulate their behavior as if under constant scrutiny. The genius of Panopticism lies not in overt oppression but in the subtle conditioning of self-discipline, where visibility becomes a trap that ensures obedience.

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* chillingly dramatizes these theoretical insights in its portrayal of a dystopian state under totalitarian rule. Orwell imagines a society where omnipresent surveillance, epitomized by the figure of Big Brother and the ubiquitous telescreens, manipulates and suppresses the populace. In this bleak landscape, citizens live under the constant threat of observation, which functions to internalize fear and compliance. The Party's ceaseless monitoring mechanisms mirror Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power, transforming society into a giant Panopticon where privacy is obliterated, and even thoughts are policed through the concept of "thoughtcrime". By weaving Foucault's theoretical lens with Orwell's fictional narrative, this article examines how *Nineteen Eighty-Four* serves as a grim allegory of Panoptic surveillance, revealing the insidious ways in which power operates not merely through physical coercion but through the psychological entrapment of its subjects. In doing so, it underscores the timeless relevance of Orwell's warning against the unchecked proliferation of surveillance technologies and the quiet erosion of individual freedoms.

## Literature Review

Scholarly engagement with *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has long recognised the novel's piercing critique of totalitarian regimes and its prophetic commentary on the politics of control. Critics have explored its historical context, drawing parallels between Orwell's dystopia and the rise of fascism and Stalinism in the twentieth century. Bernard Crick, in his seminal work *George Orwell: A Life*, emphasises Orwell's intent to warn against the terrifying potential of absolute power. However, more recent scholarship has shifted towards theoretical readings that expand the novel's relevance beyond its immediate historical circumstances. Among these, Michel Foucault's concept of panopticism offers an especially fruitful framework for understanding the intricate mechanisms of surveillance and self-regulation embedded within Orwell's narrative.

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* introduces the panopticon as a metaphor for modern disciplinary societies, wherein power operates less through direct oppression and more through the constant possibility of observation. Scholars such as Thomas Mathiesen and David Lyon have extended Foucault's ideas to analyse contemporary surveillance cultures, identifying parallels with Orwell's vision. In their analyses, the themes of internalised discipline, the erasure of privacy, and the transformation of citizens into subjects of state power emerge as crucial focal points. Critical interpretations by scholars like Beatrix Campbell have further argued that Orwell's depiction of surveillance is not merely technological but profoundly psychological, aligning closely with Foucauldian theories of biopolitics and control. This paper situates itself within this critical conversation, bridging Orwell's dystopian narrative with Foucault's theoretical insights to offer a nuanced reading



of how surveillance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* operates as both a visible and invisible mechanism of power, extending beyond coercion to the very construction of subjectivity.

### **1. Architecture of Surveillance: Foucault's Panopticism**

Foucault's concept of Panopticism, as elaborated in *Discipline and Punish*, offers a profound reimagining of the dynamics of power and surveillance in modern society. At the core of Panopticism is the metaphor of the Panopticon — an architectural design conceived by the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham in the late eighteenth century. Bentham's Panopticon envisaged a circular prison with a central watchtower surrounded by cells along the perimeter. The design ensured that prisoners remained in full view of the watchtower, while the internal structure of the tower prevented them from seeing their observers. This clever manipulation of visibility created an environment where the few could surveil the many, efficiently and silently, without the need for direct coercion.

Foucault transcends the literal architecture of Bentham's model to present the Panopticon as a generalized schema of power that characterizes modern disciplinary societies. For Foucault, the brilliance of the Panopticon lies not merely in its physical construction but in the psychological and social mechanisms it enables. The possibility of constant observation induces a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. It is not necessary that the observer is always present; what matters is the enduring awareness of potential surveillance. This internalization of the gaze compels individuals to regulate their own behavior, rendering overt displays of force increasingly redundant.

Through Panopticism, Foucault illustrates how modern power shifts from external coercion to internalized discipline. Unlike the spectacle of punishment characteristic of pre-modern sovereign power — where public executions served as theatrical demonstrations of authority — Panoptic power operates quietly, efficiently, and pervasively. Surveillance becomes an invisible web that penetrates daily life, governing individuals not by spectacular violence but by instilling a continuous sense of being watched. In this way, power embeds itself within the very consciousness of individuals, normalizing compliance and manufacturing what Foucault famously terms “docile bodies”.

Crucially, Foucault emphasizes that the Panopticon is not merely a prison model but a template for numerous modern institutions. Schools, hospitals, factories, and military barracks all adopt Panoptic principles to monitor, classify, and regulate bodies. For example, the examination in schools not only assesses knowledge but functions as a means of surveillance, recording students' abilities and behaviors, thereby producing normalized subjects who internalize institutional expectations. Hospitals, too, with their constant observations and meticulous record-keeping, transform patients into subjects of medical scrutiny. These micro-operations of power cumulatively generate a society in which surveillance becomes the very condition of social existence.

Furthermore, Foucault identifies Panopticism as a tool of both individualization and totalization. Surveillance isolates individuals, making them singular units of observation, yet at the same time, it integrates them into a larger collective managed and controlled by administrative apparatuses. This dual function is what makes Panopticism so powerful: it produces isolated, self-regulating subjects while simultaneously enabling state and institutional oversight of populations. It is a mechanism that dissects society at both the macro and micro levels, achieving unprecedented efficiency in governance.

Panopticism also blurs the boundaries between public and private spheres. In a Panoptic society, there is a dissolution of private space as individuals live under the constant shadow of observation. The omnipresence of surveillance technologies extends the gaze of authority into domestic, professional, and even virtual environments. Digital surveillance in the contemporary era, for example, mirrors Foucault's insights as individuals' online behaviors are tracked, analyzed, and commodified, shaping consumer habits and political opinions without explicit coercion. Though Foucault wrote in a pre-digital age, his theorization of surveillance anticipates the complexities of modern data-driven governance.

Panopticism does not rely solely on external enforcers of power. One of its most insidious qualities is the way it mobilizes the watched to become watchers themselves. Surveillance systems recruit ordinary individuals into their logic — turning neighbors, colleagues, and even family members into agents of observation and discipline. In doing so, the architecture of surveillance disperses responsibility across society, making power impersonal and ubiquitous. It is no longer confined to authoritarian figures but embedded in everyday practices and relationships.

Thus, the architecture of surveillance in Foucault's thought is not a static structure but a dynamic network of power relations. It operates through visibility and invisibility, centralization and dispersal, external compulsion and internal regulation. The Panopticon, while originally a design for incarceration, becomes an emblem of how modern power is exercised subtly, silently, and relentlessly, manufacturing consent while preserving the illusion of freedom. This transformation marks a pivotal evolution in the history of power, where domination is no longer imposed from above but is woven into the very fabric of social life.

## **2. Big Brother's Gaze: Surveillance as Social Control in 1984**

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* presents a chilling fictional embodiment of surveillance society, where the omnipresent gaze of Big Brother becomes the defining symbol of totalitarian control. Unlike Foucault's theoretical framework, which analyzes power in dispersed, often institutional forms, Orwell dramatizes surveillance as a terrifyingly centralized apparatus, wielded directly by the ruling Party to maintain absolute dominance over both public and private life. In *1984*, surveillance transcends mere observation, it becomes a psychological weapon that colonizes the minds of citizens, coercing them into conformity and eradicating even the possibility of subversive thought.

The omnipresence of telescreens epitomizes this Intrusive control. Unlike Foucault's invisible observers in the Panopticon, Orwell's telescreens not only observe but also broadcast propaganda, making surveillance a two-way mechanism. Citizens of Oceania are relentlessly bombarded with Party slogans while simultaneously being monitored in their homes and workplaces.

“WAR IS PEACE. FREEDOM IS SLAVERY. IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.”

(Part 1, Chapter 1, p. 4)

The Party's terrifying motto — “War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength” — crystallizes the perverse logic of this system, where surveillance does not merely suppress opposition but reconstructs reality itself. This creates a saturated environment of both visual and auditory surveillance, where private refuge is annihilated, and individuals internalize the Party's gaze to the extent that independent thought becomes dangerous and nearly impossible.

“Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime is death.”

(Part 1, Chapter 1, p. 27)

Winston Smith, the novel's protagonist, exemplifies the psychological torment inflicted by this system — he nurses rebellious thoughts but remains acutely aware of the Party's penetrating watchfulness, leading to constant self-censorship and paranoia. What distinguishes Orwell's surveillance society is the deliberate construction of fear as a political instrument. The uncertainty surrounding the extent of surveillance — whether or not a specific individual is being watched at any given moment — amplifies its effectiveness. As O'Brien coldly explains during Winston's interrogation, the aim is not merely to capture dissenters but to preempt dissent altogether. By instilling the belief that-

“Big Brother is watching you”

(Part 1, Chapter 1, p. 3)

The Party enforces a form of mental discipline more potent than physical coercion. Thoughtcrime, the novel's most profound invention, encapsulates this dynamic: it criminalizes not actions but mere ideas, extending the reach of the Party into the innermost sanctum of human consciousness.

“Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime is death.”

(Part 1, Chapter 1, p. 27)

Moreover, the Party's surveillance extends beyond technological instruments to the manipulation of social relations. Orwell meticulously depicts a society where trust is systematically dismantled, and citizens become informants against one another. Children are indoctrinated as “Junior Spies”, encouraged to report any signs of dissent within their own families. Friendships are hollowed out by suspicion, and love becomes a subversive

act. Julia and Winston's clandestine relationship, for instance, is not merely an affair of passion but an act of rebellion against the Party's surveillance state, which seeks to regulate even the most intimate human bonds. Their eventual betrayal under the weight of torture underscores the Party's terrifying ability to destroy personal loyalties, reducing individuals to isolated, compliant subjects.

Crucially, the Party's gaze operates not only through surveillance devices but also through the omnipotence of language and historical revisionism. The invention of Newspeak aims to constrict the range of thought itself, eliminating the very vocabulary of rebellion. By controlling language, the Party controls perception and memory, ensuring that citizens cannot conceptualize opposition even within their private reflections.

"Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought?"

(Part 1, Chapter 5, p. 52)

Surveillance thus extends into the cognitive realm, where the Party polices not only external behavior but internal realities. The erasure of historical truths and the fabrication of perpetual victories serve to disorient citizens, making them reliant on the Party for their understanding of the world.

"Who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past."

(Part 1, Chapter 3, p. 40)

Unlike Foucault's diffuse model of power, Orwell's depiction of surveillance in *1984* is centralized and personal. Big Brother functions as a godlike figurehead — at once an omnipresent watcher and an ideological anchor. Though it remains ambiguous whether Big Brother is a real person or a symbolic construct, his image saturates the public sphere, creating a psychological environment where submission is not only expected but desired.

A pivotal Foucauldian insight lies in the internalisation of disciplinary mechanisms, whereby individuals become self-regulating subjects. Orwell vividly illustrates this in the psychological torment of Winston Smith. Winston's fear is not solely of external punishment but of his own cognitive rebellion, which betrays him before any external authority intervenes. The Party's strategy is insidiously effective: by blurring the lines between observation and imagination, it instills a mode of self-policing so deeply ingrained that subjects surveil their own thoughts. Winston's eventual capitulation — epitomised by his love for Big Brother — signifies the ultimate triumph of Panopticism. Foucault observed that modern disciplinary societies do not need overt violence to maintain order; rather, they rely on the internalisation of norms. Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* expands this concept, depicting a society where external surveillance fosters internalised obedience, rendering physical chains unnecessary. The transformation of citizens into instruments of their own subjugation reflects Foucault's bleak vision of modern power relations.

## 2. Punishment and Spectacle: Reaffirming State Power

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell constructs a chilling landscape where the state harnesses both the archaic brutality of public spectacle and the insidious precision of invisible surveillance to entrench its dominion. While Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, describes the evolution of power from ostentatious, corporeal punishment to subtle, internalised discipline, Orwell envisions a dystopia that collapses this historical progression, fusing both methods to devastating effect. Public rituals such as the “Two Minutes Hate” are not mere emotional outlets but carefully orchestrated ceremonies that weaponise collective fury. These moments of state-sanctioned catharsis externalise internal fears, redirecting potential dissent toward manufactured enemies like Emmanuel Goldstein. Orwell’s portrayal of such spectacles reflects Foucault’s assertion that power requires visibility — not merely to be observed, but to be felt viscerally by the populace.

The power of spectacle in *1984* extends beyond mass events; it is deeply personal and psychological, culminating in spaces like Room 101. Here, punishment transcends the physical and becomes an existential annihilation of the self. Unlike the public rituals designed for mass consumption, Room 101 operates as a private theatre of horror tailored to individual fears, ensuring absolute obedience through intimate degradation. This dual strategy of mass spectacle and personalised terror reinforces Foucault’s contention that modern power operates both in the public sphere and within the depths of the individual psyche. Yet, Orwell intensifies this dynamic by demonstrating how public displays of loyalty and fear are not merely performative acts but essential survival mechanisms in a society where surveillance extends into the recesses of thought itself. Thus, punishment in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* serves a dual function: it publicly affirms the Party’s omnipotence while privately disintegrating any residue of resistance. By weaving the visible theatre of punishment with the invisible web of surveillance, Orwell presents a society where control is total, resistance is futile, and the spectacle of power becomes a daily reality — relentlessly reaffirming the Party’s unassailable supremacy.

## 4. Surveillance as a Tool of Preemptive Suppression

Orwell’s portrayal of resistance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* underscores the futility of rebellion in a fully surveilled society. The figure of O’Brien embodies the state’s capacity to infiltrate and co-opt subversive movements, ensuring that even the seeds of dissent are sown under the regime’s watchful eye. Foucault argued that where there is power, there is resistance; yet, Orwell complicates this by depicting resistance as pre-emptively neutralised through surveillance. The Party does not merely punish rebels but anticipates and orchestrates their downfall. The paradox of the Brotherhood — a resistance movement whose existence is ambiguous — illustrates the state’s manipulation of hope as a means of control. Winston’s tragic journey, from clandestine defiance to abject submission, exemplifies the profound reach of panoptic power. By illustrating a world where resistance is both foreseeable and

futile, Orwell extends Foucault's analysis, revealing the terrifying efficiency of a surveillance system that operates as both a preventative and punitive apparatus.

## Conclusion

To sum up, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* remains a hauntingly prescient reflection of Foucault's concept of panopticism, illustrating how surveillance transcends mere physical observation to become a pervasive psychological and societal control mechanism. Orwell's dystopia is not simply a fictional warning but an allegorical blueprint that mirrors the structures of power and surveillance we increasingly encounter in contemporary society. With the rapid advancement of digital technologies—such as facial recognition software, data mining, and algorithmic monitoring—the architecture of surveillance has evolved far beyond the static watchtower of the Panopticon, embedding itself into the very fabric of everyday life. Unlike the centralized gaze of Big Brother, modern surveillance operates diffusely and often invisibly, harvesting personal data under the guise of convenience, security, or efficiency. This silent omnipresence cultivates a state of internalized vigilance in individuals, much like the citizens of Orwell's Oceania, who censor their thoughts and actions in anticipation of unseen watchers.

Furthermore, as we stand on the cusp of an even more technologically governed future, the lines between voluntary participation and coerced compliance blur dangerously. Social media platforms, state-sponsored monitoring, corporate data surveillance, and AI-driven analytics collectively generate a landscape where visibility becomes a means of control, and personal freedom is subtly bartered for digital presence and acceptance. Foucault's insight into the internalization of power is crucial here: we are not merely being watched—we are made to watch ourselves. This self-surveillance aligns alarmingly with Orwell's depiction of psychological entrapment, where fear of transgression perpetuates conformity. In this light, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not a closed historical commentary but an urgent, living text, compelling us to remain critically aware of how power operates in our time. The future, therefore, demands a vigilant engagement with questions of privacy, autonomy, and resistance, lest we willingly step into the panoptic gaze and lose sight of our agency in the name of progress. ■

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Ms. Sanjukta Samal, Assistant Professor of English, Fakir Mohan College, Balasore, Odisha.



(L-R) Dr Kusha Chandra Pradhan, Dr Manoranajan Mohanty, editor Dr Udayanath Majhi, Prof Dr Basudev Chakraborty and others in ROCK PEBBLES March-2025 issue release program at S.G. College, East Jajpur, Odisha

## A Man Becomes the Place: Jayanta Mahapatra's *A Father's Hours* and *A Rain of Rites*

Chhayakanta Sarangi

Jayanta Mahapatra's first volume *Close the Sky, Ten by Ten* (1971) and the second volume *Svayamvara and Other poems* (1971) reveal his obsessive romantic self. Nevertheless, in the next two volumes *A Father's Hours* and *A Rain of Rites* published in 1976 the obsessive self-yields place to a reflexive self. Though he begins as a poet of love, he soon realizes that there are greater concerns than love. He becomes a poet of the place, of the people and their culture and tradition. He tries to identify his roots, his own self in relation to his family and society. He discovers the roots of his life lying inextricably linked up with the society. Hence a variety of people such as his son, dead mother, friends, neighbours, three-rupee whore Kamala, social worker Rama Devi, the destitute, the tubercular servant girl etc. come alive in his imagination. The poet tries to discover his relationship with them by participating in the living rhythm of life and says, "I am eager to disappear into the living, once again."<sup>1</sup> His awareness of the world around him, his concern for public life and events are discovered in such poems as 'The peace Negotiators', 'Gandhi,' 'The Blind Beggar', 'Blind Singer in a Train' etc. However, his social consciousness in these two volumes finds expression only in flashes.

*A Father's Hours* opens with a long poem 'Performance'. The poet finds himself "with bandaged mind, / amidst the smell of smoke and gun-powder and blood." (P.12) He is seriously disturbed by the evils and violence prevailing in the society:

Now is the instant when I cannot recognize myself  
Amazed by the silence after Kurukshetra,  
the fury never really over.  
(What had Arjun or anyone done?)  
I remember only faces, terrible, faceless,  
coming alive in the silence. (P.13)

The life of the Indians is still engulfed in the fury of the Mahabharata War, but hardly does anyone accept the burden of guilt. People have not learnt any lesson from this Kurukshetra



battle. The question underscores our lack of accepting the burden of responsibility. For Mahapatra, living today is inextricably linked with yesterday. Thus the cultural, historical and mythical past is evoked. The legend of Dharama's sacrifice relates him to the shameful history of Konarka. The twelve-year-old boy fixed the crowning slab of Konarka which twelve hundred artisans had failed to do in a period of twelve years. The boy jumped into the river Chandrabhaga from the top of the temple to save the artisans from the dreaded capital punishment. Their craftsmanship remained as a glorious achievement in the realm of art and architecture, but a genius was nipped in the bud. The poet expresses a sense of guilt and calls "his silent cry a legend of baffling idealism"

as the twelve hundred builders of my hoped for triumph  
overcome the humility all along the journey  
and avidly prepare to claim recognition  
for that noble, proud Konarka of the soul. (P.13)

'The Twenty-fifth Anniversary of a Republic: 1975' makes an attempt to present the contemporary social reality "which has not been all it might have been" after Independence. He finds that

This is a barren world that has been  
prowling round my room, epidemics in the poisoned air,  
dusty streets stretching away like disgruntled socialists. (P.17)

The poet expresses his deep concern for the ills in the society which political freedom has not been able to remove. The poet reveals the inherent corruption in a sarcastic way:

The prostitutes are younger this year:  
at the police station they're careless to give reasons  
for being what they are.  
And the older women careful enough not to show their years. (P.18)

In post-Independence India idealism has melted into the thin air, and people have been building statues of great men without following their message:

The coarse crows perch upon the shoulders of bronze and stone  
like crafty priests looking handsome and mysterious  
in the counterfeit glow of light. (P.19)

The image of the crows stands for harshness, and that of the crafty priests of Puri reflects the hypocrisy of the post-Independence hero-worshippers.

The peculiarity of Mahapatra's approach is that he does not describe the social evils as an outsider. He never forgets that he is a part of the society which is burdened with mounting corruption. The poet has a sense of belonging to his country, and therefore, he, too, celebrates the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Indian Republic. "I paint my front gate in shiny aluminum/and walk past it, to wait for the ceremonial parade", (P.20) but he is

anguished to find poverty and destitution all around: “the destitutes everywhere are still my sense of guilt”. (P.20) He is pained to see that the emerging New Women fail to assert their individuality and dignity. India’s past glories of warrior-queens are now a subject matter of history and lie in books that college girls carry. The poet’s sense of irony and satire is conspicuous:

What is wrong with my country?  
The jungles have become gentle, the women restless.  
And history reposes between the college girl’s breasts:  
the exploits of warrior-queens, the pride pierced together  
from a god’s tainted armours. Is this where the advantage lay?  
Mina, my pretty neighbour, flashes round and round the gilded stage,  
hiding jungles in her purse, holding on to her divorce,  
and a lonely Ph. D. (P.27)

However, in his attempt to present the contemporary socio-political reality he is aware of the lack of requisite boldness. He admits:

In *A Father’s Hours* there is a rather long poem which has political undertones, but here too, I think I have not been wholly successful because of my tentative approach to things. You know, even in the freedom of my saying what we think, we are not able to say these things-and I too have become a coward that way.<sup>2</sup>

This capacity to analyse himself and to confess his follies characterize his poems. It is his firm belief that “poetry has always been responsible to life. By this, one means that a poet is first of all responsible to his or her conscience, otherwise he or she cannot be called a poet.”<sup>3</sup> As a serious poet of the twentieth century, he does not deceive himself. He acknowledges his contribution to the ills of the society to which he belongs. His conscience compels him to accept the burden of joint responsibility in a society full of ills and evils:

Let me get used to living with myself once again,  
with the guilt I was trying to lose touch with,  
which lets them live as they are. (P.28)

Mahapatra accepts his responsibility both as man and as a poet. He says:

It is the poet again who will talk about injustice and cruelty and greed in a society in which he lives, hoping in his heart of hearts that these would be taken care of. Certainly one cannot place the poet in the category of a social reformer: but there can be no denying the fact that he would like to see a just and fair society come into existence, to see that smile appears on the face of every destitute child on the street, on every man, woman and animal on this earth he inhabits.<sup>4</sup>

Mahapatra is surprised at people's firm faith when they worship Lord Siva with milk and coconut: "Thus the milk runs over a much-whored lingam/ the ritualistic coconuts before the gods" (P.34). He says:

There is resilience in the Indian people, may be it is faith. But I don't have that faith. I'd like to belong to them, yet I don't. I want to believe, yet I cannot. The people around me are Hindus, their Hinduism is a way of life. It amazed me how people can believe so much. It enables them to spring back to normalcy after calamity.<sup>5</sup>

This longing for faith in Mahapatra has been variously interpreted. Critics find here a Christian poet's alienation from Hindu culture and his suffering due to biculturalism. In fact, this longing for faith characterizes the modern sensibility of a man having scientific education and thereby estranged from the way of the mass. Mahapatra develops rather a love-hate relationship towards Hinduism when he tries to accept Indian culture as his own. Though he is a Christian, he is unable to ignore Hindu culture and seems to accept its world view. Mahapatra himself says, "This is Indian sensibility. Perhaps it comes out of an allegiance to the past, out of a sense of acceptance."<sup>6</sup> He recognizes his roots and is attached to his native land. Therefore, in 'Levels' he faces his son and says "I don't want you to die alone / in some strange country" (P.16)

'Assassins', the last poem of this volume, shows how Mahapatra is disturbed by the "nocturnal figures rising slowly from under/ dead leaves of tired newspapers." They are the agents of violence and bloodshed, and are like 'ghosts' and 'dark' striking terror in his heart. In a country where violence becomes the order of the day, marigolds are found "flowering the wrong way,/ toward the way of the terrible fear". In the past both Hindus and Muslims fought together for the country's independence, but today the poet finds the "cold rancor of Hindu and Muslim". The nocturnal figures whom he considers "mine" come to his mind as nightmares. They come in the form of "shadows rubbing themselves on my (his) bed." People suffer at the hands of those agents of violence. The poet's heart goes out for "those silent people, uninvolved," "who grow like tough coarse grass from cracked pavements." Their mute sufferings "wake me (him) up in the cold mists of night." The poet's heart is hurt, and his "frightened glance comes and goes like a silence." Mahapatra's acute social consciousness does not allow him to remain aloof from the people who are tortured in the society often without any reason.

The merging of the subject with the surroundings has been a characteristic of the European poetry in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. According to Baudelaire, the modern concept of art is to create a suggestive magic including at the same time, the subject and the object, the artist himself and the world outside. Eliot's early poems express almost the same point of view. In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', for example, the protagonist himself is the anaesthetized evening and the yellow fog. Mahapatra's attempt to merge the self (subject) with the country (object) highlights the seriousness with which

he seeks to identify himself as an Indian accepting the burden of responsibility of failure at different sectors.

The poems included in *A Rain of Rites* express almost a similar concern with the poet's place and people. In 'Dawn' he finds "an Indian woman, piled up to her silences / waiting for what the world will only let her do". Reference to the Indian women reveals Mahapatra's deep concern for the lot of womenfolk in his country. The dawn hardly brings a message of hope to them whose life is just a long waiting for being used up by circumstances. In the next poem 'Village' the image of the Indian woman continues:

a freezing sense of inutility sits  
on the dark brown throat of a woman  
where the scarlet mark of the gods  
had swept over through the years,  
a suffering, subtle spirit. (P.2)

It is a common scene in the evening in Indian villages that the shy woman bows to "the vermilion-smeared, whored stone." The evening sun passes indifferently "leaving behind on her body / the awe of shadow." The epithet "whored stone," a bitter remark by the poet, reveals his agony at the silent suffering of the Indian women who bow before the stone every day taking it for a god or goddess and accept thereby the life of mute suffering inflicted on them. The poet's ironic comment on the Hindu practice of worshipping stones arises out of his deep sympathy for the down-trodden including the women who have hardly been treated sympathetically by the orthodox Hindus for a long time. Many of his poems show Mahapatra's love-hate relationship towards Hinduism. He cannot altogether deny the great tradition of Hinduism, which is almost indivisible with the Indian tradition. But he cannot bear with those cruel rituals which are apathetic to the torture inflicted on the down-trodden, on women in particular. Hence the sound of the temple bell is "acid" (Dawn), the stone image is "whored" (Village), and the bell trembles as it is touched by "the pain of countless people" (Listening to a Prayer). In 'These Women' this view is more clear:

What do they live for  
beyond the veils of innocent prayer  
the climb up and down the holy stairs? (P.6)

In 'Ceremony' "a large group of stony women in front of a shrine / silently sit out the whole day waiting to be cured".(P.15) In 'Dawn at Puri' the white clad women waiting to enter the Great Temple "stare like those caught in a net / hanging by the dawn's shining strands of faith".(P.28) The bitter irony revealed in these lines is not a mere pose; it is the result of the poet's thorough investigation of the society where the Hindu widows suffer. Mahapatra's sensitive mind does not appreciate the rituals. Hence for him, there is "no point in crossing that ceremonial river/ of a hundred thousand lies" (Listening). Mahapatra always focusses on the silent suffering and loneliness in the life of an Indian woman. His poem 'A Missing Person', written on his mother, amply reflects his vision of woman:

In the darkened room  
a woman  
cannot find her reflection in the mirror  
waiting as usual  
at the edge of sleep  
In her hands she holds  
the oil lamp  
whose drunken yellow flames  
know where her lonely body hides. (P.7)

About the origin of the poem Mahapatra says:

....My father was away most of the time, touring the primary schools of the sub-division on his sturdy B.S.A. bicycle; and in the house my mother, physically ill, would be moving about in the listless darkness, my younger brother at her heels. We didn't have electricity in the house (it was a luxury for us), and the verandah with its adjoining little courtyard seemed to float in a ghostly atmosphere, filling me with a sense of insecurity I found hard to overcome.

And the picture of my mother, holding on to the oil lamp in the shadows, the sooty flame swaying in the breeze, seemed to establish itself in my mind.....

Strangely, these evenings in memory lived closer to the heart than ever. An inexplicable loneliness linked itself with the sad-eyed oil lamp of my mother.<sup>7</sup>

From the village woman piled up to her silences and the stony women waiting in front of a shrine to be cured, the camera shifts its focus to a metropolitan brothel where a woman breaks her silence urging her customer to leave soon: "Hurry, will you? Let me go."<sup>8</sup> It presents the image of a whore who wants to spend as little time with her client as possible, for her time is measured in terms of money, and she has to attend to other clients. In 'Hunger' the focus is on a fisherman's hovel where the fisherman collects customers for his young daughter. Here the image of whore is linked with hunger, and it presents the vision of woman wronged in a society in which he lives. Many of his poems show his deep concern for women who take to prostitution out of hunger. The inside of the "palm-frond shack" on the poverty ridden sands of Gopalpur sheltering the fisherman's daughter with her wormy legs echoes the starvation of the country. The fisherman-father, a victim of poverty, allows his daughter to resort to prostitution and asks the stranger, "She's just turned fifteen / Feel her." The poem juxtaposes two hungers, one leading to an intense awareness of the other. They generate a complex realization of the predicament of one's helplessness in the presence of man-created problems. About the origin of the poem Mahapatra says:

The poem is based on a true incident, it could easily have happened to me on the poverty ridden sands of Gopalpur-on-sea. Often have I imagined myself walking these sands, my solitude and my inherent sexuality working on me, to face the girl inside the dimly lit palm-frond shack. The landscape of Gopalpur chose me and my poem. To face, perhaps, my inner self, to see my debasement, to realize my utter helplessness against the stubborn starvation of my country.<sup>9</sup>

The poet's concern for starvation finds expression in 'Dawn at Puri', too: "A skull on the holy sands/ tilts its empty country towards hunger". (P.28) Leprosy seems to be another concern with Mahapatra, and a possible reason could be the memories of lepers at the Jagannath temple at Puri. This poem refers to "leprous shells leaning against one another/ a mass of crouched faces without names".(P.28) With such scenes, the poet is faced with "injuries drowsy with heat." <sup>10</sup>

'Myth', an important poem of this volume, clearly brings out Mahapatra's search of identity. The temple beckons him to come and touch the old brassy bells. He observes a crumpled leaf and the dried sacrificed flowers. The crumpled leaf turns into a diamond, and the sacrificed flowers take the form of devadasis, who dance on the stairs "that seem endless, / lifelong" and become symbolic of their devotion to God. Thus Mahapatra invokes the sacrificial rituals of the Hindu temple, and the poem embodies what V.A. Shahane says "his mythic consciousness of the Indian heritage."<sup>11</sup> The poet stands outside the dark sanctum into which he does not go. His standing outside the temple implies that he is a non-Hindu. Everything that goes on inside the temple seems mysterious to him. But the poem ends with the priest asking him firmly "Are you a Hindoo?" The poet is confronted with the question "Who am I ?" Here Bruce King finds Mahapatra concerned with "the Indian side of biculturalism."<sup>12</sup> When the priest asks him if he is a Hindu, he must have felt himself to be an outsider, because as a Christian he cannot proceed further. This question shows the urgency of the poet's search. He wants to clarify his relation to his country, the culture of which is often at one with Hindu culture. This conflict lends the necessary sharpness to his poems. It is through continuous self-analysis that he seems to reach a conclusion about his identity. Being a Christian, Mahapatra looks upon Hindu rituals from a distance. He says:

I don't think I am a religious person in the way most Indians are. Frankly, I am not. Physics did make me more analytical, helping me to break ties with my ancestral beliefs; and still, the basic quality of acceptance, of an unshakable closeness with my destiny persists. I tend to accept at times the things which happen to our lives, at other times I tend to question myself, but eventually fall back to the safe ground of our destiny. I don't believe in ritual, which seems to hold so much for people; the Indian religions are steeped in ritual, which appears meaningless. My concept of religion would be not to hurt others, or try to do so.<sup>13</sup>

In these lines Mahapatra comes out with the problem of a modern scientific-minded Indian who, be he a Hindu or a non-Hindu, is eager to assimilate the Indian tradition that is distinguished from the outlook of a devout Hindu. Mahapatra's urgency is, however, sharpened by his Christian identity. He is conscious of his firm roots in the tradition: "A thousand years answer my ochre heart / through the ends of my dead grandmother's hair."<sup>14</sup> But he sneers at "minds stacked with sacred ash",<sup>15</sup> rejects "the quivering of diseased gods"<sup>16</sup> and calls the lingam "a sightless god."<sup>17</sup> Mahapatra finds religious ceremonies and rituals to be hardly related to the human soul. They are empty, because people observe them unthinkingly without caring to know its hidden meaning:

What is there in ceremony, in a ritual's deeply hidden meaning?  
The familiar words are rude like roots, and out of place.<sup>18</sup>

Children serve as a key to Mahapatra's identification with the place, because the childhood he depicts is marked by poverty, disease and negligence. Whenever he refers to children, they are treated as a burden: "The air smells of sick, mortal children",<sup>19</sup> "A man begs for alms, sitting under an old tree / holding his paralysed boy with damp, awkward arms."<sup>20</sup> With his old rag elephant smothered, the poet feels within him a playful childhood choked to death. In conversation with R.K. Swain Mahapatra said, "I told you I did not have a happy childhood."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, references to unhappy childhood are often found in his poetry. He shares his identity with his neighbours, women and children alike and relates himself to his native land Orissa. He says:

I would never be wrong if I said that my own poetry has been about Orissa, this land where I was born and have spent all my life. India is too vast a country for one region to know about another. Living beside a slum in the heart of this old mosquitoes-infested "city", how could I not have talked about the despair in the eyes of women and children I see everyday? How could I not have shared my identity with my neighbor even though I was educated and wrote in English?<sup>22</sup>

This total identification with his land is explicit in 'Somewhere' My Man"

A man does not mean anything.  
But the place.  
Sitting on the river bank throwing pebbles,  
into the muddy current,  
a man becomes the place.(P.42)

V.A. Shahane finds this approach of Mahapatra to be almost Whitmanesque in its range and spirit. In his poem 'There was a Child Went Forth' (1871) Whitman articulates his felt experience of childhood, of his identification with objects of nature. The child becomes a part of nature he observes, a part of lilacs, water plants etc. "There was a child went forth every day / And the first object he looked upon, the object he became." Whitman echoes, to



quote V.A. Shahane, a romantic poet's basic quest for identity and a feeling for unity with natural phenomena."<sup>23</sup> Almost in the same way Jayanta Mahapatra expresses his attachment to the earth by identifying himself with it. He is so much obsessed with Orissa that his self gets absorbed into the place. He cannot but write about Odisha which has nourished him in her lap. He says:

I suppose I can never write anywhere but there, in Orissa. You know I was at Jowa for four months in 1976. But I could not do any serious work over there. Strange. Isn't it? There is an unmistakable feeling of freedom here; in my home in the centre of Cuttack; the dust, the mosquitoes, the bamboos and the mango tree in our little yard, and the two rivers circling Cuttack, on the bank of one where I grew up..... all these make up the skeleton around which my poetry forms.<sup>24</sup> And thus Mahapatra "becomes the place." ■

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Dr. Chhayakanta Sarangi, Associate Prof. of English (Retd.), D.A.V. Autonomous College, Titilagarh, Dist. Bolangir, Odisha.

# Exploring the Shining Worlds of Banu Mushtaq: A Study of *Heart Lamp* and Her Selected Stories

Chittaranjan Bhoi

Debasis Rauta

This research paper explores the powerful and emotional storytelling of Banu Mushtaq as presented in her short-story collection *Heart Lamp* translated by Deepa Bhashti. The paper delves into Mushtaq's unique narrative voice, her focus on women's experiences within domestic, cultural and religious settings, her critique of patriarchy and her nuanced portrayal of love and longing. Through textual analysis and contextual reflection, we position Mushtaq's work within the broader landscape of Kannada literature and feminist writing in India. The paper also highlights the translator's role in bringing these local stories to a global audience, preserving both cultural specificity and emotional universality.

**Keywords:** patriarchy, exploration, humourous, delicate, intricacies

## Introduction

Banu Mushtaq stands as a luminous voice in contemporary Kannada literature, particularly noted for her fearless exploration of women's inner lives, social constraints and small yet profound acts of resilience and resistance. The English translation of her work, *Heart Lamp* offers non-Kannada readers a rare glimpse into the delicate, painful and often humorous intricacies of Muslim women's domestic and emotional worlds in South India.

*Heart Lamp* is a remarkable collection of short stories that illuminates the intimate, complex and often painful world of Muslim women navigating love, faith, social norms and their own society in a patriarchal setting. This paper further examines the themes, stylistic choices, character portrayals and sociopolitical undercurrents in Mushtaq's selected stories. Written across several decades, the stories offer layered portraits of women whose inner lives and outer circumstances clash, collide and sometimes gently reconcile. Furthermore, the paper purports to offer a critical exploration of the literary techniques and cultural significance of the collection. However, by engaging with stories such as "Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal," "Fire Rain," "Black Cobras," and the signature piece "Heart Lamp," we argue that Mushtaq's fiction offers an essential intervention in feminist literary discourse and South Asian narrative traditions.

## **Banu Mushtaq's Literary Background**

Banu Mushtaq emerged as an important Kannada writer in the 1990s and early 2000s, during a period when regional women writers were gaining attention for their candid, interior explorations of domestic life. Coming from a Muslim background, Mushtaq brings a distinct cultural lens to her fiction, combining intimate observations of family life with sharp social critique.

Her works often grapple with questions of gender, marriage, motherhood and personal freedom - themes deeply rooted in the everyday realities of middle-class South Indian Muslim women. Unlike some of her contemporaries, Mushtaq's approach is less overtly political or confrontational; instead, she employs irony, humour and layered emotional observation to reveal the structures that liberate her characters.

Indeed, the stories of this collection span over three decades showcasing the evolution of Mushtaq's voice. Through shifting narrative perspectives - from wives and mothers to daughters, friends and observers- Mushtaq weaves an intricate tapestry of South Indian Muslim life, marked by desire, duty and subtle acts of defiance.

## **Marriage, Faith and Social Expectation**

Mushtaq's characters are often Muslim women negotiating both religious and cultural expectations. The stories are not didactic; they do not blame religion for women's suffering, nor do they ignore its significance in the characters' lives. Instead, Mushtaq shows how social and religious norms intertwine to reinforce gender roles. For instance, Zeenat notes early on the idea prevalent in her community: that the husband is God's representative on earth, deserving obedience even when abusive. Whether a man is drunk, violent or unfaithful, the wife is expected to serve him - a logic that places women in a permanent state of subordination. Yet Zeenat's narration is filled with a sharp, sometimes sardonic tone hinting at her resistance to these ideas.

Mushtaq is careful not to present her female characters as passive victims. They reflect, question and push back in small but meaningful ways, even if their external circumstances often remain unchanged. She even does not paint her male characters as villains. However, they are often sympathetic, confused or loving in their own flawed ways. This moral complexity gives her exploration of marriage a resonant authenticity.

## **Tension between Tradition and Modernity**

Mushtaq's stories frequently place characters at the crossroads of tradition and modernity. Zeenat's playful, educated, somewhat progressive stance bumps up against Mujahid's traditional ideas about marriage and gender, even as he postures as a liberal. Shaista's yearning to educate her daughter clashes with Iftikhar's insistence that girls need only basic schooling before marriage.

In “Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal,” the symbolism of the Taj Mahal- a monument both to love and death - becomes a metaphor for the kind of romanticized, hollow love that suffocates real women. Mujahid and Iftikhar banter about love and fidelity but their conversations reveal how little room they actually make for their wives’ needs or dreams.

This tension is not resolved easily in Mushtaq’s stories. Instead, she leaves it simmering under the surface showing how women adapt, negotiate and sometimes surrender under the weight of competing demands.

### **Motherhood and Generational Tensions**

Motherhood emerges as both a burden and a site of fulfillment in Mushtaq’s work. Shaista, in “Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal,” embodies the duality of maternal sacrifice: she takes pride in her children yet privately dreams of more autonomy and educational opportunities for her daughter Asifa.

In “A Decision of the Heart,” the protagonist faces moral dilemmas that reflect intergenerational conflicts - between parental duty and personal desire, between inherited traditions and modern aspirations. Mushtaq’s sensitive portrayal of mothers wrestling with their daughters’ futures reveals her deep empathy for the quiet struggles that define women’s lives.

### **Religion and Cultural Identity**

Mushtaq’s Muslim characters navigate rituals, expectations and gendered religious interpretations. She neither romanticizes nor condemns religious practice but offers a textured portrait of how faith intersects with social life. For example, the discussion in “Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal” about the husband’s quasi-divine status in Islam - where even a cruel or negligent husband is to be revered by the wife is treated with a mix of irony and critical distance. Mushtaq’s narrators are often educated women who question these norms internally, if not always outwardly. Her female characters often prefer a dignified defiance that perhaps the only stance for their existence.

### **Cultural Significance, Female Friendship and Solidarity**

Banu Mushtaq is an important voice in Kannada literature, especially as a Muslim woman writer giving visibility to the lives of Muslim women- a perspective that is often marginalized or misrepresented in mainstream Indian literature. Her stories resist simplistic representations, offering instead a textured view of how women live, love and resist under conditions of structural oppression.

Banu Musthaq powerfully explores the theme of female friendship and solidarity through intimate portrayals of women supporting one another in the face of patriarchal oppression. Her stories often center on everyday women whose lives are shaped by cultural constraints, yet who find resilience and strength in their bonds with other women. Musthaq captures the quiet acts of care, emotional labor and mutual protection that

sustain these relationships. The narratives highlight how shared experiences of marginalization become the basis for deep connection and empathy. Rather than presenting women as isolated victims, Mushtaq emphasizes collective endurance. Her stories evoke a sense of warmth and tenderness, underscoring how companionship becomes a form of resistance. Whether it's helping a friend escape a difficult marriage or offering silent understanding in times of grief, her characters demonstrate the transformative power of female solidarity. The friendships are not idealized but grounded in realism, conflict and forgiveness. Ultimately, Mushtaq's treatment of female friendship is a celebration of sisterhood as a vital force of survival and hope.

### **Feminist Readings**

Mushtaq's feminism is not didactic but emerges through careful depiction of constrained female lives and the small rebellions within them. Unlike more explicitly activist writers, Mushtaq resists grand revolutionary arcs; her characters often navigate within, rather than escape from patriarchal structures. However, this does not diminish the subversive force of her work. By centering women's perspectives, voicing their dissatisfactions, and highlighting the gendered double standards in love, labor and desire, Mushtaq makes a quiet but powerful feminist intervention. Her stories suggest that feminist resistance can take many forms: a woman dreaming of education for her daughter, an ironic retort to a husband's claim of superiority or a shared glance between friends.

### **Contextual Significance**

Mushtaq's works arrive at an important intersection of regional, feminist and minority literature in India. Writing from within the Kannada literary tradition, she adds Muslim women's voices to a largely Hindu-dominated literary field. Her characters' concerns—around family, faith, desire and education—resonate with broader feminist questions while remaining deeply rooted in local cultural specificities. By foregrounding domestic and emotional spaces, Mushtaq's stories challenge the public-private divide often seen in political discourse. She asserts that the personal is political, that the microcosms of women's daily lives reflect larger societal structures.

### **Literary Style and Voice**

Mushtaq's narrative voice blends humor, melancholy and sharp observational detail. She favors first-person or close third-person perspectives allowing readers intimate access to her characters' thoughts and feelings.

One of Mushtaq's most compelling strengths is her use of first-person female narrators who combine wit, irony, vulnerability and insight. Zeenat's voice in "Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal" is both playful and sharp allowing the readers to see the gap between what is said and what is felt. This narrative strategy gives the stories an immediacy and intimacy drawing us into the emotional worlds of the characters.

The tone shifts across the collection: some stories carry a lighter, almost humorous touch while others are heavy with grief, longing and despair. But always, Mushtaq's stories (Bhasthi's translation) retain a clarity and rhythm that makes even everyday domestic scenes vivid and emotionally charged.

The English translation extends Mushtaq's reach to a global audience, making accessible the rich cultural, linguistic and emotional world she evokes. Translator Deepa Bhasthi deserves praise for rendering the nuances of tone, voice and cultural context without flattening or exoticizing the stories.

### Conclusion

Banu Mushtaq's *Heart Lamp* glows with emotional precision, cultural richness and quiet feminist insight. Through characters like Zeenat, Shaista, Asifa, and countless others, Mushtaq offers readers an intimate look into the joys, sorrows and longings of South Indian Muslim women. Her stories neither offer simplistic resolutions nor retreat into despair; instead, they illuminate the flickering heart-lamps- the small but vital sources of light that women carry within constrained worlds.

This research paper has explored the thematic, stylistic and feminist dimensions of Mushtaq's work situating her as a crucial voice in contemporary South Asian literature. Future scholarship might extend this analysis by comparing her stories to those of other regional women writers or by examining the reception of her translated works in international literary spaces.

Ultimately, Mushtaq's stories invite us to listen closely to the whispered dreams, the teasing laughter and the quiet heartbreaks of women who despite everything, continue to shape their own luminous worlds. ■

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Dr. Chittaranjan Bhoi, Associate Professor of English, KISS Deemed to be University, Bhubaneswar, Odisha.

Debasis Rauta, Lecturer in English, Khallikote Junior College, Berhampur and a PhD Scholar at KISS Deemed to be University. Bhubaneswar, Odisha.



Felicitations to the great teacher and poet Prof. Dr. P. G. Rama Rao  
at his Hyderabad residence in Telangana



# Environmental Consciousness: Eco-critical Analysis of Select Indian and British Literary Works

Sanjiv Kumar

Prakash Bhadury

Eco-criticism as a separate branch of study has only been established in the latter decades of the last century but the mutual relationship of man and nature has always been a matter of interest for poets and writers down the ages. The growing environment issues have recently attracted the concerns of scientists and philosophers equally. Literature as a mirror of social environment reflects the interconnectedness of all life forms on earth and natural features. This paper is a keen attempt to investigate the relationship of man and physical environment in the light of eco-critical theories and seeks to establish how English literature has been instrumental in developing interest of people towards the environmental concerns. Select texts from Indian and British fiction have been approached for the study and examples have been drawn to establish the role of literature in creating ecological consciousness.

**Keywords:** ecology, eco-criticism, interconnectedness, relationship, man, nature, environment, theories, consciousness

## Introduction:

The unsustainable development and wanton abuse of natural resources has posed an irrevocable threat to the very existence of mother earth, the only habitable and life sustaining planet in the entire solar system. The unbalanced environment and visible climate changes and furious manifestations in the form of global warming, cyclones, earthquakes and floods around the globe have caught the attention and concern of intellectuals from all branches of knowledge and studies. Donald Worster's *Nature's Economy* (1977), historian Arnold Toynbee's *Mankind and Mother Earth* (1976), Richard Grove's *Nature and the Orient* (1998), David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha's *Nature, Culture, Imperialism* (1995) etc. are works of economists and environment historians which emphasize the concern for environmental issues. Joseph Meeker in his book "The Comedy of Survival: Studies in Literary Ecology (1972)" used the term 'literary Ecology' to mean 'the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works. It also attempts to ascertain the role of literature in the ecology of the human species.'



Literature has acted as a mirror to the social concerns down the ages. Various developments and revolutions through the history of mankind have aptly been reflected in the works of poets and writers. Eco-criticism as a theory of criticism is not limited to a particular discipline rather it is interdisciplinary in nature. The role of Literature, like any other discipline, in developing ecological consciousness in society is remarkable. The term eco-criticism emerges from the word ecology which is concerned with the relationship shared by living organisms with their surrounding environment. Eco-criticism is a study of literature from an interdisciplinary point of view where all sciences come together to analyze the environment and inquire about how to correct the current environmental situation. Eco-criticism is concerned with the relationship of literature with environment and seeks to analyze how man's relationship with his physical environment finds manifestation in literary texts. Nature and literature have always shared intimate relationship as is evident from the representative works of eminent writers and poets of world literature. Eco-criticism is a broad approach that has also been known as 'green studies', "green (cultural) studies", "eco-poetics" and "environmental literary criticism." Eco-feminism is a branch of eco-criticism. Greta Gaard, author of *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* defines Ecofeminism as "the philosophy that links the subjugations of individuals based on race, class, gender, species, etc., to the ideology that permits the domination of nature. Additionally, she claims no attempt to liberate women (or any other oppressed group) will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature." (Gaard) Eco-criticism aims to investigate how people in society behave and react in relation to nature and ecological aspects. Of late, due to increasing social concern for environmental degradation and unsustainable technological development and its impact on environment, lot of attention is being paid to ecological discourse. Due to the negative impact of technological advancement on environment, there was growing demand for a need to reevaluate the relationship between man and environment; and human approach to nature. 'Deep Ecology' a philosophy developed by Arne Naess, a Norwegian philosopher, emphasizes the intrinsic value of living beings and the interconnectedness of the natural world. It changes the anthropocentric approach to nature and presents a symbiotic and holistic world-view.

#### **A Concise History of Eco-criticism:**

William Rueckert in his essay "Literature and Ecology: An experiment in eco-criticism" (1978) used the word eco-criticism for the very first time. He defines eco-criticism as "the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature". However, through the decade of 1980, the interest in ecological concerns was very little in measure. Fredrick O Waage the editor of "Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources" (1985) intended to promote 'a greater presence of environmental concern and awareness in literary disciplines'. While editing the book Waage propounded the term 'eco-criticism'. Later, in a meeting of Western Literature Association in 1989 Cheryl Glotfelty and Glen Love emphasized eco-criticism as 'a study of nature writing'. Respectively in 1992 and 1993, Association for the Study of Literature and Environment

(ASLE) and Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment (ISLE) were established. Eco-criticism as a theory of literature gained momentum with the emergence of ASLE and ISLE. The two seminal works in the field of eco-critical studies, 'The Eco-criticism Reader' (1996) edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm and 'The Environmental Imagination' (1995) by Lawrence Buell are considered to be the landmark works of eco-critical studies. Cheryll Glotfelty in the Introduction to *The Eco-criticism Reader* described eco-criticism in the following words:

“Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, eco-criticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies.”

Lawrence Buell defines eco-criticism “as a study of the relationship between literature and environment conducted in a spirit of commitment to environment praxis”.

#### **Eco-critical Study of Works from Indian Literature:**

Indian literature has a very rich tradition of man's intimate relationship with nature. The classical texts ranging from Vedic literature to epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, from Kalidasa to Jai Shankar Prasad abound in depiction of man and nature relationships. Yashpal and Sayar Singh Chopra in their paper entitled “An Ecological Reading of Kalidasa's *Rtusamhara*” state, “According to his literary works; as we can say that Kalidasa not only a spiritual poet but also an ecological poet.” However, the environmental concerns can also be seen in ancient vedic texts like Rigveda and Yajurveda. “The Rigveda appeals “Do not cut trees because they remove pollution.” The Yajurveda refers to pollution and exhorts man, “Do not disturb the sky and do not pollute the atmosphere” (Sulphrey and Safeer). If we centre our study on the Indian classical Sanskrit and Hindi literature alone an entire thesis can be written. Nevertheless, for the brevity of this study we will investigate works of Indian English writers and investigate their role in increasing ecological consciousness through the lens of eco-critical theories. The ecological consciousness in Indian English Writing is represented by stalwarts like Raja Rao whose *Kanthapura* gives us a deep insight into man and nature relationship. In the backdrop of a south Indian village, its culture and environment, the writer depicts the intimacy of man and nature. The writer shows what role the mountains and the rivers play in the lives of people. People revere mountains and consider their fury as their curse and their kindness as their blessing. The Indian Writing in English symbolizing ecological aspects is pioneered by works like 'The Hungry Tide' by Amitava Ghosh. Kumari Shikha in her paper entitled “Eco-criticism in Indian Fiction” observes about Ghosh's 'The Hungry Tide',

It does have the elements of the earlier concept of eco-criticism that is the interrelationship between human, nature and animal worlds. In other words it deals with the study of nature writing. The book is about one of the most dynamic ecological systems of the world. It takes us to the Sundarbans and the hundreds of

islands found and lost in a short span of time. It is about the hardships of the settlers trying to give a meaning to their lives against all the odds offered by the place. We see nature in both its full beauty and its ugliness. He presents before us the wrath of nature and fragility of humans at the mercy of the former. This blend of the political and the social truth with its concern for nature has brought this novel of Indian English Literature under the discussion of the seminars based on eco-criticism.

Similar perceptions of nature and man interrelationship can be perceived in the works of RK Narayan, Bhawani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandey, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Ruskin Bond, Arundhati Rai and Jayant Mahapatra. In RK Narayan's fiction nature plays a very significant role. His imagined setting of Malgudi with its river, the social, regional and the psychological atmosphere he creates remain immortal in the psyche of the readers of his novels and stories such as *The Guide*, *The English Teacher*, *The Man Eater of Malgudi* and *Malgudi Days* etc. Arundhati Rai's *God of Small Things* presents impacts of pollution in the lives of people. Kamala Markandey's 'Nectar in a Sieve' describes the impact of environmental degradation on mankind. Ruskin Bond's short stories like *Copperfield in the Jungle*, *No Room for a Leopard* and *Dust on the Mountain* etc. portray man and nature relationships. Dinesh A Borse in his paper entitled, *A Study of Ruskin Bond's Selected Short Stories in the Light of Eco-criticism*, observes:

'Copperfield in the Jungle', 'No room for a Leopard' and 'Dust on the Mountain' are all about the great chain of being which binds man and nature, as in the chain of ecosystem, showing interdependence and all-inclusiveness which emphasizes on the ecofriendly, cohabitative and symbiotic relationship between man and nature.

In the perceptions of Bhabani Bhattacharya (*So Many Hungers*) and Anita Desai (*Cry the Peacock*) is not only one who is favorable and kind to mankind but also shows its silent wrath in the form of floods and famine. Man's power proves weaker in comparison to the power of nature when it comes in full display. Man surrenders himself to the very supremacy of nature and cries for its kindness. If we go through the entire history of Indian English literature, we find tons of works by Indian writers which abound in examples which can be considered fit for study in the light of eco-critical theories. Nature and environment has always been a part and parcel of Indian literature and Indian characters have always been in close association with the surrounding landscapes and physical settings. The continuous developments in the study of ecocritical theories and addition of newer perspectives, the ecocritical study becomes more and more relevant in relation to Indian literature.

#### **Eco-critical study of Works from British Literature:**

Eco-criticism is better known as Green criticism or Green (Cultural) Studies in British Literature. Eco-criticism as a study of relationship between literature and environment seeks to view the works of art with reference to man's relationship with his physical environment. During the initial phase of eco-critical studies, critics focused on American

nature writing, the British Romantics and environmentally oriented non-fiction. Eco-critics, later, broadened the area of eco-critical studies by approaching early literary texts including Shakespeare's plays. However, the true study of British literature in pursuance of eco-critical inquiry can be embarked on with Romantic poetry when adoration of Nature was at its best and man's return to nature was particularly advocated. Keats, one of the most prominent writers of Romantic period, represents the eco-critical aspect of literature through his poems like 'To Autumn', 'To A Skylark' and 'Ode to a Grecian Urn'. His poetry is chiefly concerned with nature and human circumstances. Nawaj Sakib in his essay entitled, "Eco-critical Thoughts in John Keats Poetry", has beautifully summed up the significance of John Keats' poetry in the following words:

Keats' ideas and thoughts are related to eco-criticism. For, his literature is mostly related to the nature and the human condition. Mortality, death, sex and transience of life are major subjects of his poetry, he talks about the nature and its relationship with human being. The poem "To Autumn" is exemplified to bring forth eco-critical aspects of Keats poetry. The poem focuses on the relationship between nature and the literature. It talks about the human condition and its surrounding effects. The season autumn is the past of our ecosystem and eco-criticism is about the ecosystem and its relationship with human.

William Wordsworth is the forerunner of Romantic Movement in English literature. His poetry has widely been approached for eco-critical analysis by scholars. Wordsworth is an ardent devotee of nature's fascinating features. He is fascinated by the sensuous appeal of breeze in 'The Prelude' and at same time disgruntled by city life and sees himself as a 'discontented sojourner' of city life. His poem, 'The Simpleton Pass' appears to voice against the effect of deforestation and impact of human civilization on nature. Wordsworth promulgates the eco-critical thought that "nature undisturbed is balanced and harmonious." (Gerard, 2004) Erum Sultana and Tahir Saleem in their paper, "Wordsworth's The Prelude: A Manifesto of Eco-criticism" about the eco-critical aspects of Wordsworth's poetry conclude,

Wordsworth is not only a spiritual thinker but also an ecological activist of his time. His poetry, especially, "The Prelude" conveys his ecological concerns. He reports through his autobiographical recollections that every phase of human life has its own intimate relations with nature.

The discussion on eco-critical study cannot be complete without the mention of two Victorian novelists namely Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy. Andrew Sanders, in his book entitled 'Charles Dickens', writes about Dickens' ecological sensibility,

The more placid rhythms of rural life elude him as much as does an ability to observe and record the delicacies of a flower or the contours of a working landscape. Although he readily recognised the Romantic conventions of seeing nature as the

inspirer and the regenerator, few of Nature's voices echo directly in his novels. As a writer of fiction, Dickens generally remained distinctly unawed by its phenomena.

In this regard, Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* draws our attention towards the appalling neglect of environment and social inaction and Victorian despair at the pinnacle of industrial revolution. Thomas Hardy's attitude to nature can be observed in his widely read novels like *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders* and *Far From the Madding Crowd*. Dr. Mallika Tripathi and Dr. Rattan Bhattacharjee, in their paper, 'An Analysis of Eco-criticism and Literature with special reference to the works of Hardy and Dickens' observe about Hardy's *A Return of the Native*,

Hardy's ecological consciousness is embodied in his view on Nature from the description of the landscape in *The Return of the Native*. If we employ a new critical approach eco-criticism to interpret the novel, then it is particularly appropriate to an examination of literature in the context of globally environmental predicament and arouse the modern people's consciousness. Through this analysis, the conflicts between man and man, man and nature, and man and society became terrible by the invasion of the industrial civilization which reflects Hardy's consideration of the relationship among nature, life and society. Besides, it provides us with useful enlightenment on how to handle the relationship between man and nature, at the same time arouse the reader's ecological consciousness.

*The Lord of the Flies* by William Golding is typical modern novel which has been favourite among the eco-critics for investigation under the eco-critical theories. Golding's reflection to nature as imagined from *Lord of Flies* is nicely observed by Iman A. Hanafy in his paper entitled, "Deconstructing Dichotomies: An Ecological Analysis of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*", describes Golding's approach towards nature in the following words:

Golding shows that a dual accountability to nature and culture is the best that we can hope for. When humans are driven to forsake culture, the result is death. Culture is the life-sustaining factor for human beings. But culture possesses its own serious problems, because, in its separation from nature, culture has grown to the point where it has become life-threatening when viewed from an ecological standpoint.

Among the modern poets of English literature, T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets* represent Eliot's fundamental perception of environment and depict the modern crisis due to changing relationship of man and nature. About *The Waste Land*, Dr. Anupama Verma in her paper, "Concept of Eco-criticism In T.S. Eliot's Poetry" comments:

The poem is immensely relevant in the context of the present situation of worldwide environmental cry. Eliot's search for physical, psychological and artistic reconnection to nature is evident throughout his poetry. Eliot depicted through the landscapes of modernity to identify what is still

valuable and worth preserving in modern life. Nature is found to be central to this search and the desire for meaningful contact with the natural world.

Although environment is a burning topic of the present era, contemporary literature has shown somewhat little eco-critical concern as compared to other disciplines. However, fiction based on apocalyptic ecology has received much acclaim and admiration. Of the most recent time, some novelists have attracted attention with their works raising eco-critical concerns. Of these major authors are Lindsey Collin (*There is a Tide*, 1990), Margaret Atwood (*Oryx and Crake*, 2003 and *The Year of the Flood*, 2009), Cormac McCarthy (*The Road*, 2006), Liz Jensen (*The Rapture*, 2009) and Kim Stanley Robinson (*Capital Trilogy*, 1993-96)). Astrid Bracke & Marguérite Corporaal in their paper entitled, "Eco-criticism and English Studies: An Introduction," observe; "All these texts express the ambivalence of the contemporary situation in which nature is either idealized or lamented; present or irretrievably lost."

#### **Conclusion:**

Environmental degradation and its manifestations in the form of global warming, floods, famine, climate changes, glacial and ozone depletion are rising on an alarming rate. It is high time man must be vigilant to challenges to the health and harmony of his relation with nature and the very existence of planet earth. A large population on earth is still unaware of the threat posed to the existence of humanity and the flora and fauna flourishing on earth. Eco-criticism as an interdisciplinary study of man and nature relationship aims to educate and raise environmental awareness in civilizations world over. Literature as a mirror of society has from time immemorial played crucial role in increasing man and nature relationship. Poets and writers of world literature have intentionally or unintentionally shouldered time and again the responsibility of increasing the environmental awareness through their writings. The very aim of this paper is to analyze the writings of representative poets and writers especially of British and Indian English Literature in the light of eco-critical theories and to pin down the role played by their writings to propagate environmental awareness and admiration for the beauty of nature. Nature is imbued with uncontrollable power and placidness both in one. The nature exercises profound impact on the psyche and actions of man. The wanton misuse of nature's resources man has disturbed the harmony of man and nature relationship. The reckless exploitation of nature has posed irrevocable threat to the environment resulting in the devastating consequences. Man the most intelligent species has caused the present environmental crisis on earth through his foolish actions. The works of select writers like Arundhati Rai, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Anita Desai, Keats, Wordsworth, William Golding, Thomas Hardy T.S. Eliot and so on attempt to highlight the consequences of thoughtless actions of man. Eco-criticism as a study of man and nature relationship has been developing since its inception as a theory of criticism and by and large encompassing more and more of insights and perceptions. Literary creations need to be more eco-centric, and poets and writers should focus more on global awareness about environmental issues. ■



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Dr. Sanjiv Kumar, Assistant Professor of English, Government Degree College, Muwani, Pithoragarh, Uttarakhand.

Dr Prakash Bhadury, Professor, Department of English, IIMT, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh.



Felicitations to poet Raj Babu Gandham in Hyderabad, Telangana



## Pain as Protest: FGM and the Politics of Resistance in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*

Sanjay Kumar

Alicia Wanderer's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) addresses the distressing custom of female genital mutilation (FGM) through the heroine Tashi's evolving path from subjugation to rebellion. This essay contends that Wanderer reimagines bodily and emotional anguish as a societal gesture of dissent, portraying FGM as a male-dominated mechanism of suppression and Tashi's opposition as a feminist restoration of autonomy. By blending feminist ideology, postcolonial gender studies, and trauma research, the examination investigates how Tashi's story contests societal acquiescence, imperial inheritances, and worldwide apathy toward FGM. The book's disjointed narrative, communal perspectives, and symbols of defiance enhance this criticism, presenting suffering as a spark for global feminist unity. Through Tashi's tale, Wanderer converts hardship into a summons for unified effort, promoting the abolition of FGM and the strengthening of women globally.

**Keywords:** Agency, Female Genital Mutilation, Postcolonial Feminism, Trauma, Resistance, Transnational Feminism, Womanism.

### Introduction:

Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992) serves as a compelling condemnation of female genital mutilation (FGM), a custom impacting more than 200 million women worldwide, frequently defended by male-dominated customs that emphasise masculine authority over women's physiques (World Health Organisation 4). Through the main character Tashi, an African female who experiences FGM and wrestles with its bodily and emotional consequences, Walker reveals the cruelty of this ritual while honouring the strength of those who oppose it. This essay contends that Walker converts anguish into a political gesture of defiance, employing Tashi's agony to challenge the societal, male-centric, and international frameworks that sustain FGM. Using womanist philosophy, postcolonial feminist thought, and trauma research, the evaluation explores how Tashi's path from victimhood to empowerment reflects a womanist spirit of endurance and opposition. The book's storytelling techniques—disjointed viewpoints, communal voices, and legendary narratives—further intensify this condemnation, promoting global feminist unity. This

broadened analysis also positions Walker's text within wider literary and advocacy frameworks, investigating its contributions to worldwide anti-FGM campaigns and its alignment with other feminist works.

Ultimately, *Possessing the Secret of Joy* stands as a resonant summons to address gender-based violence and encourage women to recapture their physiques and voices. Walker's concept of womanism, which emphasises the holistic empowerment of Black women and their communities, provides a foundational lens for this analysis. "Womanism prioritises cultural survival, communal healing, and resistance to intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class, distinguishing it from mainstream feminism's often Eurocentric focus" (Walker, *In Search* xi-xii). Postcolonial feminism, as articulated by scholars like Chandra Talpade Mohanty, complements this framework by critiquing how "colonial legacies and global power dynamics shape gendered violence," including FGM (Mohanty 338). Mohanty argues that practices like FGM are often misread as "cultural" rather than patriarchal, obscuring their roots in systemic oppression (341).

Trauma studies, particularly Cathy Caruth's work on the narrative articulation of trauma, illuminate how pain and memory in Walker's novel serve as both "wound and witness," enabling Tashi to transform suffering into resistance (Caruth 4). Furthermore, Frantz Fanon's anticolonial perspectives on aggression and emancipation guide the examination of Tashi's bold gestures of resistance, presenting them "as decolonising reactions to gender-based subjugation" (Fanon 44). These theoretical lenses together demonstrate how Walker casts suffering as a rebellious power, confronting male-dominated, societal, and international conventions.

In *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, FGM is portrayed as a ceremony grounded in masculine dominance, intended to curb women's sensuality, independence, and individuality. Tashi, an Olinka female, opts to experience FGM as a grown woman, initially perceiving it as a restoration of cultural heritage amid colonial upheaval. Yet, Walker exposes this decision as a consequence of ingrained subjugation, moulded by male-centric customs and imperial histories. The novel describes the procedure's devastating impact: "The pain was so intense, so like a burning alive, that I died to myself" (Walker 79). This imagery underscores FGM's role in annihilating Tashi's sense of self, aligning with scholar Angeletta KM Gourdine's observation that Walker "exposes the mutilation as a tool of patriarchal hegemony, stripping women of agency" (Gourdine 92).

Walker situates FGM within a broader system of gendered violence, where women's bodies are commodified to uphold male dominance. The Olinka tribe's adherence to FGM, enforced by women like Tashi's mother and the tsungaM'Lissa, reflects how patriarchal norms co-opt female participation, perpetuating harm across generations (Walker 23). Mohanty's postcolonial feminist critique is apt here, as she notes that such practices are often defended as "tradition" to mask their patriarchal roots (Mohanty 341). Additionally, Walker connects FGM to imperial aggression, illustrating how Western religious endeavours,

embodied by figures like Adam and Olivia, unsettle Olinka traditions without tackling their inherent injustices. This twofold condemnation—male-centric and imperial—frames FGM as a nexus of overlapping subjugations, demanding a womanist counteraction.

Tashi's bodily and emotional anguish emerges as a crucial spark for her defiance, converting her from a submissive sufferer to a proactive force for transformation. The bodily marks of FGM, combined with mental distress—revealed through night terrors, detachment, and thoughts of self-destruction—drive Tashi to challenge the societal stories that rationalised her disfigurement. In therapy with Raye, a Western psychologist, Tashi begins to articulate her pain, a process Caruth describes as “speaking the unspeakable” to reclaim narrative control (Caruth 7). Walker writes, “To speak of it was to make it real, to make it bearable” (Walker 132), highlighting how verbalising trauma enables Tashi's rebellion.

Walker's storytelling framework heightens the dynamics of opposition, utilizing disjointed viewpoints, shared voices, and legendary narratives to echo the intricacy of Tashi's distress and the collective significance of her resistance. The book shifts between Tashi's personal musings and external perspectives from figures such as Adam, Olivia, M'Lissa, and Pierre, crafting a multifaceted narrative that captures both involvement and unity. This technique, as Gouridine argues, “decenters the individual to foreground collective responsibility” (Gouridine 98). For example, M'Lissa's narrative reveals her victimisation by FGM, complicating the binary of victim and perpetrator and exposing the systemic nature of the practice (Walker 210). Tashi's distress also binds her to other females, both within the story and worldwide. Her exchanges with Lisette and Olivia, who provide intercultural viewpoints, underscore the commonality of “gender-based abuse and the possibility for unity” (Walker 180). This shared dimension of suffering resonates with womanist principles, which prioritise group recovery over solitary pain. By presenting Tashi's anguish as a collective ordeal, Walker defies the seclusion enforced by FGM, framing opposition as a joint undertaking.

To position *Possessing the Secret of Joy* within wider feminist writings, it is valuable to contrast Walker's depiction of FGM with other texts tackling gender-related violence. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), for example, probes the agony of enslavement through Sethe's act of child-killing, which, like Tashi's slaying of M'Lissa, is a drastic reaction to institutionalised damage. Both books employ suffering as a storytelling tool to address historical and gender-based injustices, though Walker's emphasis on FGM highlights physical sovereignty in a global setting. Yet, Walker's womanist perspective sets her work apart, stressing shared delight and defiance over solitary endurance. These contrasts illuminate Walker's role in feminist literature: her skill in intertwining personal suffering with a worldwide condemnation of gender-based violence. By focusing on an African female's voice, “Walker contests Western feminist stories that often sideline non-Western perspectives, echoing Mohanty's demand for an anticolonial feminism” (Mohanty 340).

Nevertheless, Walker's depiction of FGM has drawn critique for possibly sensationalizing African traditions, a claim raised by some anticolonial academics (Kanneh

356). While the book risks oversimplifying Olinka customs, Walker counters this through “Tashi’s nuanced autonomy and the acknowledgement of Western involvement, such as Pierre’s scholarly scrutiny” (Walker 201). By balancing condemnation with unity, Walker’s work endures as a pillar of feminist advocacy, encouraging readers to participate in the worldwide struggle against FGM.

### **Conclusion:**

Alice Walker’s *Possessing the Secret of Joy* reimagines suffering as a potent gesture of defiance, employing Tashi’s path to unveil the male-dominated and imperial origins of FGM. Through womanist and anticolonial feminist perspectives, the book condemns societal involvement, colonial histories, and worldwide indifference, framing Tashi’s anguish as both an individual injury and a shared summons to act. Walker’s storytelling techniques—disjointed narratives, communal voices, legendary episodes, and distress accounts—intensify this message, nurturing global feminist unity. Comparative literary frameworks and Walker’s advocacy further highlight the book’s influence, placing it within a worldwide campaign to eliminate FGM. By converting Tashi’s agony into a rebellious force, Walker urges readers to face gender-based abuse and bolster the strength of women globally. *Owning the Mystery of Happiness* thus emerges as a tribute to the capacity of suffering to spark transformation, encapsulating the womanist spirit that defiance is truly the essence of happiness. ■

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Dr Sanjay Kumar, Deptt. of English, Feroze Gandhi College, Raebareli, Uttar Pradesh.

## From Silence to Song: Subaltern Agency and Narrative Form in Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*

Santosh Kumar

Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* (2008) re envisions the experiences of marginalized figures—bonded workers, women, and lower-caste individuals—within the context of 19th-century imperial commerce and the opium market. This essay contends that Ghosh converts the muted voices of these overlooked characters into a unified “melody” of empowerment through creative storytelling techniques, such as multivocal narratives, linguistic blending, and historical reinterpretation. Utilizing subaltern scholarship, anticolonial frameworks, and narrative analysis, the study examines how figures like Deeti, Kalua, and Paulette resist colonial and male-dominated subjugation, building alliances aboard the *Ibis*. Ghosh's employment of a multivocal storytelling framework, hybridized language, and legendary narrative enhances subaltern awareness, reshaping history from the viewpoint of the disenfranchised. By mapping the transition from voicelessness to autonomy, the essay establishes *Sea of Poppies* as an anticolonial contribution that honors subaltern endurance and recovers sidelined histories for a global readership.

**Keywords:** Subaltern Agency, Amitav Ghosh, *Sea of Poppies*, Postcolonialism, Narrative Form, Polyphony, Linguistic Hybridity, Colonial Capitalism, Resistance, Marginalized Histories

Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* the inaugural book of the *Ibis* Trilogy, offers a vividly layered examination of 19th-century imperial commerce, set amid the opium trade and the coerced relocation of bonded workers from India to Mauritius. The story focuses on a varied group of marginalized figures—farmers, exiles, and women—whose paths cross aboard the schooner *Ibis*, a former slave vessel repurposed for carrying “coolies.” Ghosh counters the historical muting of these overlooked individuals by endowing them with narrative autonomy, converting their stifled voices into a unified “melody” of defiance and unity. This essay asserts that Ghosh utilizes creative storytelling methods—multivocal narratives, linguistic fusion, and legendary tales—to magnify subaltern empowerment, reshaping history from the viewpoint of the disenfranchised. “Building on subaltern scholarship, anticolonial frameworks (Bhabha; Fanon), and narrative analysis” (Bakhtin),

the study explores how characters like Deeti, Kalua, and Paulette confront colonial and male-dominated subjugation, crafting fresh identities and alliances. By charting their shift from voicelessness to authority, *Sea of Poppies* stands as an anticolonial contribution that honors subaltern endurance and recovers sidelined histories for a global readership.

The concept of the subaltern, as articulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ranajit Guha, provides a foundational lens for this analysis. Spivak argues that subaltern voices are often erased by colonial and elite discourses, raising the question, “Can the subaltern speak?” (Spivak 283). Guha emphasizes the need to recover subaltern agency through alternative historiographies (Guha 8). Postcolonial theory, particularly Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of “hybridity” and Frantz Fanon’s focus on resistance, illuminates how Ghosh’s characters negotiate colonial power dynamics (Bhabha 112). Mikhail Bakhtin’s narrative theory, specifically his concept of polyphony, informs the analysis of Ghosh’s multi-voiced storytelling, which allows “diverse perspectives to coexist without a dominant narrative” (Bakhtin 6).

In *Sea of Poppies*, the marginalized characters are initially muted by the converging pressures of imperial commerce, social hierarchies, and male-dominated customs. “Deeti, a widowed farmer, is sidelined by her gender and reliance on opium cultivation, which profits British colonizers while impoverishing Indian peasants” (Ghosh, *Sea* 42). Kalua, a low-caste cart-driver, endures societal rejection and brutality, highlighted by his near-murder for his bond with Deeti. Paulette, a French orphan reared in India, maneuvers through racial and gender-based restrictions, masquerading as a laborer to flee a repressive caretaker (Ghosh, *Sea* 132). These figures represent Spivak’s subaltern, whose voices are stifled by “intellectual violence” rooted in colonial systems (Spivak 280).

The opium trade, a pivotal force in the novel’s storyline, highlights the economic exploitation that mutes marginalized groups. Ghosh strikingly portrays the poppy fields that “drained the soil barren” (Ghosh, *Sea* 29), tying environmental ruin to imperial avarice. Academic Anupama Arora observes that Ghosh “unveils the opium trade as a tool of colonial domination, turning farmers into mere parts of a worldwide system” (Arora 25). The Ibis, as a site of coerced migration, further embodies this suppression, robbing laborers of their individuality and pasts. However, Ghosh converts this place of subjugation into a forge for subaltern empowerment, where muted voices start to echo.

Ghosh’s adoption of a multivocal narrative framework, drawing from Bakhtin’s idea of diverse, autonomous voices, is key to enhancing subaltern autonomy. The book shifts viewpoints among figures like Deeti, Kalua, Paulette, Neel (a fallen landlord), and Zachary (a biracial mariner), crafting a “conversational” narrative where no single perspective prevails (Bakhtin 6). This approach enables marginalized characters to recount their own stories, contesting the uniform chronicles of colonial elites. For example, Deeti’s visions of the Ibis, depicted as “a vast seabird” (Ghosh, *Sea* 13), endow her with a visionary authority, casting her as a prophet rather than a sufferer. Scholar Gaurav Desai contends that Ghosh’s



multivocality “equalizes the narrative, granting speech to those historically omitted from records” (Desai 142).

The *Ibis* itself evolves into a miniature world of subaltern unity, where characters form a “ship-kinship” that surpasses caste, race, and gender boundaries (Ghosh, *Sea* 328). This collective, as Fanon might argue, signifies a shared defiance against colonial division (Fanon 44). Deeti and Kalua’s bond, for instance, challenges caste prohibitions, while Paulette’s camaraderie with the laborers undermines racial divisions. Ghosh notes, “Aboard the *Ibis*, they shed their former selves” (Ghosh, *Sea* 356), emphasizing how the ship nurtures new identities. By interlacing these voices into a multivocal fabric, Ghosh transforms silence into a shared story of empowerment.

Ghosh’s use of linguistic hybridity—blending English, Hindi, Bhojpuri, French, and lascari (sailor slang)—further empowers subaltern voices, reflecting Bhabha’s concept of cultural hybridity as a site of resistance (Bhabha 112). The novel’s creolized language mirrors the diverse identities aboard the *Ibis*, allowing characters to assert their agency through speech. For instance, the lascar Serang Ali’s pidgin commands, such as “Malum Zikri! Jaldi karo!” (Ghosh, *Sea* 16), disrupt the linguistic dominance of colonial English, creating a subversive vernacular. Similarly, Deeti’s Bhojpuri songs and prayers infuse the narrative with subaltern cultural memory, preserving her identity against colonial erasure (Ghosh, *Sea* 65).

This legendary structure emboldens marginalized characters to rise above their suppression. For instance, Neel’s shift from a wealthy landlord to a prisoner on the *Ibis* enables him to connect with the laborers, “recounting their common plight” (Ghosh, *Sea* 310). Academic John Thieme suggests that Ghosh’s epic storytelling “reframes subaltern experiences as monumental, lending them historical significance” (Thieme 95). By merging chronicle and legend, Ghosh casts the marginalized as shapers of their own tales, contesting imperial historical records.

The passage from muteness to melody peaks in acts of marginalized defiance, both personal and shared. Deeti’s guidance in coordinating the laborers’ survival tactics, such as distributing provisions and tales, mirrors a womanist empowerment similar to Alice Walker’s focus on “collective strength” (Walker, *In Search* xii). Kalua’s physical prowess, employed to shield Deeti and others, overturns his caste-driven exclusion, reflecting Fanon’s emancipatory aggression (Fanon 44). “Paulette’s masquerade as a laborer, meanwhile, disrupts racial and gender conventions, enabling her to build bonds with the disenfranchised” (Ghosh, *Sea* 350).

The story’s peak, where laborers and sailors contemplate a revolt against the *Ibis*’s tyrannical crew, represents “a unified rebellion” (Ghosh, *Sea* 470). Though the resolution remains unclear, this act of resistance highlights the marginalized’s potential to confront colonial authority. As Arora observes, “Ghosh depicts defiance as a journey, not an endpoint, grounded in the marginalized’s capacity to envision new horizons” (Arora 28). This resonates



with Spivak's guarded hope that marginalized expression, though challenging, can emerge through joint efforts (Spivak 308).

*Sea of Poppies* critiques the worldwide mechanisms of imperial commerce, connecting the opium trade to modern concerns of globalization and displacement. The novel also challenges Western historical narratives that sidelined non-European perspectives, echoing Guha's advocacy for "marginalized-focused chronicles" (Guha 8). By centering subaltern agency, Ghosh fosters a transnational postcolonial consciousness, urging readers to recognize the interconnectedness of colonial legacies. The novel's open-ended conclusion, with the Ibis poised for further journeys, invites readers to imagine new possibilities for subaltern solidarity, resonating with Bhabha's vision of hybrid, resistant identities (Bhabha 112).

*Sea of Poppies* converts the muted voices of marginalized characters into a lively "melody" of autonomy, employing creative storytelling techniques to recover sidelined histories. Through multivocal narratives, linguistic fusion, and epic tales, Ghosh enables figures like Deeti, Kalua, and Paulette to confront imperial and male-dominated subjugation, building alliances aboard the Ibis. Marginalized scholarship, anticolonial frameworks, and narrative analysis reveal how these methods challenge dominant historical records, focusing on the disenfranchised in a worldwide story of defiance. Comparative literary perspectives and Ghosh's wider body of work highlight the novel's importance as an anticolonial contribution, linking historical detail with universal themes of endurance. By mapping the shift from voicelessness to melody, *Sea of Poppies* honors the marginalized's ability to shape their own narratives, delivering a compelling tribute to the lasting strength of shared empowerment against oppression. ■

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Dr Santosh Kumar, Deptt. of English, Govt Degree College, Raebareli, Uttar Pradesh.



Rotary Peace Tower inaugurated by Yagnasish Mohapatra, District Governor, RID - 3262 and Dr Udayanath Majhi, president ( 2024- 25) of R. C., Biraja Kshetra at Jajpur Town, Odisha

# The Evolving Archetype: A Comparative Analysis of Sita's Character in Valmiki's *The Ramayana* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*

Nisha Singh

This research article examines the portrayal of Sita, a central figure in Hindu mythology, across two significant literary works: the ancient Sanskrit epic *Ramayana* by Valmiki and the contemporary novel '*The Forest of Enchantments*' by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Through a comparative analysis, this study explores how the character of Sita has been reimagined and reinterpreted over time, reflecting changing societal norms and feminist perspectives. The research highlights the evolution of Sita from a symbol of ideal womanhood in classical literature to a more complex, nuanced character in modern feminist retellings. By examining the narrative techniques, character development, and thematic elements in both works, this article aims to shed light on the enduring relevance of Sita's character and its adaptation to contemporary sensibilities.

**Keywords:** Sita, *Ramayana*, Valmiki, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, *The Forest of Enchantments*, feminist literature, Hindu mythology, comparative literature

The character of Sita, the consort of Lord Rama in Hindu mythology, has captivated the imagination of writers, scholars, and readers for millennia. As a central figure in the *Ramayana*, one of the most influential epics in Indian literature and culture, Sita has long been regarded as the epitome of wifely devotion, purity, and self-sacrifice. However, as societal norms and literary perspectives have evolved, so too has the interpretation of Sita's character.

This research article aims to explore the portrayal of Sita in two distinct literary works separated by over two millennia: the classical Sanskrit epic *Ramayana* by Valmiki, composed around 500 BCE to 100 BCE, and the contemporary novel '*The Forest of Enchantments*' by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, published in 2019. By examining these works side by side, we can trace the evolution of Sita's character from a traditional archetype to a more nuanced and empowered figure in modern feminist literature.

The significance of this comparative analysis lies in its potential to illuminate the ways in which ancient myths and characters are reinterpreted to reflect contemporary values

and concerns. As feminist scholarship has increasingly turned its attention to the re-examination of classical texts, the character of Sita provides a compelling case study in the reimagining of female archetypes.

This study employs a comparative literary analysis approach, examining primary texts, critical commentaries, and scholarly interpretations of both Valmiki's Ramayana and Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*. The paper focuses on several key aspects of Sita's characterization: By analyzing numerous elements in both texts, paper aims to identify the similarities, differences, and evolutionary aspects of Sita's portrayal across classical and contemporary literature.

In Valmiki's Ramayana, Sita is presented as the paradigm of wifely devotion and female virtue. From her first appearance in the epic, she is described in terms of her beauty, grace, and unwavering loyalty to her husband, Rama. The narrator emphasizes her pativrata dharma – the duty of a devoted wife – as her defining characteristic. For example, when Rama is exiled to the forest for fourteen years, Sita insists on accompanying him, declaring:

“O son of a king, father, mother, son, brother, and daughter-in-law all reap the fruits of their own karma. A wife alone shares the fate of her husband.” (Valmiki Ramayana, Ayodhya Kanda, Sarga 27)

This passage underscores Sita's complete identification with her husband's fate and her willingness to sacrifice comfort for the sake of her duty.

While Sita is portrayed as virtuous and devoted, her agency in Valmiki's epic is limited. Many of the pivotal events in her life – her marriage, exile, abduction, and eventual banishment – happen to her rather than as a result of her own choices. Her suffering is often silent and passive, embodying the ideal of patient endurance in the face of adversity.

This is particularly evident in the repercussion of her rescue from Lanka. Despite having remained faithful to Rama during her captivity, Sita is subjected to a trial by fire to prove her chastity. Her response is one of quiet dignity:

“If I have never thought of any man other than Rama even in my mind, then may the fire god protect me from all sides.” (Valmiki Ramayana, Yuddha Kanda, Sarga 118)

In Valmiki's epic, Sita serves as a powerful symbol of purity, fertility, and the sanctity of the marital bond. Her connection to the earth – she is described as being born from the furrow of a plowed field – reinforces her association with fertility and abundance. This symbolism is further emphasized when she chooses to return to the earth at the end of the epic, having endured societal rejection despite her proven innocence.

### **Sita in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments***

Divakaruni's novel marks a significant departure from the traditional narrative by giving Sita her own voice. The story is told from Sita's first-person perspective, allowing

readers direct access to her thoughts, emotions, and motivations. This narrative choice immediately grants Sita greater agency and complexity.

The novel opens with Sita being asked to validate Valmiki's telling of the Ramayana:

“He has left many things out, though not from malice. A woman's truth is different from a man's truth. I will tell you my truth, as a woman must to other women.” (Divakaruni, 2019, p. 3)

This framing device sets the tone for a re-examination of the epic from a feminist perspective, challenging the traditional male-centric narrative.

Divakaruni's Sita is a far more complex character than her classical counterpart. She is educated, skilled in healing and herbalism, and possesses a strong sense of self. The novel explores her inner conflicts, desires, and the tensions between her individual identity and societal expectations.

For instance, Sita's decision to follow Rama into exile is portrayed not simply as wifely devotion, but as a conscious choice driven by love, curiosity, and a desire for adventure:

“I wanted to see the world beyond Mithila's walls. I wanted to be with the man I loved, to share his joys and sorrows. Was that a crime?” (Divakaruni, 2019, p. 89)

While Valmiki's epic focuses primarily on Sita's relationship with Rama, Divakaruni's novel expands on her connections with other characters, particularly other women. Her friendships with Urmila, Mandodari, and the rakshasis in Lanka add depth to her character and highlight themes of female solidarity and shared experience.

The novel also explores Sita's complex relationship with Surpanakha, Ravana's sister, offering a nuanced perspective on female rivalry and the consequences of societal expectations placed on women.

Through Sita's narrative, Divakaruni offers a subtle critique of the patriarchal norms embedded in the original epic. Sita questions the fairness of her trial by fire and the double standards applied to men and women:

“Why was a woman's virtue always in question, never a man's? Had anyone ever thought of subjecting Rama to such a test?” (Divakaruni, 2019, p. 257)

This questioning attitude extends to her final banishment, where Sita's pain and anger at the injustice she faces are given full expression, in contrast to the quiet acceptance depicted in Valmiki's version.

The most striking difference between the two portrayals lies in the narrative perspective. Valmiki's third-person narration presents Sita as an ideal to be admired from a



distance, while Divakaruni's first-person account humanizes her, making her struggles and triumphs more immediate and relatable to modern readers.

This shift in perspective allows for a more nuanced exploration of Sita's character. While Valmiki's Sita is often silent, her thoughts and feelings inferred rather than explicitly stated, Divakaruni's Sita is eloquent and introspective, offering direct insight into her motivations and emotional landscape.

In Valmiki's Ramayana, Sita's activity is limited, with her actions often driven by duty and circumstance rather than personal choice. In contrast, Divakaruni's Sita is portrayed as an active participant in her own story, making conscious decisions and grappling with their consequences. This increased agency is particularly evident in the novel's treatment of pivotal moments such as Sita's decision to cross the Lakshman rekha, which in Divakaruni's version is presented as a choice made out of compassion rather than naive disobedience.

While both works emphasize Sita's relationship with Rama, Divakaruni's novel expands the scope of Sita's interactions, particularly with other female characters. This allows for a more comprehensive exploration of Sita's character through her roles as friend, mentor, and sister, in addition to her role as wife.

The novel's treatment of Sita's relationship with Ravana is also more nuanced, exploring the complexities of captivity and the psychological impact of her time in Lanka in greater depth than the original epic. Valmiki's Ramayana uses Sita's character primarily to exemplify ideals of wifely devotion and feminine purity. While these themes are still present in Divakaruni's novel, they are balanced with explorations of individual identity, gender equality, and the tension between personal desire and societal expectation.

The novel also introduces themes that are largely absent from the original epic, such as female solidarity, the impact of trauma, and the power of storytelling as a means of reclaiming one's narrative.

Both works present Sita as a significant cultural symbol, but the nature of that symbolism differs. In Valmiki's epic, Sita embodies an idealized vision of womanhood that has profoundly influenced Hindu cultural norms. Divakaruni's Sita, while still reverential, challenges this idealization, presenting a more human figure that questions and sometimes defies traditional expectations.

The comparison of Sita's character in Valmiki's *Ramayana* and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* reveals a significant evolution in the portrayal of this iconic figure. While Valmiki's Sita serves as an archetypal embodiment of wifely devotion and feminine virtue, Divakaruni's reimagining presents a more complex, autonomous individual who grapples with the constraints of her role while asserting her own identity.

This transformation reflects broader changes in literary perspectives and societal attitudes towards women's roles and rights. Divakaruni's novel, by giving voice to Sita's inner world and expanding on her relationships and personal growth, offers a feminist reinterpretation that resonates with contemporary readers while still honouring the character's cultural significance.

The enduring relevance of Sita's story, as evidenced by its continued reinterpretation, speaks to the power of myth to adapt to changing times. By reimagining classical characters through a contemporary lens, authors like Divakaruni contribute to an ongoing dialogue between tradition and modernity, allowing ancient stories to remain vital and meaningful in new contexts. Future research could further explore the implications of such reinterpretations for cultural identity, gender roles, and the evolution of mythological narratives in the face of changing societal norms. ■

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Dr. Nisha Singh, Head, Department of English & other Foreign Languages, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi, U.P.



# Viewing PINK and DAMINI as an Antidote to Oppression of Women: An Ecofeminist Study

Prasenjit Das

Papari Kakati

Ecofeminism explores the connection between women and nature and the abusive treatment of the both in the hands of patriarchy and capitalism. Essential feminists believe that both nature and women are the origins and life-protectors. For them there remains an inherent affinity between nature and women. Therefore, exploiting the source of life itself indicates the endangerment of life on earth. On the other hand the socialist ecofeminists believe that this conception of woman's closeness to nature as the mother and nurturer is a tool only used by patriarchy to suppress women and control them. The Indian filmmakers of this generation have become conscious enough of visually representing this age-old concept of women-nature relationship. The abuse, molestation and oppression of both nature and women in their films can be analyzed from an ecofeminist point of view. This paper tries to explore two notable Indian Hindi films. One is *PINK*, directed by Anirudha Roy Chowdhury and another is *DAMINI*, directed by Rajkumar Shantoshi. Both the films shed some light on the depiction of interconnectedness of nature and women from the essentialist ecofeminist perspective, and the subordination of both from the socialist ecofeminist perspective. This research article will also show how the mental health of women, their personal concerns and also the natural objects or creatures are caged, ignored, denied, rejected, exploited and controlled by the capitalist attitude in Indian literary context.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Nature and Women, Consent, No, Pink, Patriarchy and Capitalism

## Introduction

The term 'Ecofeminism' was coined by French feminist Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 in her book *Le Feminisme ou la mort*. This term emerged first as a movement in the 1970s. It is "a social movement and form of theoretical inquiry that resists formations of domination and seeks to construct a politics for planetary survival and social egalitarianism" (Carlassare, 2000, p. 89). It is an alliance of ecology and feminism (Ruether, 1997) which looks for affinities between devaluation of earth and devaluation of women. Ecofeminism tries to examine some common causes linked to environmental destruction and social injustices like poverty, racism, sexism etc. In the sphere of Indian feminism, it is Vandana Shiva who is regarded to be the harbinger of ecofeminism. Vandana Shiva laments

that the interconnectedness of women and nature has always been underestimated. She argues that the path to liberation of nature, women and men is one, based on sustainability and harmony, not exploitation and surplus. For Shiva both nature and women are producers of life. This prominent theoretical critic Vandana Shiva wants the continuation of the project of domination of the others namely women, nature, subordinate classes, indigenous people to be stopped. The Indian Film Industry is one of the most notable entertaining industries. Movies of Hindi language in India have attracted the audiences of the world. Picturization of the domination of nature, women, extortion of women's labor, killing of women's honour both physically and mentally (Through the acts of insults, rape), extortions of subordinate classes are abundant in the Indian Hindi movies. In this paper an effort has been made to show a revolutionary outlook; defending the feminine species and Nature that the nature and the women are not the commodities only to be used and discarded. The view that women are both biologically and socially linked with the environment has been emphasized throughout the discussion of certain sequences of two Hindi movies in India, namely PINK and DAMINI.

#### **Objectives:**

1. This work will try to explore feminism as a conceptual framework for viewing society and its impact on women by analyzing the changes in women's life and attitude through the films PINK and DAMINI
2. To find relevance of viewing these films from the ecofeminist viewpoint.
3. To establish the notion that forcing a woman against her consent is also a kind of serious oppression on the part of woman
4. To establish an idea that the pre-conceived notion perceived by the male about women be changed or modified as this carries the seed of oppression in it.
5. To establish an idea and validate that devaluation, threats towards women reflect the continuation of the history of patriarchy or capitalism

#### **Methodology:**

The approach in this study is interpretative. Throughout the study the method will be analytic, qualitative and descriptive.

#### **Relevance of the Study:**

Issues faced by women in this 21<sup>st</sup> century in Indian literary context and the environment are one of the major problems in the current society. The male dominant culture in Indian literary context oppresses both the women and the nature, even though we have the tradition of respecting the both. The problem of both the nature and the women are not separate. They are interconnected. It is high time to respond to their issues. Today we come across numerous cases in news papers or television where women are seeking justice and this act of seeking justice is often equated with the hurtful proceedings. A woman's day to day

struggle in the society in and around is a mostly discussed and sensitive issue. An eco-feminist reading helps spreading light on various issues faced by the women and the nature. It may give us prime idea for solution.

### **Literature Review:**

In Indian Film industry till this date many movies are being made and gifted to the Indian society and around the world. Movies which are women oriented, society looks at them with a different angle, with a view to discovering something either controversial or appreciating. But with the passage of time certain Indian film directors, scriptwriters have started directing their pens and thoughts towards the upliftment of the status of the womenfolk more than the early status and to do justice to the women's oppression. Though women face numerous struggles in society through various means they accept and go through all those hurdles and overcome it by proving their position in society and their importance in it throughout their life. Although constitution gives equal importance to women's position and accorded equality to women, the continuation of the history of patriarchy or capitalism becomes a hindrance in the path of equality. Ecofeminism demands equal pay, equal rights along with some other issues like reproductive technology, toxic pollution, third world development etc. *Mirch Masala*, *The Dirty Picture*, *Arth*, *Chandni Bar*, *Lajja*, *Kahani*, *English Vinglish*, *Queen*, *Mary Kom*, *Mardani*, *Neerja*, *Bandit Queen* etc. are such films where the status of women and their various problems and issues are dealt to focus their mental and social status, their traumas, their oppressions. But the films *Pink* and *Damini* are significant, differ and deal with the co-existence that this society should abide by. Be it a man or woman both have equal roles in the society. A woman's 'No' means her utter rejection to an issue. An unwanted pressure on a woman to make her stand with the oppressors only is a kind of heinous act of oppression. Through the leading actors namely Meenakshi Sheshadri, Tapsee Pannu and Amitabh Bachchan these bold issues have been dealt in the films *Pink* and *Damini*.

### **Discussion:**

We all know that the very term *Ecofeminism* is a branch of Feminism that examines the connection between women and Nature. It claims that both women and nature are dominated and thus there remains a need for more interdependent worldview. Being a branch or a part of feminism Ecofeminism tends to break the barriers of subjugation of women in this patriarchal society. Although ecofeminism embraces both Nature and Women in its discussion, this paper will give more weight on the issue of women's subjugation, women's status and position within the society they live in this twenty first century in India. Women in the Bollywood industry in India have always been objectified and sexualized. It has become a norm rather than an exception. Despite the country's rapid social and economic development, the Indian film industry continues to perpetuate gender inequality, misogyny and patriarchal attitude. The Indian film industry has portrayed women often as glorified beauty objects, symbolizing sex appeal and entertainment. Indian films have featured many women characters facing a range of painful consequences also, from public shaming to

threats of legal action. In the Hindi movies the women victims' real names are not basically released in compliance with Indian law. Normally pseudonyms are used for them to keep them fully safe and honored. Women normally receive secondary and stereotypical representation tied to traditional roles of wives, lovers, and mothers. Until now, women were only an entity of the family, later they are becoming energetic participants from all walks of life. At present, women are becoming not only a noteworthy unit of society but also influencing the track of social change in society. The present society has begun recognizing the individual identity of women as their awareness and involvement in social life are mounting. Though women are progressive in and around still they are facing certain individual struggles which are hurdles to their success. These struggles prevail quite often in their lives which are untold and they are put into light through some brilliant creators, directors in their novels and movies. *Pink* and *Damini* are two such Hindi movies where such struggle is brought out into light.

The story of both *Pink* (2016) and *Damini* (1993) are about molestation, rape, oppression of women and also about the marginalization of a natural hue pink. The films *Pink* and *Damini* can be viewed and scrutinized in the light of ecofeminism which investigates the aspects of both exploitation of nature to a little extent in terms of colour, subordination of women to a large extent and the function of patriarchy and capitalism behind the acts of domination. Women who attempt to seek social justice are often shamed, isolated, threatened, assaulted, and even sometimes killed. The character Meenal is a most educated and independent woman in the film *Pink*. She is residing with two other independent working ladies in an apartment, paying rent in a city. Through the delineation of their situations the movie tries to show us how in this modern society even the most educated and self independent ladies become victims of prejudices and ill psyche inherent in public mind. The female protagonists in this film suffer a false accusation lodged by men for the only reason that they are women. The film *Pink* is a critique of scathing social reality and double standards of both men and women towards women. The film makes a powerful statement not only against the blindness of patriarchy but also for the courage which supporters have to display. It emphasizes the need for social responsibility and women's solidarity. The female protagonists have shown their courage, resilience in the face of violence, oppression, discrimination and societal pressure beautifully. The movie *Pink* is a very powerful indictment of all the vices associated with women in our male dominated Indian society. The film unabashedly brings out the hypocrisy of the Indian society that levels women as promiscuous and morally unsound if they are vocal about their sexuality. Here, in the movie *Damini* (1993), the character *Damini* is a very good natured, simple, a newly married, loving wife in a reputed family in the Indian society where she lives jointly with her in-laws. *Damini* witnesses her house-maid being raped by her husband's brother. When *Damini* decides to testify this event against her family, she is declared as insane and sent to mental asylum. In the discussed two films women figures are sexually and mentally harassed. A message has been tried to convey through these two films that the women who are harassed are not to lend credence to the claim; hence their allegations will be felt as false. The women figures

in the Hindi movies that have burning desire to correct injustices are deemed incompatible with warm hearth. Damini's in-laws become angry with her efforts to seek justice. Damini demonstrates the role of the voice in resistance and oppression. She shows herself more vocal about oppression by her own family male-members. The socialist ecofeminist ideology has been reflected in these movies. The patriarchal society here stands as a materialist in terms of understanding of the oppression, exploitation and domination of women. The featured society in the discussed movies has taken these delineated women as its property.

Being faced with systematic oppression and male dominance, women frequently turn to other nearby women for support and understanding. In both the films we can see this aspect through the intimation of the three ladies in the movie *Pink* when all of them are accused falsely and are in need of safety and justice. In the movie *Damini*, Damini contacts the victim, the house-maid and learns many painful things that the house-maid has gone through during the event of rape with her. Damini associates herself with the victim's pain and thereby feeling the togetherness. Here we can recall the very ideology of **Volga** who introduces the concept '**Sisterhood**'. Also we can recall the concept '**Care**' and '**Holding**' of **Ariel Salleh** and **Sara Ruddick**. The combined influence of these concepts is noticed in the association of the portrayed women in the two movies. Throughout the narratives of these two movies an unwelcome idea has been tried to put forcibly that a man is only as good as his physical power. This damaging stereotype of man is criticized and expected to be changed.

The first half of the film *Pink* deals with how the lives of a group of three ladies namely Meenal, Falak Ali and Andrea Tariang get affected severely because of the unrest created by a man named Rajveer Singh and his gang. All these ladies are working ladies who are residing in a well- to-do South Delhi area. Although their regular battle with neighbors' testing eyes has made them almost dauntless and prepared for intense difficulties, they are not been able to handle one more unexpected thunderbolt. A legal proceeding has blamed these three ladies for soliciting three men and claimed that the ladies have turned aggressive because they are refused money. The strong capitalist and patriarchal social system stands with the three young men to support their allegation and accusation against the ladies. The ladies are tried to be shown and proved as sex-workers mischievously by the influential patriarchal misogynist Rajveer Singh and his gang. The three ladies suffer false accusation and keep stating true facts only but the patriarchal society's pre-conceived notions about women falters the scenery for almost half part of the movie. To teach a lesson Rajveer Singh along with his company abducted Meenal Arora and has forced himself on her. In spite of her strong denial and opposition to this act she is forced. In the heated courtroom trial Meenal reiterates that she has pushed Rajveer away in this act to protect herself but evidently it has not been enough. Rajveer Singh is rich and has been a nephew of an influential politician. The dialogue of one of his companion 'We won't spare those girls' reflects the inherent patriarchal mindset which is rarely been brought by the Hindi movie under scrutiny. But this movie *Pink* brings it out under scrutiny through an ecofeminist lens. Meenal is

captured by the police under Section 307 IPC under false accusation and allegation that she endeavors to kill Rajveer. Here no any member of the capitalist society considers it to be the act of self-protection on the part of Meenal. Police, society, legal executive and every other person seem to be following the conventional patriarchal norm in finding the women to be guilty. In this 21<sup>st</sup> century's modern society women's social friendliness and friendly gestures are often taken to be an invitation to men for sleeping with them without even asking them. And here the women are blamed for their own oppression and violence. The three ladies namely Meenal, Falak, and Andrea take threats, intimidation and sexism by these three men. As a result the three ladies suffer from various traumatic scenes. One of the ladies is forced to take leave from her working company because her picture has been morphed, the another lady is threatened through text messages and phone calls and the remaining one has been abducted and assaulted in a van by the male gang. The landlord of the three ladies is threatened by the gang to kick the ladies out from his apartment. Such are the tortures, harassment oppression the ladies have received because in a society where the maintenance of the Rule-Book for women for their character-sketch is controlled or designed by the power structure of the patriarchal society. Women are taken as less worthy and less important to be regarded equal to the status and dignity of the Male. Interestingly eco-feminism demands equal importance, accommodation and right for the male and female.

The movie Pink throws light on another most interesting and thoughtful issue. Director's selection of a male lawyer (Amitabh Bachchan) instead of a lady lawyer for the legal investigation to the case filed by Meenal reinforces the idea that we are somehow less convinced to take or accept a lady lawyer whatever, however the case or incident might be. Similarly in the movie Damini, the male lawyer Govind (Sunny Deol) acts as a saviour of Damini and her dignity in the court. Projection of the male lawyers in these movies for the protection of the female and their dignity indirectly spans the history of patriarchy or capitalism, also shows the full and blind faith of the society on the manmade rules, thus enhancing the oppression of women. Here we can validate the statement of the prominent Indian Ecofeminist **Vandana Shiva** that the so called '**Development**' of a society which Vandana Shiva prefers to name as '**Mal-development**' simply spans the history of patriarchal or hierarchical civilization. Usually when women make valid arguments, the very nature of their arguments is usually deemed as 'bossy' or intimidating. This act definitely oppresses the sentiment or dignity of the women. This act also raises a question mark to their capabilities. Here male lawyers take the charge of handling the trials in the court for the ladies to defend them at last as a 'Saviour', not a female lawyer. Because a female lawyer's arguments, sense of empathy would have not been unfolded convincingly. The feminine principle is shown hurt and reduced in this way powered by the patriarchal society. Protagonist Meenal is a determined lady to take up challenges and to withstand the false accusation or oppression imposed on by the male. The character Falak brings in the importance of consent even when it is a sex-worker we often talk about. A woman is not to be forced if her consent is not received. The character Andrea Tairang in the Pink justifies her role and enforces the idea of the shallow mindsets of most people who think that women



from the North-East region are 'easy-target' to get oppressed to any extent. The three ladies in Pink have gone through the phase of shame, anxiety, and guilt, exclusion with sex work and sex workers. The lawyers named Deepak Sehgal (Amitabh Bachchan) and Govind (Sunny Deol) are good-natured men, have done justice to the oppression of the ladies. They have come to their rescue. The ladies are offended at the hurt caused by a merciless patriarchal system. The protagonists are brave enough to face the proceedings though they are falsely accused and are strong to argue with the opponents to prove their innocence to the society.

### **Relevance of the Study:**

It is observed that the female characters through their victory in the court featured in the movies Pink and Damini, the whole women's race has faced victory. These women are living genuine lives, have managed prickly routine issues, which today's young women everywhere throughout the world will easily recognize and relate with. The female protagonists have struggled to break the ceiling of the oppression they have faced and suffered, have tried to break certain social taboos. They have done it bravely by overcoming all hardship. The movie Pink sketches the callous truth, shows the continuity of the history of patriarchy or capitalism. We witness this kind of occurrences in and around our real life also. The very supporting and blasting dialogue in favor of the womenfolk in the movie is voiced by the lawyer Deepak Sehgal(Amitabh Bachchan).

'A woman's no means no, be it a sex worker, a casual acquaintance or even a wife. "NO" is not only a word...it's a sentence by itself...it does not need any explanation or interpretation...no simply means no. There remains no excuse for "but" in "no". **Pink (2016)**

By showing unwillingness to listen to, not heeding to the words of a woman or not accepting a woman's rejection modestly, forcing and threatening the woman to follow the male's wishes only, a man commits the act of oppression. The very dialogues from this character lawyer highlights the presence of the supreme control, unwelcomed power of patriarchy or capitalism and shows how even most educated women in the society get oppressed without being guilty at all sometimes. The word "NO" voiced by a woman determines the lack of her "Consent". The word "NO" also determines the absence of a definite "Yes" from the woman. So, if any male who will force the woman to follow him and his wishes only or tries to convert her "NO" into her "Yes" commits the act of extortion and oppression. The modern women today face this kind of situation abundantly in and around the society, in their working places and also within the houses.

Regarding the title of the film, in one of his interview director Aniruddha Roy Chowdhury reveals that the title PINK is meant to destigmatise '**pink**' as a feminine colour and the various associations that are made with it. There is a myth associated with the colour Pink that it is a favorite colour of girls and linked with Barbie dolls. Hence most people take this film to be a film about women and women empowerment. People have taken this title PINK to be girly. Not even for once this association has been substantiated. Thus we can see how a natural hue has been marginalized, labeled and gendered as a feminine



entity only. The socialist ecofeminist sentiment has enriched the grim reality of the patriarchal culture which has been clearly shown through the incident in the movie. At the same time the male saviour complex is being played to enhance the notion that patriarchal or capitalist treatment is far away to be objected and scrutinized. Similarly the title Damini means Lightening, symbolically enlightens and encourages the lives of the co-existences, other oppressed subordinate people.

### **Conclusion:**

Along with other burning issues films play vital role in bringing out the various untold, inexpressible pathetic and serious issues faced mostly by the womenfolk run or controlled by the patriarchal society. Films bring out the struggles and the untold stories of women who are not only imaginative sometimes, but happen to be the real face of many unknown women in the society. Women can relate themselves with the characters portrayed in the films and justify their situations. The movie Pink has been all about three young women who live genuine lives and manage thorny routine issues, which every young women face all over the world and relate with. Ecofeminism argue for a world which is not only eco-friendly, but also gender-just. The central focus of the films Pink and Damini is common almost on a single word that is '**Consent**'. More or less in the scenery of an Indian family, a woman often goes through the phase of *character assassination* because she chooses to take charge of her life, and determines its course on her own terms. A woman's inner existence is assassinated several times both within the house and outside unnoticeably accept the sufferer. Question arises regarding the value of the term 'consent' in terms of woman's choice, agreement, likes and dislikes. The movies strongly project the rebellious voices of the female protagonists as an antidote to the wrong thoughts or ideas caused by the pre-conceived notions possessed by the male about them. The realization is built that the Indian culture should consider or give importance to the term 'consent', especially in terms of sexual consent of women. The films Pink and Damini can really be taken as an antidote to the oppression of women and Nature. Both the natural hue pink and the three female protagonists are oppressed, marginalized and devalued. Although the very director and the script writers' mission was to upgrade and honor the womenfolk, the very cinematic narratives of the film takes the viewers for sometime to a world where there is celebration of the masculine power and where even the most educated, independent women are insulted, doubted with foul acts, assaulted. The ladies have witnessed the assassination of their characters in the public although have received clean sheet at last. That is why perhaps our Indian based speculative ecofeminist critic Vandana Shiva has opined that development typically marginalizes women. These movies have shown many age-old conventional Indian mindsets and have left us for introspection of many things. The movies have said with mental fortitude and conviction. These films have given us success stories of the womenfolk; have become an inspiration for those women who are still suffering from honor killing or character assassination both in the houses and in public. These movies

recommend that women should have the freedom and liberty to walk at night along with the freedom, to express their every issue freely and desperately. ■

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Dr. Prasenjit Das, Associate Professor in English, KKHSOU, Guwahati, Assam

Ms. Papari Kakati, Associate Professor, Gossaigaon College & Research Scholar in English, KKHSOU, Guwahati, Assam.

## The Illusion of Perfection: A Reflection on Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*

T.K. Santhi

This paper delves into the illusion of perfection as portrayed in Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*, a play that challenges the human desire for completeness and questions the very possibility of achieving it. At its core, **Hayavadana** dissects the complex interplay between identity, desire, and the yearning for existential fulfillment—particularly the notion that one can attain a perfect balance of mind and body. Through the entangled lives of Devadatta, Kapila, and the titular character Hayavadana, Karnad exposes the fragile foundations upon which ideals of perfection are built, revealing how they often crumble under the weight of real human emotion and imperfection. By weaving together myth, folklore, and contemporary psychological tensions, the narrative offers a powerful lens through which to examine how the quest for perfection frequently results in greater inner fragmentation rather than true fulfillment. The disembodied head, the transposed bodies, and Hayavadana's half-human, half-horse dilemma all serve as metaphors for fractured identities and the futility of seeking an ideal form. Karnad employs these theatrical symbols not to offer solutions, but to underscore the impossibility and perhaps the absurdity of absolute wholeness. By analyzing these motifs, this paper argues that *Hayavadana* critiques the very concept of perfection, portraying it not as an attainable goal but as a seductive illusion that distorts human perception and leads to inner turmoil. In this way, the play reflects on the significance of imperfection and to accept the intricacies of fractured identities. Instead of presenting wholeness as an ultimate objective, *Hayavadana* suggests that true human experience emerges through engaging with the disorder and complexity of one's identity.

**Keywords:** Human aspiration, wholeness, identity, psychological dilemmas, perfection

The main objective of this research is to investigate *Hayavadana*'s articulation of the human aspiration for wholeness, particularly through its characters, narrative organization, and mythological symbolism. A key aspect of this is analyzing how Karnad utilizes the fractured identities of the protagonists and Hayavadana to offer a critique of traditional notions of completeness. Moreover, the study seeks to situate this theme within wider scholarly debates on postcolonial identity, gender roles, and existential thought

One of India's most influential playwrights, actors, and public intellectuals, Girish Karnad (1938–2019) primarily wrote in Kannada, but his work's influence extended across linguistic and regional boundaries in Indian literature and theatre. He became a significant voice during a period of transformation in Indian drama, as it aimed to develop an authentic voice grounded in Indian realities and traditions, moving beyond colonial and Westernized models. His Oxford education as a Rhodes Scholar provided him with a global perspective, which he used to synthesize classical Indian aesthetics with Western dramatic forms in his work. Karnad's plays often explored philosophical ideas, psychological complexities, and socio-political concerns, solidifying his position as a central figure in the post-independence Indian dramatic renaissance.

Karnad's *Hayavadana* is a masterful integration of traditional Indian performance elements and Western theatrical devices, used to address the themes of fragmented identity and the search for completeness, contributing to its status as one of his most critically lauded and widely staged plays. Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* stands as a pivotal piece in contemporary Indian theater, skillfully blending folklore, mythology, and existential thought. Inspired by traditional Indian narratives and shaped by Western dramatic influences, the play profoundly explores fundamental human concerns about identity, a sense of lacking, and the yearning for a cohesive self. Central to *Hayavadana* is its examination of the human struggle to integrate the opposing forces of mind and body, feeling and reason, and individual aspirations with societal expectations. This analysis investigates how the play portrays "wholeness" not merely as a physical or romantic concept but as an intricate psychological and spiritual journey.

Indian literary and philosophical traditions have a long history of engaging with the idea of wholeness, understanding it as more than just physical integrity, but as spiritual fulfillment. While the Upanishads and Bhagavad Gita emphasize the union of the individual soul with the universal soul as the path to true completeness through ego transcendence and detachment, folk narratives like the Vetala Panchavimshati, adapted by Hayavadana, often explore human flaws and paradoxes, using fantasy to critique strict social structures and moral binaries. Karnad's fusion of folklore and modern theater challenges the separation of tradition and modernity, using myth as a philosophical lens. The horse-headed character seeking humanity and the man divided between intellect and strength embody fundamental cultural metaphors of the incomplete self. Consequently, the play becomes a meeting point for ancient Indian notions of wholeness and modern existential anxieties.

*Hayavadana* presents a profound philosophical exploration through a narrative that combines elements of tragedy, comedy, and myth. The play opens with Hayavadana, a man cursed with a horse's head, whose condition represents not only a physical deformity but also a deep existential struggle as he seeks to reclaim his human identity and achieve a complete, unified form. The story unfolds through the interconnected lives of Devadatta, an intelligent and sensitive man, and his friend Kapila, a physically strong but less articulate

man. Both are in love with Padmini, a beautiful woman torn between their intellectual and physical qualities.

The play *Hayavadana* interweaves two stories, both exploring characters' struggles for perfect fulfillment. The subplot features Hayavadana, a 'horse-headed man' whose very name and hybrid existence symbolize his incomplete state and his quest for wholeness. Despite achieving partial fulfillment at Kali's temple, the drowsy goddess mistakenly transforms him into a complete horse, a change he later regrets due to the loss of his human voice. The passage suggests that the conditional devotion of human beings to God might explain Kali's indifference to the desires of these characters. This theme of the search for completeness is also central to the main plot, which revolves around the close friendship of the intellectually gifted and fair-skinned Brahmin, Devadatta, and the physically strong but plain-looking ironsmith, Kapila, who represent opposite physical extremes.

Two friends there were —one mind, one heart— (Karnad 1975: 11)

Driven by his profound love for Padmini, Devadatta requested Kapila to act as his messenger, promising extreme sacrifices if he were to marry her. Upon seeing Padmini's beauty, Kapila also felt a pull towards her, believing she required a more physically imposing partner than Devadatta. Nevertheless, prioritizing his friendship with Devadatta, Kapila controlled his own desires and became instrumental in arranging their marriage.

Married to Devadatta, Padmini, a contemporary woman who believed in voicing her desires and pursuing her goals, discovered that her marriage to Devadatta did not meet her expectations. Instead of showering her with attention and admiration, he was absorbed in scriptures and poetry. This negligence drove her towards Kapila, who truly appreciated her. Karnad depicts her as an independent woman who expressed, rather than suppressed, her emotions. Her affair with Kapila within the confines of marriage indicates a rebellious spirit against patriarchal structures. She can be seen as defiant, rejecting traditional social norms and acting on her desires. Completely disregarding Devadatta's feelings, she planned a trip to the Ujjain fair to be with Kapila, revealing her growing weariness with Devadatta's intense absorption in his studies, which led him to overlook her physical desires that she sought to fulfill with Kapila.

Padmini's pregnancy did not deter her from going to the Ujjain fair as she is driven by her desire to be with Kapila. Stopping at a temple on the way, Devadatta, who had by then recognized the developing relationship between his wife and Kapila, decided to sacrifice himself to Goddess Kali. This act was driven not by his earlier vow but by his despair over Padmini's unfaithfulness and Kapila's betrayal. Conscious of societal norms condemning extramarital relationships, a reality Padmini ignored, Devadatta felt compelled by these codes to take his own life before the goddess.

When Devadatta did not return for a long time, Kapila went out to look for him. Upon arriving at Kali's temple, he was horrified to find Devadatta's lifeless body on the ground. Shocked by the sight, Kapila decided to behead himself as well, fearing that he

might be blamed for killing Devdatta to be with his wife, Padmini. Like Devdatta, Kapila was also deeply influenced by societal norms and feared the consequences of being labelled unfaithful. Their self-sacrifices clearly reflect their awareness of and submission to the patriarchal rules of society. In contrast, Padmini's behaviour indicated that her personal desires were more important than these social rules.

Upon arriving at the temple and discovering the truth, Padmini's words to Goddess Kali were startling, questioning why the goddess hadn't saved at least one of the men to prevent her suffering. Kali, pleased by her outspokenness, instructed her to reattach the heads. However, in her eagerness to create a perfect man, Padmini mistakenly swapped the heads, a fact Kali noted with a comment about honesty having limits. Yet, due to her drowsiness, Kali didn't prevent the exchange. Aware that her affair with Kapila would be unacceptable in the patriarchal society and threaten its order, Padmini cleverly devised a way to achieve completeness and perfection in her husband while seemingly adhering to societal rules.

This leads to a miraculous yet tragic transformation where their heads are swapped. Initially, both men grapple with their altered identities. Devadatta, now with Kapila's body, gains physical power but loses his intellect, while Kapila, with Devadatta's head, acquires intellectual sharpness but forfeits his physical strength. Their resulting confusion and internal conflict reflect the play's central theme: *the ultimately elusive human desire for complete wholeness*.

Padmini found it practically impossible to simultaneously love and live with two men, as she was drawn to their different qualities. Her cleverness offered a temporary resolution, but it didn't last. Although the mistaken head transposition initially pleased her, it naturally led to the problem of determining Padmini's legitimate husband. Driven by an unconventional desire for a flawless husband, Padmini defied societal norms that would typically restrain an Indian wife. This impulsive act, born from her obsession, led to a chaotic aftermath following the exchange of heads. The resulting upheaval profoundly impacted not only her own life but also those of her son, Devadatta, and Kapila. Through Padmini's story, Karnad suggests that our unusual desires can lead to self-inflicted complications and unhappiness. In India, the marital bond is traditionally viewed as sacred and built on unwavering trust. A betrayal of this trust can severely damage this lifelong connection. Ideally, partners embrace each other's imperfections, fostering either marital harmony or discord. Padmini's inability to accept human imperfection and her relentless pursuit of sensual gratification and an ideal husband ultimately culminated in the tragic deaths of all three characters at the play's conclusion.

Padmini's predicament is the predicament of a modern, emancipated woman in our society who is torn between the two polarities: a woman who loves her husband as well as someone else for different personalities. A civilized Apollonian society and its moral code will not accept such a woman. The



two men will not accept each other when it comes to sharing a woman and the three will destroy themselves in the process.(Raykar 1999: 177)

Upon their revival, Devadatta and Kapila immediately began to dispute over Padmini. Their intense longing for her is evident when Devadatta rejects his original body following the head exchange, aware that Padmini was attracted to physical strength, not frailty. Kapila also asserted his claim, contending that Padmini belonged to him because she carried his child within the body he now inhabited.

Seeking resolution to their predicament, the three consulted a rishi, who decreed that the man with Devadatta's head was Padmini's rightful husband. The rishi reasoned, "As the heavenly Kalpa Vriksha is supreme among trees, so is the head among human limbs. Therefore, the man with Devadatta's head is indeed Devadatta and he is the rightful husband of Padmini" (Karnad 1975: 40). This judgment delighted Padmini, as it seemingly granted her the ideal she sought – Devadatta's attractive face and Kapila's robust physique. However, Padmini's self-centred desire left Kapila with Devadatta's frail body in the forest. Padmini's joy and satisfaction in achieving this perceived perfection proved fleeting. As the head dictates the body, Devadatta's head gradually asserted control over Kapila's frame. The body that initially brought Padmini physical pleasure and happiness transformed, much to her disappointment, reverting to its original nature. Ultimately, Padmini found herself with the very qualities she had tried to escape.

Karnad utilizes two dolls within the play to express Padmini's deep distress and her longing for Kapila. The dialogue of the dolls reveals the physical changes occurring in Devadatta, mirroring Padmini's fantasy of a rugged man with an appealing physique – Kapila. Following the exchange of heads, Padmini initially experienced the greatest joy, having seemingly achieved her ideal. However, she failed to recognize the inherent nature of incompleteness and imperfection, and the futility of trying to alter what lies beyond our control. It is crucial to understand the impermanence of all things, a truth Padmini's refusal to accept brought about needless frustration, disappointment, and suffering not only for herself but also for Devadatta and Kapila.

Once again, Padmini, driven by her selfish desires, grew unhappy and began longing for Kapila after noticing the physical changes in Devadatta. She ventured into the forest with her new-born child in search of Kapila. The next morning, Devadatta also went into the forest looking for Padmini. There, both Devadatta and Kapila ended up killing each other, leaving Padmini and her son alone. Previously, Devadatta and Kapila had been content and complete individuals, enjoying a strong bond with each other. However, Padmini's entry into their lives stirred jealousy and conflict between them, which ultimately led to their tragic end.

Instead of choosing to live as a widow, Padmini opted to commit sati. India has long been known for its *pativratas*—women devoted entirely to their husbands, often willing to embrace death on their husband's funeral pyre. However, in the final scene of the play,



Padmini's decision to perform sati wasn't driven by love for either Devadatta or Kapila. Her choice, despite her lack of faithfulness to Devadatta, seems to have been motivated by two possible reasons. First, she may have wanted to use the culturally accepted act of sati to assert her chastity. Second, she likely hoped to secure a more respectable future and social standing for her son.

In *Hayavadana*, Girish Karnad critiques the irrational beliefs and empty rituals deeply rooted in Indian society, aiming to shed light on the rigid mind-set of orthodox Hindus. He does this, in part, by exposing the flaws in the portrayal of Goddess Kali, whose actions led to the tragic and complicated lives of the characters in the play. When Hayavadana approached her with a wish, she hastily transformed him into a complete horse without even hearing him out, depriving him of a human voice and identity. Similarly, her passive response to Padmini's act of switching the heads of Devadatta and Kapila further entangled their fates. Had Kali intervened or guided them, the tragic outcome might have been avoided. Over time, Padmini might have learned to accept Devadatta for who he truly was, and their child could have been raised by his own parents instead of being brought up by strangers in the forest.

Padmini's longing for an ideal man, a fusion of strength and intellect was not limited to her husband, Devadatta. She projected the same aspiration onto her son. Before performing sati, she entrusted the boy to a group of hunters, asking them to build his physical strength to match that of Kapila. She instructed them to return the boy to his grandfather, Vidhyasagar, when he reached the age of five so that his intellectual development could be nurtured. Through this, Padmini hoped to cultivate in her son the perfect blend of Kapila's vitality and Devadatta's intellect, an ideal she had never found fully realized in either man.

The story reaches its tragic climax when Padmini, unable to live with the consequences of her decision, commits suicide. In the final moments, the character of Hayavadana, who had earlier sought to restore his human form, is granted a human head, but in doing so, he loses his horse-like vitality and strength. The play ends on a note of ambiguity, as Hayavadana, now fully human, must face the existential void of having achieved his long-desired completeness, yet feeling even more fragmented than before.

It is often rightly said that desires are endless and can never truly be satisfied. In chasing our ambitions, we often overlook and undervalue the joys we already have, making our lives unnecessarily burdensome. When we fail to find contentment in what we possess, we either knowingly or unknowingly invite misery. Through *Hayavadana*, Girish Karnad delivers a powerful message: *the notion of perfection is a myth. Not only are human beings flawed even the gods are incomplete.* The play delves into the concept of incompleteness on three distinct levels: *divine, human, and animal.* Notably, Karnad opens the narrative with a prayer to Lord Ganesha, a deity who embodies imperfection, thereby highlighting the irony of seeking perfection through a flawed figure. Through

this, Karnad questions the unquestioning faith of those who turn to imperfect gods in hopes of achieving perfection in themselves or others. In the end, *Hayavadana* conveys a profound message that true fulfillment lies in embracing our destiny and finding satisfaction in what we already possess, rather than endlessly chasing an illusion of perfection that keeps us from appreciating the present moment.

The character of Hayavadana serves as a powerful symbol of the play's central theme, the relentless quest for wholeness. Born with a human body and the head of a horse, Hayavadana is consumed by the desire to reclaim his full human identity. His journey reflects deeper tensions between human and animal nature, intellect and instinct, and the yearning to overcome one's flaws. Through his struggle, the play highlights both the physical and existential challenges of seeking completeness, ultimately emphasizing the futility of striving for an ideal that may never be attained. Although Hayavadana undergoes a transformation into a fully human form by the end of the play, he discovers that achieving completeness does not lead to fulfillment. Instead, he loses the vitality that once defined him as a horse-headed man. His new humanity feels hollow, stripped of the dynamic essence he once had. Through Hayavadana's journey, Karnad implies that the quest for wholeness—whether in body, mind, or identity—not only remains unattainable but is also inherently destructive. Hayavadana's tragic fate, similar to that of the two men, underscores the dangers of pursuing an ideal of wholeness without recognizing the complexity and multiplicity of the human experience.

The play employs striking and unsettling imagery, most notably in the character of Hayavadana, who possesses a horse's head, to emphasize the central theme of incompleteness. In traditional theatre, the grotesque frequently represents a disruption of the natural world, a violation of the divisions between human and non-human, reality and illusion. In *Hayavadana*, this symbolic application of the grotesque directly comments on the fragmented nature of both identity and existence. Karnad's depiction of Hayavadana as a half-human, half-animal figure compels the audience to question the artificial boundaries between different facets of existence. The grotesque, in this context, serves as a metaphor for the human condition - just as Hayavadana's form is incomplete, so too is the human self—perpetually divided, conflicted, and striving for unity. The horse-headed man, in his incompleteness, embodies both the beauty and the tragedy of humanity's quest for wholeness, reminding us that in our pursuit of completeness, we may lose the very essence of what makes us who we are.

Karnad's play, steeped in philosophical and cultural depth, delves into the complexities of the human condition and the timeless struggle between our desire for wholeness and the fragmented nature of reality. This paper has explored in detail how **Hayavadana** portrays the pursuit of completeness and the paradoxes that inevitably arise from it. ■

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Dr. T.K. Santhi, Associate Professor of English, Knowledge Institute of Technology, Salem, Tamil Nadu.



Editor Dr Udayanath Majhi with noted Odia poet Dr Prasanna Patsani and others  
in a Literary Program at Kasinagar, dist Gajapati, Odisha, while felicitating  
Mr Bhagirathi Behera of GKLT, Berhampur

# Re-integration of ‘Humanities and STEM’ and Beyond: The Compelling Post-humanist-turn for Inclusivism in the Indian Academia

**Ch. A. Rajendra Prasad**

It is now an established finding that Humanism has already turned Posthumanism since humanism is neither neutral nor natural nor universal, and is in principle Anthropocentric and Man/Human-centric. In view of the foregoing, it is time the Indian academia realized this, and gave Post-humanist-turn to its curricula and met its post-humanism’s onus of contributing to the seminal aspects of Indian society, like, Democracy, Material and Cultural Development and Pluralist India.

Against this backdrop, the paper attempts to argue for the emergence of New Humanities, now, named and comprehended perhaps more realistically and pragmatically as Post-humanist Studies, stands integrative with other disciplines but not in the binary position of Humanities vs STEM. Hence the integrative stance of Humanities makes it Post-humanist with its seamless engagement with STEM and beyond. Giving the post-humanist-turn to the curricula and /or incorporating post-humanist studies will be doubly challenging as what is aspired for transcends the routine and/or clichéd integration. Accordingly this paper attempts to find ways and means for the same.

The realization of Posthumanist/ Integrative Humanist Curricula will help India to sustain its Democracy by way of making the participation of the masses in informed and representative way in the true sense. Understandably undertaking of post-humanist- turn amounts to being a democracy is becoming a democracy for the wellbeing of the nation and the globe. In fact this shift from ‘becoming’ to ‘being’ in every domain of our existence and the eco-system together is the crux of posthumanist turn.

In a similar fashion, overcoming the binary of material vs culture, the integrative existence of the two shall be the spirit of the curricula which helps the universities to be equipping its students to be engaged with the complementary pursuit of the cultural and the material instead of in contrasting manner. Further, the Posthumanist, read as, integrative humanist curricula alone will be encompassing and inclusive of all sections and all people of all orientations—be they ideological /philosophical, religious, cultural, fashion, food and biological.

**Key-words/ phrases:**

Transcending routine and/or clichéd integration of humanities

Posthumanist-turn to the curricula

Sustainment of Democracy, Development and Pluralism of India

University and/or curricula from 'being to 'becoming

**I. Introduction: Genesis and/or Mutation of Posthumanism and its Implications:**

"Post-humanism seems to you a sudden mutation of the times, in fact, the conjunctions of imagination and science, myth and technology, have begun by firelight in the caves of Lascaux."

"...both imagination and science are agents of change, crucibles of values, modes not only of representation but also of transformation, their-interplay may now be the vital performing principle in culture and consciousness—a key to posthumanism."

— Ihab Hassan in "Prometheus as Performer: Towards a Posthumanist Culture?"

Assuming that the AI is a manifestation of Posthumanism and in the light of the same, it shall be conceded that comprehending the AI (Artificial Intelligence) which has been staring into our eyes and literally baffling us with its 'near-omniscient' potential will lead to us to know the other manifestations of Posthumanism. As the AI seemed to have come into our midst from seemingly nowhere, so is Posthumanism. At times, the AI gives us a creepy feeling of nearly displacing us—the Humans and their supposedly unique and centric position in this world. There have been already predictions about how the AI could displace a substantial percentage of Human Beings as Teachers and Doctors etc in the near future. Then is the AI a: "...mutation of the times "emerging and /or emerged as a Near-Alternative to Human Beings a la Posthumanism?—a mutation that has occurred in the 'genetics of the universe.'

The neologism, "Posthumanism," which was coined by Ihab Hassan in his seminal article, titled, "Promethesu as Performer Towards a Postculturalist Culture?" way back in 1977 attempts to unveil a debate about the taken-for-granted certainty of human-centric existence of this universe: "we need first to understand that the human form- including human desire and all its external representations- may be changing radically, and thus must be re-visioned. We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism." ( Hassan, 1977)

In the first place, as indicated above, the supposed eternity of 'humanist' discourse needs to be verified. As Ahab Hassan attempts to point out its longevity perhaps as a discourse and as an 'ism' is of five hundred years old, approximately, and how consequently we the Human Beings are rudely woken up to witness and realize how our existence is not unique but entangled with the other stakeholders of the universe whom we do not reckon as stakeholders.

It may be worthwhile to borrow a little more from Ihab Hassan which would attempt to jolt us from our self-opinionated assumptions and/ or certainties about our existence on the planet: “We are ourselves that performance; we perform and are performed every moment. We are the pain or play of the Human, which will not remain human. We are Earth and Sky, Water and Fire. We are the changing form of Desire. Everything changes, and nothing, not even Death, can tire.”

In view of the foregoing and finding us in the lap and/or grip of posthumanist times whose manifestations seemed to include the AI, of course among many, it is time we comprehended the posthumanist metamorphosis that has emerged with far reaching ramifications and implications. Understandably, the Posthumanist context would affect the Human Condition in variant ways.

Against this backdrop, an attempt is made to review the place of Humanities which have been already found positioned in a close contest with STEM for survival. This is almost obvious in the Indian context and perhaps elsewhere also. Perhaps any discussion and evaluation of the state of affairs of the Integrative Humanities demands a recalling of the foundations and spirit of our higher education system and also a recalling of the imparting of Humanities.

While limiting oneself, though deliberately, to a sketchy drawing of an outline of the subject matter, it becomes self-evident that normal education in ancient Indian context was confined to a few and that too was engaged in the pursuit of philosophical, liberal and fine arts- related aspects with interspersing of arithmetic. Through times, from colonial times onwards, Humanities seem to gain the ground with the advent of modern education. The post-independent times have witnessed a balanced approach to the pursuit of Humanities. Appreciation of this condition of the pursuit of liberal and fine arts studies at times coupled with humanities must be done cautiously since the crux of the issue is the continued shroud of mystery/secrecy and vagueness in the pursuit of Higher Education vs Humanities.

Further, notwithstanding the home-grown and much reiterated and officially cherished adages, like, “Vasudhaiva Kutumbam and Manavathavadam,” the higher education scenario especially with reference to the pursuit of Humanities, one can’t help pointing out, that in its practice there has been missing of candidness /openness and professionalism. The lack gets strengthened by debate and discussion induced by intellectual curiosity with emphasis on missing non-human beings, material and technological aspects of life and nature.

Also, in this context one can’t help recalling the lack of fair transmission of knowledge leave alone professionalism. Though unpleasant to recall of these times of opaqueness, it is a known fact that the transference of knowledge is shrouded in secrecy. Perhaps this seemed to be the case even with regard to imparting any technological and professional and skill-based knowledge. This condition compels us for bringing a study of contrast with that of the West. This engagement of contrasting with the West results in



revelation of crucial facts, like, pursuit of Arts / Liberal disciplines coupled with Humanities has not been conducted in tandem with the pursuit of the disciplines of science and technology.

With the hindsight of this experience, while wondering about the fate of integrative humanities, in the sense whether they are now or whether they have nearly-withered with nowhere to sustain, it is time we now realized that the very Humanism about which we take pride of a native-grown concept though our universities have mostly followed the western European construction of ‘ the human,’ which is human-centric with no empathy for not only for the non-human—the flora and the fauna and the natural resources of all sorts but also more importantly for the Woman and the Marginalized peoples of the Indian society.

In a nutshell, the humanism that we have recited and cherished, especially in Indian context, advertently and /or inadvertently has served the Cause of the Man and that too the Man of the Mainstream guided and induced by values of certainty of human-centric and heirarchal existence of the world induced and promoted by monarchy, feudalism and capitalism combined with colonialism, and presently Neo-capitalism in the postcolonial times wherein non-inclusive remains at the core.

However posthumanism is gaining ground in universities across the world. It is time the Indian Academia / Universities did the same and gave its curricula the posthumanist-turn which obviously requires shedding the orthodox approaches to departments and disciplines. Obviously the posthuman approach to the curricula demands sacrificing turf wars and department-specific programmes that we routinely offer need to be revamped and integrated in the real sense in the wake of posthumanist reality: “... posthuman thinking is growing, problematising human-centric institutions and practices ( Weaver: 2010)... “ who take quite a neutral tone regarding humanism, critique its tendency to universalise and idealise the human” (Phillips, 2015). Simultaneously, the Curricular reforms should take note of the aligned existence of: “As bodies and machines become increasingly entwined...” ( Haraway, 1991). Specifically speaking, in practice the posthumanist pedagogical practice will be “...through improvisation, theorisation and diffraction” ( Taylor and Hughes, 2016)

Further the curricular changes for taking a posthumanist-turn need to undergo a radical process: “... the posthuman condition also produces posthuman thought that makes it possible to reimagine curriculum studies, that we shall call posthuman curriculum” which “ in posthumanist terms is intelligible and manifests through intra-actions, processes of becoming and experimenting”(Grange and Preez).

While not negating the entanglement of Humanism and Posthumanism, it is time the Indian Academia conceded that the inbuilt self-circumscribing Humanism has already posed a threat, though in a veiled manner, to its Democracy, Material and Cultural Development and Plurality. In the same breath while conceding that Indian Polity and Economy have made strides but so much is still in wanting. It may be proposed that posthumanist-turn will really sustain Indian democracy, development ( cultural and material)

and plurality as it (posthumanism) advocates moving away from binaries, anti-anthropocentric and anti-Man-centric and more importantly in the inclusivist manner exposing the duplicity in the false/ borrowed read as euro-centric which has the potential to keep the marginalized in the margins for ever.

### **Post-humanist-Turn in Indian Academia for Sustaining Democracy, Development of Material and Culture and Plurality of India:**

Thus, the author, while banking on posthumanist approach read as inclusive approach of Man, Woman, Animal, Tree, River and Minerals and Technology, hopes that now the ubiquitous technology either in the form of AI or advanced version of it will have potential to bring in space, opportunity and objectivity in realizing the sustenance of democracy, development and plurality in India and elsewhere. ■

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Prof. Ch. A. Rajendra Prasad, Head, P.G. Deptt. of English and Communications, Dravidian University, Kuppam, Andhra Pradesh.

# Towards Strengthening Gandhiji's Swaraj : The Short Poems of Gangadhar Meher

Anand Mahanand

The first part of twentieth century witnessed unending competitions among nations to establish their supremacy over others. Such arrogance and dominance resulted in colonialism and violence of different forms. As a result of these, there were two world wars. Millions of people died and more than millions suffered due to these wars. Many nations' economies become crippled. In that scenario, there emerged a leader in Gandhi in India who used non-violence as weapon to fight colonialism. Another weapon that he employed was the mantra of Swaraj, a principle that taught people to give up reliance on foreign goods, services and cultural practices and adopt native ways and means to be independent and self-reliant. It was a philosophy that believed in strengthening village economy concentrating on agriculture, cow protection and weaving. Many poets and writers were influenced by Gandhiji's concept of swaraj. In Odisha, poets like Gangadhar Meher, Gopabandhu Das and Mayadhar Mansingh wrote poems with Gandhi's ideals and spread the message of swaraj. This paper aims at looking at the shorter poems of Gangadhar Meher (1862-1924) and explores the ideas of Swaraj as reflected in them. It seeks to answer the following questions: 1. What kind of devices Gangadhar Meher used in his poems to convey the ideas of swaraj? 2. What kind of activities he undertook to make possible swaraj to reach common people?

It argues that, Gangadhar Meher was committed to the idea of swaraj and adopted different poetic devices and means both in poetry and personal life to spread the message of Hind Swaraj of Gandhiji.

**Keywords:** swaraj, Gandhiji, Gangadhar Meher, self-reliance, colonialism

## Introduction

As a result of colonialism in India, the economy was controlled and crushed by the alien power. Colonialism also encouraged city based capitalist economy weakening the village and agricultural economy which was sustainable and was a support to millions of people. The traditional trades of people like weaving, pottery, and more importantly agriculture were controlled by the British power directly or indirectly. As a result, people

became poor and dependent. Gandhiji, who was influenced by Tolstoy, Thoreau and Ruskin, could recognize the power of colonialism and capitalist economy. To counter these, he adopted swaraj or self-rule as a principle. He expressed his idea in his book *Hind Swaraj* originally written in Gujarati in 1909, where he argues that, the village economy and not the urban economy has to be encouraged resulting in the growth of agriculture, weaving and cottage industries. He asserted that, our reliance on big machines will make us weak and slaves. He opines in *Hind Swaraj* , “ it is machinery that has impoverished India”(107). According to him big machines wipe away cottage industries which he supported. Gandhi also encouraged cow protection and strengthening of local self government. Gandhiji visited Odisha seven times and halted at Swaraj Ashram at Cuttack. Leaders like Gopabandhu Das, Malati Chaudhuri and others accompanied him to different places in Odisha and Gandhi described Odisha as his favourite place. But he was sad to see the poverty of the people.

### **Gandhiji's ideals in Odia poetry**

Many poets in Odisha have captured Gandhi's philosophy and concepts of Hind Swaraja in their poetry. Gopabandhu Das, Gangadhar Meher and Mayadhar Mansingh are notable among them. Gopabandhu Das's “ Kara kabita,” “Bandira Atmakatha” are poems which express the swaraj and swadeshi ideology of Gandhiji. In a poem titled “ Bandira Atmakatha” Gopabandhu Das asserts:

Misu mora deha e desha matire  
 Deshabasi chali jayantu pithier  
 Desara swarajya pathei jete gadha  
 Puru tahin padi mora mansa hada. (lines 23-26)  
**Let my body in my motherland's soil mingle**  
**Let my country folk walk on that path of land**  
**where my body has mingled.**  
**Let the pits of on the way of my country's swarajya**  
**with my flesh and bone be filled.**

Mayadhar Mansingh in his poem “Bapu Tarpana” writes:

Debata Atma bahe se tahar  
 Kshina mati abayabe  
 Padma bikasha tenu sina tara  
 Chalapathe sambahabe  
 Buddha-Khristo eka se kahila  
 Patita ku kala bhai  
 Satya se puje satru tahara nai.  
 Aharaha se go bhabuthae para pain. (Lines 21-28)  
 About Gandhi the poet says,  
 He carries the godly atma  
 In his weak-meek body so blooms lotus

Smooth has been his path  
Christ and Buddha are one he says.  
Made the dalits his bruvver  
He worships the truth and so has no opponent.  
Keeps on thinking for others all day and night.  
According to Mansigh Gandhi was the embodiment of pure soul and truth.

Gangadhar Meher was also greatly influenced by Gandhiji. Many of his short poems have been written in the shade of Swaraj and Gandhiji. In a poem titled “Bharati Bhabana” he critiqued the British colonialism as cruel and exploitative. He made sarcastic remarks saying that without paying respect to the crown, Indians cannot live peacefully in their homes. He exposes how the British appropriated Indian wealth:

Gopendra, Chhale Jatikula nasila  
Jaha thila ambha nijatwa tahire  
Nija prabhuta prakashila. (6-7).

**Gopendra, all communities and clans deceitfully destroyed  
established his supremacy destroying all that we had**

He also hopes that there will be victory of truth as Lord Krishna is with the Indians. As he was with the Pandavas and the Pandavas won the battle of Mahabharata, the Indians would win the battle against British colonialism.

Krishna krushna gheni Bharata biplaba  
Upujila kapatapashe  
Jahin Krushna tahin bijay nischaya  
Rahigala loka biswase. (Ll 36-40)

**Due to Krishna (Draupadi) and Krushna at the game of dice  
The Mahabharata occurred  
Victory is certain where there is Lord Krushna  
Set as belief in people’s mind.**

Gangadhar Meher not only critiqued the alien colonial power but also the internal colonizers mainly the money-lenders, the Mahajans, in Western Odisha. He terms the money-lenders as people of low nature. They are known for their cunning and cheating the poor vulnerable people.

Gangadhar Meher considers the forest and its resources as wealth that is precious to all. He attributes Gandhamardan forest of Nrusinghnath to Banalakshmi. He explains the ways the forest serves the people through clean air, water, medicines and other forest produces. The produces produced by farmers and the cattle bred by them are also capitals. He celebrated the handicrafts and village produces.

Gangadhar Meher through some of his short poems attempted to educate the farmers. These poems are published as “Krushaka Sangeeta”. He tells them about different crops such as rice, peanuts, grams, bana, jute and so on and educates how to grow them. He enumerates the methods of farming. He also explains the importance of cow conservation and how to rear cows. This he believes will empower the villagers and farmers. He also believed that, by empowering them he could strengthen their economy and contribute to village swaraj. Gandadhar Meher also composed many poems on dharma, morality, moral values as he wanted to teach them about truth and non-violence. He founded “Sadhu Samiti” and tried to bring people to the path of non-violence, truth and cooperation. Through meetings and messages he spread the message of righteousness and happy life.

Ganadhar Meher’s nature poems show his love for nature and its importance in our existence. He uses nature as a living force in many of his epic poems. He has described the lush green forests of Gandhamardan in his poem “Mrugaya Darshana”. He also describes many plants that are helpful and beneficial for the farmers. He educated people to domesticate cows and save them from ill-treatment. His poems “Go Rakshana” and “Go Mahatmya” deal with what kind of cows to be domesticated and how to domesticate them.

Meher also stressed on the importance of local language. He said in his poem “Matrubhumi”: “Matrubhumi matru bhasare mamata ja hrude janami nahi. Tanku jadi jnani ganare ganiba ajnana rahibe kahin” (Ll. 41-44).

If someone with no love for motherland and mother tongue  
Is called a wise man

Then who is a foolish one?

He believed that, without elevating one’s own language, there can be no development.  
Hence he said in a poem:

Uccha heba pai kara jebe asha

Uccha kara tebe nija matrubhasha

Elevate your mother tongue first,

If you want to elevate yourself.

Gangadhar Meher is an embodiment of localizing the grand narratives. He rendered texts like *Abhigyana Sankuntalam* and *Raghuvansham* from Sankrit into Odia as *Pranaya Ballari* and *Indumati* to make them accessible to the common Odia readers. His “Krushak Sangeeta” poems are for villagers and farmers. Hence he uses many colloquial words such as mug phalli, goras and so on.

At the personal level too, Meher organized people to come to the right fold leaving behind their bad habits. He formed a group called “Sadhu Samiti” and worked for their moral benefit of the country folk (Meher 185). He also attempted to educate them through many poems based on right conduct. In his poem ‘Udbodhana’ he urges people to dedicate



themselves to the cause of the motherland giving up self-interest and worldly attachment. He led a simple life and was gentle and righteous in his dealings. Because of his gentle manner, spontaneity and lucidity in expression, he is aptly called “swabhaba kabi.”

### Conclusion

Taking into consideration the poet’s use of Gandhi’s swaraj in his creative pursuit, it is clear that, Gangadhar Meher was a poet who had swaraj in his mind and creativity. He was critical of the alien power; he saw Gandhi’s idea of swaraj as a leading light. Meher also viewed forests, agriculture and handicraft as helpful means of sustenance. He was for the growth and development of local language. He made efforts to help people lead a life of righteousness. At the personal level too, he made efforts to organize people for this. In view of these, he was a crusader who fought against colonialisms and worked as a true soldier of *Swaraj*. Gandhi and Gangadhar Meher’s ideas might sound obsolete to some in present time but they were relevant and valuable for the time they were written. They are also relevant to the present time to some extent. ■

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Prof. Anand Mahanand, Dept. of Materials Development, Testing & Evaluation, The EFL University, Hyderabad, Telangana.

# A Stylistic Study on the Scope of Marxist Discourse in Literary Studies

Rajesh. S.

This essay explores the methodology of teaching stylistics from a Marxist discourse perspective, highlighting how this approach helps students critically analyse the social, political, and economic contexts embedded in literature. By focusing on Marxist concepts such as class struggle, ideology, and power relations, the essay accentuates the role of language and discourse in shaping literary texts. It discusses ideological influences of the time frame through which stylistic features like syntax, diction, and narrative structure reflect the socio-economic conditions in those texts. It further provides insight into the way literature aids as an ideological apparatus. The essay also examines the practical aspects of teaching Marxist discourse in stylistics, including the introduction of key Marxist concepts, analysis of discourse, and ideological functions within literary works. Through concrete examples, such as George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, the essay demonstrates how Marxist stylistics can uncover the class struggles and power dynamics within canonical and non-canonical texts. The essay concludes by addressing the limitations and challenges of Marxist discourse. Particularly its focus on class and economic factors, and suggests the importance of incorporating complementary critical perspectives for a more nuanced understanding of literature.

**Keywords:** Class divisions, Cultural hegemony, Dominant ideologies, Discourse, Economic base, Empire, Ideology, Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), Marxism, Language and power, Power relations, Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), Social structures, Subjugation, Narrative structure, Social context, Social inequality, Subordinate class, Symbolism, Theory

Teaching stylistics from a Marxist perspective is an enriching approach that provides students the tools to analyse the underlying social, political, and economic contexts embedded in literature. By using the Marxist lens, educators or teachers can guide students to understand the functioning of literary works as ideological instruments, reinforcing and reflecting the power dynamics of a given society. This approach accentuates the significance of discourse,

power, and ideology in shaping language and literary texts. It also provides a critical framework for students to deconstruct the inherent class struggles and social inequalities present in canonical and non-canonical works.

Stylistics, as an interdisciplinary field, combines linguistics and literary criticism, focusing on the ways in which language shapes meaning in texts. It studies the formal features of language such as, syntax, diction, and narrative structure, and their role in creating specific effects on the students. The essence of Marxist stylistics is built on exploring the language choices. Language choices are influenced by the socio-economic and political context or discourse in which the text is written. This approach emphasises literature as not mere products of artistic expression but are shaped by the ideological structures of the particular time. Hence, teaching stylistics through a Marxist framework enables students to comprehend the relationship between language, power, and society, and reflection of these factors in literary production.

The core aspects of Marxism in literary theory are the focus on class struggle, exploitation, and the role of ideology in maintaining power relations. Marxist discourse suggests that the ruling class controls the means of production. Consequently, it acts as the ideological apparatus that shapes the worldview of society. Literature, as a cultural product, is not neutral rather, it is part of this ideological apparatus and can either reinforce or challenge. Students by studying literature through a Marxist perspective, can reveal the hidden power structures at play. They further learn to critically assess the ways in which texts reflect and perpetuate these ideologies.

### **Teaching Marxist Discourse through Stylistics: Methodology and Approach**

Teaching Marxist discourse through stylistics, is an approach that not only focuses on the formal aspects of language but also emphasizes the political, social, and historical context of the text. This methodology provides students with a toolkit for analysing the devices in which language is used to reflect or resist the social conditions of its time. The Marxist approach in stylistics allows a deeper investigation of the ways in which ideology is developed in linguistic choices, narrative techniques and character portrayal.

### **Introducing Marxist Concepts to Students**

Before learning the stylistic analysis of texts, it is essential for students to have a firm understanding of the key Marxist concepts that will guide their analysis. Teachers should start teaching by introducing the basic principles of Marxist theory, such as historical materialism, class struggle, and the role of ideology in maintaining social structures. In the due process, Marx and Engels' critique of capitalism provides a foundation for understanding social, political, and economic inequalities that are maintained by the ruling class. The discussion of the division between the proletariat (the working class) and the bourgeoisie (the ruling capitalist class) is crucial for contextualizing the class dynamics present in many literary works.

Marxism in literature is often about examining how narratives and characters challenge or reflect these class structures. Understanding the relationship between the superstructure (political, legal, and cultural institutions) and the economic base (the means of production) allows students to initiate analysing language in literature which reflects these dynamics. Therefore, teachers should guide students to recognize that literature, like all cultural forms, is shaped by and responds to the material conditions of particular time.

### **Discourse and Power in Stylistics**

A key component of Marxist approach in stylistics is the examination of discourse, which refers to the language and social context surrounding a text in its time. Discourse analysis in a Marxist framework is concerned with how language reflects power relations and ideologies. For Marxist critics, discourse is not just a neutral means for communication but an apparatus through which power and class dominance are prolonged.

Students should be encouraged in the classroom to think critically about the social and historical context in which a text was written. Teachers can guide them to look for moments in the text where power relations are evident, specifically through dialogue, narrative voice, and character interactions. For instance, in George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, the use of propaganda and language manipulation is central to the power dynamics of the story. Orwell's portrayal of the pigs using language to control the other animals demonstrates how discourse is used to maintain power and reinforce ideologies. Students can analyse the way in which the manipulation of language shapes the characters' perceptions and emphasizes the dominance of certain classes.

Antonio Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony can also be introduced by teachers in this context. The term hegemony refers to the ways in which the dominant class secures the consent of the subordinate class, not through coercion or force, but through the normalization of their beliefs, values and ideologies. Students can examine how literature represents this process of consent-building and the ways that language works to sustain the situation. Through careful analysis of setting, dialogue and characterization, students can explore the means of power relationships and social norms in connection with language construction.

### **Ideology and Literary Form**

In Marxist approach to stylistics, the ideological function of literature is a crucial spotlight. The concept of ideology refers to the beliefs and ideas that mirror the interests of the ruling class, usually disguising the true nature of social and political relations. Marxists argue that ideology functions to legitimize the prevailing power structures, making them appear normal or unavoidable. In this context, literary form plays a significant role to know the methods in disseminate ideology. Stylistics, as the study of language and style, enables students to identify ideological purposes through form and content in a literary work.

While teaching Marxist stylistics, educators should highlight certain stylistic choices, such as narrative point of view, character development, and symbolism in revealing the ideological orientation of a text. For instance, in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*, the portrayal of the working class as criminal or morally corrupt reflects the ideological stance of the ruling class. In turn, this seeks to demonize the poor in order to maintain control and hegemony. A Marxist reading of the text, however, would focus on the criminal behaviour of characters like Fagin and Bill Sikes in response to the systemic exploitation and deprivation they experience at the hands of the bourgeoisie.

In teaching *Oliver Twist* or other works, students can be stimulated to analyse how Dickens' language and characterization serve the dominant ideologies of his time. They can explore and question the portrayal of the poor as immoral or violent. This further interrogates the idea that poverty is a result of moral failing rather than a consequence of economic inequality. By probing how Dickens constructs his narratives and characters, students can uncover the ways in which literature both reinforce and reflects class-based ideologies.

### **Deconstructing Canonical Literature**

One of the significant objectives of Marxist discourse in stylistics is to deconstruct canonical literature and reveal the unseen ideologies within. Classical works of literature often reflect the values and belief system of the dominant classes, and students can be trained to critically assess these works through Marxist point of view. Students can develop a more nuanced understanding of literary texts by examining in what way language reinforces class divisions, social norms, and power dynamics.

To prove this, teachers can assign readings of canonical texts that reflect the class dynamics of their period. For example, students can analyse the works of Jane Austen, such as *Pride and Prejudice*, through a Marxist framework. Austen's novels often represent the lives of the British upper class and the social pressures of marriage, and inheritance. A Marxist reading of *Pride and Prejudice* can focus on the reflection of the capitalist economic system of that time, particularly in reference to class mobility, property and wealth.

Students should be motivated to look at the narrative structures and language choices in Austen's work to see the way they reflect the dominant social, economic and political values of her society. For example, the characterization of characters like Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth Bennet can be read as an annotation on class consciousness, social expectations, and the limited boundaries of upward mobility within a capitalist society. Through a Marxist reading, the text can be deconstructed to depict perpetuating class distinctions through the interests of the bourgeoisie while.

### **Teaching Marxist Stylistics with Examples**

Teaching Marxist discourse in stylistics becomes definitely effective when it is grounded in concrete examples. George Orwell's *Animal Farm* is an excellent example for illustrating Marxist discourse in stylistics as it provides an allegory of revolution. In addition,

it shows the ways in which power dynamics shift and ultimately reproduce the same class structures. Orwell's use of language particularly the manipulation of words by the pigs become a powerful tool for examining the factors of constructed and maintained ideologies.

In the classroom, students can be asked to examine Orwell's use of narrative structure and language techniques. They can focus on the pigs' manipulation of language which enables them to maintain control over the other animals. Along with this, the narrative technique of using propaganda to showcase the disguised nature of the pigs' rise to power shall also be underscored. Students can also explore how Orwell's depiction of power dynamics and class struggle exhibit the political context of his time, particularly the rise of totalitarian regimes.

Similarly, Dickens' *Oliver Twist* provides a rich example for Marxist stylistics. Students can analyse how the novel's depiction of poverty and crime reflects the ideologies of Victorian England. By focusing on the narrative techniques, character portrayal, and dialogue, students can uncover the ways in which Dickens' language reflects class-based ideologies and how the working class is both portrayed and exploited.

### **Challenges and Limitations of Marxist Discourse in Stylistics**

While Marxist discourse in stylistics offers a powerful instrument for analysing literature, it is however, not without its challenges. One of the significant limitations of Marxist discourse in stylistics criticism is its focus on class struggle and economic factors. It also frequently neglects other forms of oppression, such as gender, ethnicity, caste and race. As a result, it may not sufficiently address the intersectionality of social issues. Further, the contemporary critics often seek to complement Marxist analysis with feminist, postcolonial, and queer theories which may not adequately withstand the theoretical aspects within Marxist studies. Therefore, teachers should be mindful and be circumspective of these limitations while encouraging students to consider multiple perspectives in the process of analysing literature.

In conclusion, teaching stylistics through a Marxist discourse point of view offers a powerful context for analysing literary texts, as it underlines the ways in which language reflects and reinforces social, political, and economic power structures. By examining discourse, ideology, and class dynamics, students can discover the way literature functions as both a reflection and a tool for maintaining the dominant ideologies of a given society. Marxist discourse in stylistics provides a valuable insight into the ways literature engages with issues of class and power. Hence, it is important for educators or teachers also to consider the limitations of this approach. Particularly its focus on class struggle over other forms of social oppression. Ultimately, combining Marxist discourse in stylistics with other critical perspectives can offer students a more holistic and nuanced understanding of literary texts. It also helps them to critically engage with the ideological forces that shape both literature and society. ■



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Rajesh.S, Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Bangalore University, Jnana Bharathi, Bangalore, Karnataka.



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# Fragmented Flesh: Manto's Women and the Grievous Survival in Partition's Shadows

Suneeta Chura

Shashi Kant Acharya

A significant trauma was caused in South Asian history by the Partition of India in 1947. It broke communities, displacing one and many. Amid this commotion, women's experiences were always kept in corners and under the rug. Burning with violence and societal uproar, their frames were always the field of bloodshed and battles, drawing cuts and scars of a nation with divisions. Trauma exhibits not only bodily violence but also leads to a lasting psychological abrasion.

Saadat Hasan Manto (1922-1955) with his bitter and plain-spoken narratives, specifically *Thanda Gosht* and *Khol Do*, reveal the most significant impact of the splitting of the nation on the female population. It foregrounds the strife and crusades just to exist in the landscape of relentlessness. Moreover, His writings are quite significant to understand gender discourse, art as activism, trauma as a shared experience, bodies as battlegrounds and to bring in light those stories which are always going to bring change to the nation. This paper contends that Manto is integral to the study of women and trauma in partition. It is about how it is so focused on the experiences of the marginalized and how important it is for them to "get their stories back" in the sense of South Asian literature, and how the partition never really ended; it just continues to the next generation.

**Keywords:** Partition, Trauma, Women's Experiences, Violence, Manto, *Thanda Gosht*, *Khol Do*, Marginalized Voices.

## Introduction

The Partition of India in 1947 was not just a historical event—it was a nightmare that unfolded across the bodies and minds of millions, with women being its most brutalized victims. But what's often left out of the history books is the insidious, gendered violence that women endured during and after the Partition. The political borders that divided India and Pakistan were drawn with blood—especially the blood of women. Their suffering was not an unfortunate byproduct of history; it was woven into the fabric of Partition itself. "The wounds of Partition are deep, and many of them are carried in the bodies of women" (Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence*, 2000, p. 80)

In this sea of human suffering, Saadat Hasan Manto emerges not just as a writer, but as a brutal truth-teller—one who refuses to sanitize the ugliness of his nation's history. Manto's stories, particularly *Khol Do* and *Thanda Gosht*, go beyond mere historical documentation; they are visceral, heart-wrenching accounts of the unspeakable violence women faced, not only as victims of communal riots but as pawns in a much larger game of nationalistic and patriarchal control. Manto doesn't just present their pain—he dares to show us its ugly face and demands that we face it.

This paper will explore how Manto's unflinching realism offers us a mirror, showing us not just the horrors of Partition but also the political and social systems that allowed this violence to unfold. It will argue that Manto's works force us to confront not only the gendered nature of this violence but also the very heart of a society that reduces women to mere objects of violence, control, and power struggles. Scholars like Ritu Menon (1998, *Borders and Boundaries*) and Veena Das (1995, *Critical Events*) provide a critical framework for understanding these gendered experiences and the politics behind them.

#### **Manto's Unforgiving Realism: Women as the Ultimate Sacrifice.**

When we talk about Partition, we often discuss borders, migrations, and deaths. But what of the violence that was performed on women's bodies? What of the rapes, the abductions, the mutilations? This is the subject of Manto's most unsettling works, stories that expose the raw, unfiltered truth about how women were treated during Partition. In *Khol Do*, Manto writes the story of Sakina, a woman who is raped by a man who claims to "rescue" her from the violence. The words "khol do" (open it) are uttered in the midst of this assault—murderously simple, yet profoundly devastating. The man doesn't just take her body; he rips away her humanity. As Shashi Behl (2019, *Gender and the Partition of India: The Unwritten Memoirs*) notes, women's bodies were "not just battlefields in the political sense but in every sense of survival" (p. 112).

**Manto's genius lies in how he depicts Sakina's trauma:** "Her body was no longer her own" (Manto, *Khol Do*, 1948). She is not just violated physically; she is stripped of her identity. Her body is a battlefield between competing forces—communal violence, patriarchal domination, and the individual's quest for survival. Sakina's trauma is not unique; it is collective. It is the trauma of every woman caught in the crossfire of Partition, where their bodies were treated as objects of war, to be controlled, conquered, and discarded. As Urvashi Butalia argues, the Partition "created the conditions under which violence against women was not only condoned but actively promoted as part of the nationalist discourse" (*The Other Side of Silence*, 2000, p. 85).

In *Thanda Gosht*, the story of Eeshwar Singh forces us to confront the twisted aftermath of violence. After committing a horrific act of necrophilia on the woman he once loved, Eeshwar Singh, in his confession, reveals something even darker: this violence, this inhumanity, has become ingrained. The violence is no longer a reaction to an external event; it is internalized, embodied. "The heart of the country had died, and with it, the love we

once knew” (Manto, Thanda Gosht, 1950). This chilling line does not just speak to Eesher Singh’s internal torment—it speaks to the soul-crushing trauma that has infected an entire society. As Sumanta Sarkar (2009, *The Partition of Bengal*) explains, Partition led to “the internalization of a fractured national identity that continues to haunt the psyche of its people” (p. 65).

Manto doesn’t give us a chance to look away. His portrayal of sexual violence is not sensationalized; it’s real, raw, and ruthless. And in doing so, he forces us to question the very systems that allowed this violence to happen, and continue to allow it today.

#### Women’s Bodies: Political Objects in a Nationalist Game.

What makes Manto’s works revolutionary is his understanding of how women’s bodies became the ultimate political objects during Partition. They were the visible markers of religious and national honor, tools of power, and objects to be fought over. “The body of a woman was the price of a community’s victory,” as feminist scholar Ritu Menon writes (*Borders and Boundaries*, 1998, p. 95). The violence of Partition didn’t just disrupt geographical boundaries; it desecrated the most intimate spaces of human existence—the bodies of women. They were abducted, raped, and forcibly converted as a means of asserting control over the land.

In *Khol Do*, Manto captures this stark reality. Sakina is not simply a victim of individual violence; she is a symbol of the larger communal struggle. When the man who claims to be rescuing her strips her of her dignity, it is not just an assault on her body—it is a reflection of the way women were treated as symbols, as spoils in a game of political maneuvering. The horrific line “open it” is a metaphor for how easily women’s lives were torn apart by the brutal forces of nationalism. “Women were not just the victims of Partition; they were the casualties of a society that valued national pride more than human life” (Behl, 2019, p. 118).

In this context, Manto’s stories become not just a chronicle of historical events but a radical critique of the societal structures that allow such violence. He dismantles the façade of honor, religious purity, and national identity, showing us that at the heart of these ideologies lies the brutal exploitation of women.

#### **The Psychological Trauma of Partition: A Legacy that Lives On**

The trauma Manto depicts is not just immediate; it is psychological and intergenerational. The violence of Partition didn’t end when the borders were drawn; it festered in the minds and bodies of those who survived, particularly the women. In *Thanda Gosht*, Eesher Singh’s act of necrophilia symbolizes the distortion of human relationships in the wake of Partition. His violence is not an isolated act; it is the product of an entire culture that has been poisoned by violence.

“The violence inflicted during Partition does not simply fade—it is passed down through the generations, haunting those who were not even born during the conflict.” This

is why Manto's works remain urgent and necessary today. They are not just about the past; they are about the present. Women continue to be targeted in times of communal violence, and their trauma continues to be silenced, pushed to the margins of the narrative. Chitralkha Zutshi (2010, *Women, Memory, and Identity: Partition in South Asia*) highlights that the trauma of Partition has been passed on through generations, affecting cultural memory and women's roles in shaping that memory (p. 134).

Manto's characters, like Sakina and Eesher Singh, are not just victims—they are symbols of a larger, pervasive violence. Their trauma is not just personal; it is collective. It is the wound of a nation that refuses to confront its own history. It is the wound that continues to bleed today, every time a woman is targeted, violated, and silenced in the name of religion, community, or nationalism.

### **Manto's Relevance Today: The Need for Unflinching Truth**

In today's world, where religious intolerance, nationalism, and political violence are still rampant, Manto's work remains as relevant as ever. His boldness in confronting uncomfortable truths is precisely what makes his work revolutionary. In an age where we are constantly told to sanitize history and "move on," Manto demands that we stop, look, and feel the scars that Partition left on the subcontinent—especially on the women. As historian Gyanendra Pandey (2001, *Remembering Partition*) notes, "The history of Partition is one that must be retold, and retold again, if we are to understand the full cost of its violence" (p. 72).

The gendered violence of Partition is not something that belongs to the past; it is something that continues to shape our world. The bodies of women remain the battlegrounds of religious and nationalist wars. Manto's fearless exploration of this violence compels us to confront the uncomfortable reality that gendered violence is not just a relic of the past; it is a present-day epidemic. "The horror that Manto captured in his stories is not gone. It lives on in every woman who suffers violence in the name of honor, religion, or community" (Zutshi, 2010, p. 118).

### **Conclusion**

Manto's works—*Thanda Gosht* and *Khol Do*—are not just historical narratives; they are radical critiques of the society that allowed, and continues to allow, the systemic sexual violence of women. They are a call to action, an urgent reminder that the trauma of Partition did not end with the drawing of borders. It lives on in the bodies and minds of women, who remain its most brutalized victims. By refusing to sanitize the truth, Manto forces us to confront the violence that we have chosen to ignore.

His stories are not easy to read. They are not meant to be. They are meant to disturb, to shake us, to make us uncomfortable. Because until we acknowledge the depth of this trauma, until we recognize how women continue to be the casualties of political and communal wars, we will never heal. And until we face the unflinching truth that Manto

presents, we will continue to live in a world where women's bodies remain the ultimate battleground. ■

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Suneeta Chura, Research Scholar in English, Maharaja Ganga Singh University, Bikaner,, Rajasthan.

Dr. Shashi Kant Acharya, Assistant Professor in English, Govt. Dungar College, Bikaner, Rajasthan.



## Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* : A Poem of Invocation to Revolution

Satya Sundar Samanta

P.B. Shelley is a romantic poet par excellence. He is famous for his superb lyricism, lofty imagination, unique imagery, reformatory zeal, revolutionary tendency and myth making power. His "Ode to the West Wind" bears all the qualities. Through this powerful poem, the great poet strives to make the readers aware of the various evils relating to society, culture and politics in England. Through the invocation to the wind he literally invokes a revolution in his motherland.

**Keywords:** Shelley, ode, change, England.

Shelley's wonderful verse "Ode to the West Wind" is the one among the greatest poems ever written in romantic literature. The later romantic poet is at his best in this superb lyric. His other remarkable lyrical poems are "The Cloud", "To a Skylark", "To Night", "The Indian Serenade", and many others. In points of elevation of tone, subjectivity, sustained sublimity of diction, apt and colourful imagery, the sweeping movement of the verse and, above all, the poem is the perfect example of ode. Edward Albert wrote in his *History of English Literature* "Of his many beautiful odes, the most remarkable is 'Ode to the West Wind'". (Albert 317)<sup>1</sup>

The splendid poem is composed in Italian Terzarima. The poem 'Ode to the West Wind' begins with an invocation to the wild West Wind "O Wild West Wind". Then Shelley spiritedly describes the violent sweep of the wild wind over the land, ocean and firmament creating everywhere great agitation and convulsion. The Wind blowing through the autumnal forest becomes the agent to the poet of destruction as it tremendously sweeps away the dry leaves. But, the west wind is not only known as a destroyer; it is also a preserver. Along with the dead leaves it carries seeds to their bed where they will lie quietly only to sprout up in spring. The strong West Wind thus not only destroys old and rotten things but also lays the solid foundation of the new. Shelley is famous for his superb lyricism, lofty imagination, reformatory zeal, revolutionary tendency and myth making power.

It is this aspect of the wind which attracts the poet's imagination and urges him to beg from the powerful wind some of its vigour and impetuosity so that the poet can make his poem a potent force for destruction of the old and corrupt social order and ushering in a brave reformed world built on the wreck of the old. So, the evolution of the theme of the lyric starting with a description of the destructive activities of the wild wind in diverse spheres leading to a note of personal despondency for not having the strength and spirit of

the west-wind but finally culminating into an optimistic expression of the prophetic passion lends itself to a logical sequence, characteristic of an ode. Shelley bears his power to strike fierce sparks of feeling.

The tremendous power and energy of the wild wind makes the poet painfully aware, by contrast of his decaying physical strength and mental power. The romantic poet laments over the fact that once he too was brave and swift, full of energy and spirit as the wind is at present.

Shelley laments in agony,

I fall upon the thorns of life!  
I bleed!  
A heavy weight of hours  
has chained and bowed.  
(Chand 126)<sup>2</sup>

But the note of complaint is hardly the last thing in Shelley's poetry. Towards the ending part of this poem Shelley is too enthusiastic to create a rejuvenation in the human world. He begs to the wind to provide inspiration to him with at least a part of its strength and power. With reformatory zeal Shelley hopes to utter words that will inspire humanity with motives of love and truth and bring about a complete reformation of society;

Drive my dead thoughts  
over the universe  
Like withered leaves  
to quicken a new birth!  
And, by the incantation  
of this verse,  
Scatter, as from an  
unextinguished hearth  
Ashes and sparks, my words  
among mankind!

The poem ends with  
an optimistic note:  
If Winter comes,  
can spring be far behind?  
(Chand 126)<sup>3</sup>

The poem is a superb lyric with intense personal note, revolutionary motif, brilliant imagery, spontaneity of expression, reformatory zeal, and musical cadence. The poet calls the wind as the "dirge/ of the dying year" and "breath of autumn's being". The dead leaves swept off

the trees by the wild wind are like age old ghosts fleeing in apprehension from an enchanter. The yellow leaves swept by the strong wind have again been likened to “pestilence-stricken multitudes”. Thus the imagery depicting the stormy wind and its characteristic features come surging upon his mind as spontaneously as waters jump from the spring. Moreover, the flow and the sweeping movement of his verse point unmistakably to the spontaneity of expression. The wind shaking violently the Autumnal woods resemble the poet’s profound feeling and emotion.

“Every world of this splendid lyric is the spark of the burning atoms of his fiery thoughts.”

Thus Shelley’s romantic poem “Ode to the West Wind” is lyrical in tone and substance. There is the union of the most exquisite words to the most exquisite harmonies. The series of sustained waves of feeling have found expression in the splendour of thrilling sounds.

The later romantic poet, Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” is a fantastic ode and his representative poem. It is an elaborately formal lyric-poem in the form of an address to the spirited and destructive west wind. Like the other famous odes “Ode to the West Wind” is also solemn and elevated in diction and tone. Here the personal cry and exultation of the spirited poet, Shelley along with a brilliant natural setting find a sublime expression.

“Ode to the West Wind” has two distinct parts- the first part boldly narrates the destructive and preservative activities of the strong west wind on earth, in the firmament and in the ocean. In this superb ode the romantic poet has expressed the tremendous strength and impetuosity of spirit which is shaking the mood of Autumn to its very foundation and creating a great commotion in the vast region of water and in the firmament and the second part portrays the poets’ desire for the limitless energy of the wind for soaring to the great task of bringing about a reinvigoration of the world. The poet thinks that the world has been drooping in weariness and flagging under the oppression of deadening systems and conventions. With reformatory zeal Shelley wants to change the corrupt orders and traditions to serve better situations for the people of his present generation and of the next generations also.

The most distinguishing characteristic features of Shelley’s poetry are his superb lyrical gift, rich variety of images, and music of hearts. The dazzling images describe the brutal activities of the west wind. The poet considers the west wind as Autumn’s breath. He addresses the spirited wind: “O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn’s being”. (Chand 124)<sup>4</sup>

The dry leaves like “pestilence-stricken multitudes” are blown like ‘ghosts from an enchanter fleeing’. The violent west wind in the firmament is like an invisible stream on which the dark wood of the firmament is shaking down its foliage of clouds which are the messengers of rain and lightning. The clouds are the disordered locks of the wild wind as wizened as those on the head of an infatuated Maenad who is a female worshipper of Bacchus, the God of wine. The west wind is ‘the dirge of the dying year’; in Autumn season when the wind is blowing the year is hearing its close and the wailing sound of the wind has aptly been called ‘the dirge of the dying year’.

Shelley's verse has a splendor in its diction which seems to capture the elemental music of the world. The music wholly recaptures the restlessness of Nature. It describes the swiftly changing play of colours in the blue firmament, the unlimited marching of the billowy waves of the blue deep, the lowering clouds, the tireless energy of the west wind and the like with an emotional music. The rhythmic swift of the poem romantically suggests the sweeping motion of the wild wind and the frequency of run on lines carries the movement triumphantly from line to line.

The lyrical poem rings with a strain of personal despondency and prophetic zeal which are the essential features of Shelley's lyrics. He cries in intense agony:

"I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed!  
A heavy weight of hours has chain'd and bow'd.  
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud."

He mourns over the diminution of his physical strength and mental courage. He regrets that the tyranny of deadening customs and conventions of the present universe has tamed his spirit which was once as 'vigorous, swift and proud as the stormy west wind itself. But the moment he foresees the emergence of a brave new world in the future the faltering accents

"I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed!"  
yield place to the thundering assertion of  
"Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth/  
The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind, /  
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

Here we mark the rapturous prophecy of millennium. Inspired by the impetuosity of the west wind the poet longs to scatter his revolutionary ideas all over the world to inspire humanity with motives of love and truth. Thus, the ode is a representative one of all that is appreciable in Shelley. Here we mark the joyous union of the most appropriate and the fittest words to the exquisite harmonies.

P. B. Shelley is a romantic poet with fertile imaginative power. He in all his poems has used various images and similes in profusion. Whenever his imagination is excited by anything striking, imagery and similes come surging upon his mind with a disconcerting rapidity. He makes the most effective utility of them in his poetry to convey vividly to the readers his ideas and thoughts. Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind" abounds in images and similes which for their dazzling brilliance and colourful variety are most memorable. Here image after image is placed into service to give the curious readers a clear and genuine idea about the destructive and preservative activities of the West Wind in the autumnal wood.

The west wind blowing violently through the autumnal wood is conceived as the life breath of Autumn which is personified. The dry leaves of the trees swept away by the mighty wind are imagined to be flying away out of fear like "ghosts from an enchanter fleeing". Again, the withered leaves which are yellow, black, pale and hectic red are like "pestilence-

stricken multitudes.” The seeds which are carried by the west wind to their wintry-bed lie “each like a corpse within its grave”. The west wind is also imagined to be the “dirge of the dying year”. The wailing west wind is conceived of as the lamest of Nature over the year which is dying in autumn. The tomb to receive the year’s dead body is now being constructed; this last night of autumn, dark and stormy is like the vault of the Tomb. Again, the autumnal forest through which the wind blows has, as though, become the wind’s lyre. The wind plays mightily through the leafless branches and raises a wild harmony that stirs the soul. The west wind blows through the sky like a rushing river flowing unseen through the dark forest of clouds. The west wind as it sweeps above in the sky is compared to a stream of water. Along the current of the wind clouds are borne as dead leaves are borne on the surface of an earthly river. The west wind creates a great commotion in the blue firmament and the dishevelled clouds which are imagined to be locks of hair of the wind resemble the wildly-scattered locks of hair on the head of some frenzied woman worshiper of the wine-God. The poet is always hopeful, spirited, and exulted. According to David Daiches, “the poem (Ode to the West Wind) ends on a note of exultation”. (Daiches 913)<sup>5</sup>

Thus Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind” shows how a poem of Shelley can be a treasure house of images, similes and metaphors which are remarkable for their freshness and variety. In fact, whenever Shelley’s imagination is stirred, images and similes start floating on his vision as spontaneously as the waters spring from the fountain. Indeed, Shelley’s exhaled images as flowers exhale fragrance. However, Shelley was criticized for some defects by his friends. His poetic defects are obscurity and inartificial. Through this powerful poem the great poet tries to make the readers aware of the various evils relating to society, culture and politics in England. Through the invocation to the wind he literally invokes a revolution in his motherland. ■

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Dr. Satya Sundar Samanta, Asst. Prof. in English, Ramnagar College, West Bengal.

# A Critical Study of King Porus: The Noble Spirit that Sacrificed for Freedom with Reference to M. M. Dutt's Poem

Shahaji Mastud

It is significant to acknowledge that Michael Madhusudan Dutt composed the poem about the heroic king Porus. This celebrated Indian poet makes space in his poems for a lost ruler in Indian history. Indian history is filled with invasions, ruling dynasties, and episodes of violence. There was intense desire for power and wealth, so the vibrant ruler assassinated their siblings to gain power. Besides, chivalry and bravery play important roles in determining leadership. Here, King Porus was a dynamic figure who battled for human freedom. Today, Indians require Porus-like bravery to safeguard the nation's freedom. This article celebrates Porus's heroic fight, while the accompanying poem offers a fresh lens through which to view his indomitable spirit and relentless pursuit of freedom. Together, these narratives invite us to reconsider what it means to be a hero, highlighting that the struggle for liberty often demands sacrifices that shape both personal legacies and collective histories.

**Keywords:** invasion, dynasties, violence, freedom, heroism.

## Introduction

Throughout history, humans have been unable to fully comprehend the concept of freedom. Human civilization has experienced many ups and downs in terms of freedom. Many attacks on human freedom have occurred since ancient times and continue to this day. To protect their regime, dictators constantly seek to undermine freedom. It could be in a monarchy or democracy. There is always a conflict between the regime and the public. The regime seeks to restrict freedom, while the public attempts to safeguard it. The fight continues between these two poles. The opponent constantly promises freedom, but when they become ruler, they change forms and continue to play the same roles. Especially powerful regimes never provide an opportunity to raise the general spirit for liberty. It is expected that the public should be conscious about their freedom. They must continue to battle for the protection of their rights. They should safeguard their role models, ethics, and ideologies for the welfare of society and peaceful living. People are falling behind populism and losing their freedom; thus, it is vital to safeguard and fight against the hazy enslavement.



## **Background**

It is clear that numerous sorts of controlling structures have existed from ancient civilization to the present. Early barbarous gangs grew into larger mobs and eventually achieved the position of monarchy. The monarchy was dismantled during the rebellious French Revolution, but it got impeded over time. Furthermore, many ideologies emerged that violently dominated the public sphere. Fascism, communism, colonialism, and Nazism are just a few examples of ideologies that have destroyed human lives. The rise and development of democracy give a better opportunity to live the life. In a democracy, it is also true that any ruling party doesn't bear the opponents' pressure. Furthermore, respect for opposition is the aspect of good governing, yet many forms of press diplomacy are employed to eliminate opponents. One of the most incredible events in Indian history is the battle between Porus and Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great honours the valour of his enemy, King Porus. Through this research, I hope to raise the issue for discussion and educate society on gracious competition.

## **Ethics of War in Third-Century India**

In the third century, warfare ethics were mostly pragmatic and survival-orientated. There is little emphasis on moral restraint. In South Asia, Kautilya's Arthashastra addressed the use of biological warfare, providing a unique viewpoint on war ethics. Kautilya expressed the concept of the king's ministry. Kautilya places the king at the core of his ministry. In addition, he classifies the king's adversaries as neutral or medium level. Kautilya has expressed six techniques for interacting with the enemy. First, if the opponent is powerful, the king must pursue the approach of negotiating a peace pact. Second, if the monarch is more dominant than his rival, he should take an aggressive stance. Third, if the enemy's power structure is equal, the king should employ a quiet tactic. Furthermore, if the king is more powerful, he should launch a military attack on his rival. Fifth, if the king is more powerless, he should seek safety with the other king. Finally, to fight against the enemy, if the king has to take the support of the other mighty king, then there is no problem. Though a specific type of battle strategy was used at the time, Porus understands that his defeat is certain, so he can implement the above idea, but he meets a hurdle. He resolved to battle against the mighty Alexander the Great for the sake of the motherland and human freedom.

## **King Porus –Legend of Old by M. M. Dutt**

Michael Madhusudan Dutt was the luminary star of the Bengali and Indian English literature. His writing in both languages, Bengali and English, is a reflection of his inner conflict. He was an early composer of poetry who established the proper direction for Indian English literature. He has been greatly influenced by Homer's and Dante's writing. Jawhar Sircar rightly said that "He was then seen as a distinguished composer of a completely new breed of heroic poetry that had strong shades of Homer and Dante but was intrinsically Indian."<sup>1</sup> The present heroic poem has been composed on this line. Though the descriptive

method was accepted from overseas, the theme and aspect of poetry are purely Indian that explain the valour of King Porus.

The most celebrated poem about Porus is divided into six sections. The opening section alerts about the arriving thunder of Alexander the Great. The introductory stanza warns of the approaching thunder of Alexander the Great. The poet delivers a dramatic account of the escalating conflict. The majestic entrance of Alexander as a hero has been described with dramatic imagery. It was a struggle against not just human liberty but also India's motherland. That is why there are flashing lights, thunderous clouds, and showering in the darkness as the water of Hydaspes rises. There was a wailing howl and uneasy air among the heedless slumber. The arrival of the enemy is with the silent step of death as the tiger arrived noiseless, sluggish to destroy his prey. It's like an earthquake in the womb of a volcano. There was a horrible entry of the powerful foreign invader Alexander on the Indus land of Porus. The second verse describes the combat between Alexander and Porus. It was dawn, and the sun shone on the land. Porus emerges with his splendid flag in defense of Alexander. There was a terrible conflict between the two legends. Porus's soldiers attacked like a fearless lion, despite their small number. They have only two options: fight for freedom or go to a glorious grave. That daybreak, blood spilt freely for emancipation on Earth. They shed blood for their country's independence and left gore on their lovely bed. Unfortunately, Porus' army was severely defeated during the battle.

The third stanza illustrates King Porus's great bravery. He stood fearless among the foes, like a Himalayan peak with an endless crown of snow. His brow is adorned with a jewelled royal diadem. His milky white elephant was adorned with many sparkling gems. He did not rack in front of the phalanx that surrounded him but battled gracefully. He roared like an angry wind, so the tall mountain pines lay down before him. There was terrible chaos between them, reducing his crown and his country's opponent. Porus battled courageously, like the most tenacious warrior. The antagonist was afraid to stare at him and ran away from his searing glare. The determined king did not fear death but instead fought like lightning, scorching everything in sight and trampling the live alongside the dead. The fourth stanza extends Porus's wonderful energy. Alexander the Great was astounded by the courageous king when he saw him charged and battling like his deceased father. Porus was encircled by thousands of troops. He stands fearless in the middle of the ocean. When Alexander observed the battling spirit of wounded Porus, he recalled his soldiers. He ordered the soldier not to shed noble blood. Then he sends his herald to proclaim the heroic king who stands between the dying and the dead. The generous rival stopped the war and flies the flag that calms terror and awakens peace.

The fifth stanza is a continuation of the previous scene. Porus, the wounded king, stands proudly before Alexander. His eyes flashed fire without sorrow. He confidently moves amid the adversaries as Alexander sits like a deity. While the world's

mightiest monarchs submitted to Alexander, Porus fought heroically for his freedom and motherland. King Porus was not a slave; thus, he did not stop and bow his knees but instead stood with Himalayan majesty. When the great king of Macedon asked how to treat you, India's proud son replied with royal pride, "Treat me as a king." Thus, Alexander satisfied and liberated King Porus, along with his realm and crown. Brooke Allen, in his article, remarks that "he was humane; when he defeated the Indian leader, Porus, he treated him with dignity and kept him on as governor of his former territories."<sup>2</sup> In stanza six, the poet questions the allegiance of Indians. The poet emphasizes that outsiders have taken India's wealth and forced India into slavery. He goes on to ask, where is the spirit of Porus, who rescued the land from slavery?

"But where, oh! Where is Porus now?  
And where the noble hearts that bled  
For freedom with the heroic glow." p. 466

Kingship and their heroism are common themes in Indian history. They struggled for dynastic succession and shed a lot of blood. King Porus is exclusively renowned for his extraordinary courage because, despite knowing that his defeat was certain, he entered between Alexander's soldiers with his elephant and fought valiantly. His troop fights by stamping the battlefield. Where, King Ambi adjusted to Alexander's campaign. Alexander's treatment of Porus is an example of chivalry and humanity. The poet's question: Where is Porus now? For the sake of the nation's welfare, it must be adapted in the current scenario.

### **Conclusion**

King Porus symbolizes the indomitable fighting spirit of India. Even in the face of adversity, the fighting spirit must remain unwavering. It is essential when human freedom is in danger. A just society requires a fair war, so individuals, communities, and organizations should collaborate in good faith to give meaning to their lives. Nowadays, the public sphere is dominated by diplomacy rather than fair competition. On the other hand, the public are uninterested in marching for their rights. Even they are ignorant of the blurred submission. They are trapped between caste, creed, and religion. There is only media combat while the human brain is engaged in the virtual world. Moreover, the people lag behind materialism and lose their moral conscience, so the bravery of King Porus definitely stimulates the young minds and ignites the fighting spirit for human liberty. In this sense, slavery will not give respect to the people until they fight for justice and liberation of humanity. The King Porus gained self-esteem through his spirit, so he has possessed a dignity and reverence in Indian history. Thus, people must earn their freedom, like King Porus, and live a respectable life. ■

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Mr. Shahaji S. Mastud, Associate Professor in English, D.A.B.N. Arts & Science College, Sangli, Maharashtra.



Felicitations to poet Dr Sumitra Mishra in a ROCK PEBBLES program  
at Lohia Academy, Bhubaneswar, Odisha

# Neural Renewal: An Interdisciplinary Study of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Neuroplasticity in Healing from Traumatic Memories

Vickey Prasad

Anoop Kumar Tiwari

The convergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and neuroplasticity presents transformative possibilities in the domain of trauma healing. This study investigates the role of AI-driven technologies in facilitating neural rewiring to mitigate the effects of trauma and reconstruct fractured memory pathways. The research explores how AI systems can simulate adaptive neuroplasticity to support personalized interventions for trauma survivors, drawing from advancements in neural network modelling, machine learning algorithms, and neuropsychological frameworks. Central to the inquiry are AI-based therapeutic platforms, such as virtual reality exposure therapy and biofeedback systems, which offer immersive and interactive environments for reprocessing traumatic memories. The study also examines the ethical implications, potential biases, and accessibility concerns in deploying such technologies. The research underscores the critical need for integrative approaches that harness the brain's natural capacity for adaptation while leveraging AI's precision and scalability by bridging insights from neuroscience and AI. The interdisciplinary exploration aims to advance the understanding of AI's potential to complement and enhance traditional trauma therapies, fostering resilience and long-term recovery in individuals.

**Keywords:** AI-Driven Therapy, Artificial Intelligence, Neuroplasticity Trauma Healing, Reconstruction.

## Introduction:

Trauma remains one of the most significant psychological challenges faced by individuals worldwide, exerting long-lasting effects on mental health and well-being. It can manifest as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, or other psychosomatic symptoms, significantly disrupting daily functioning. As many theorists have remarked that “our appears to be the age of trauma”(Miller & Tougaw, 2002, p. 1). and it is “a catastrophic age” (Caruth, 1995, p.11) and “an obsession” (LaCapra, 2001). Another significant statement that undoubtedly marks the quest for the exploratory research in the

field of trauma comes from Luckhurst is that the milieu of modernity is signified by the “sign of wound” and the modern subject has become inseparable from the categories of shock and trauma” (Luckhurst, 2008, p.20). The pervasive nature of trauma and its impact on millions of individuals necessitate innovative approaches that address both its psychological and neurological underpinnings. Traditional therapeutic interventions, while efficacious, often fall short in terms of accessibility, scalability, and personalization, resulting in a substantial gap in treatment outcomes. Recent advances in neuroscience have elucidated the brain’s extraordinary ability to recover and adapt through neuroplasticity—the capacity of neural networks to reorganize themselves in response to injury, learning, or environmental changes. “Neuroplasticity” (Innocenti, 2022) which is called “brain remodeling” (Merzenich et al., 2014) plays a critical role in trauma recovery by enabling the brain to form new pathways, effectively compensating for areas affected by traumatic experiences. Neuroplasticity encompasses a wide range of phenomena that occur throughout development and into adulthood. As a result, it is unsurprising that pinpointing the exact origin of the concept or attributing it definitively to a single founder of the field may prove challenging (Berlucchi & Buchtel, 2009). This discovery has revolutionized the understanding of how the brain heals and opened avenues for developing therapies that capitalize on this inherent adaptability. However, leveraging neuroplasticity for trauma healing requires precise, targeted, and consistent interventions that can guide the brain’s rewiring process in a controlled and effective manner. Concurrently, artificial intelligence (AI) (Zohuri & Behgounia, 2023) has emerged as a transformative force in various domains, including healthcare. AI’s capacity to process vast amounts of data, identify patterns, and make predictive analyses has revolutionized diagnostics, treatment planning, and personalized patient monitoring (Dave & Patel, 2023).

In mental health care, artificial intelligence (AI)-powered tools such as virtual reality (VR), machine learning algorithms, and biofeedback systems are gaining prominence as viable alternatives or adjuncts to traditional therapies (Olawade et al., 2024). These technologies provide immersive, interactive, and adaptive environments that can be tailored to individual needs, aligning with the principles of neuroplasticity. For instance, Virtual reality exposure therapy (VRET) enables patients to confront and reprocess traumatic memories in a controlled virtual environment, facilitating desensitisation and cognitive restructuring (Beidel et al., 2019). Similarly, biofeedback systems allow for real-time monitoring and regulation of physiological responses, fostering emotional resilience and self-regulation (Khazan, 2013). The integration of AI technologies with neuroplasticity principles presents a unique opportunity to address the multifaceted challenges of trauma recovery. By combining AI’s precision and scalability with the brain’s inherent capacity for adaptation, it is possible to develop therapies that are not only efficacious but also accessible to a broader population. Trauma significantly affects neural pathways, frequently resulting in disrupted connections within the brain’s emotional regulation and memory-processing centres, such as the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex (Chapman, 2014). Nevertheless, the brain’s inherent neuroplasticity—its capacity to reorganise and form new



neural connections—provides potential for recovery (Van der Kolk, 2015). Investigating how neuroplasticity can assist individuals in rewiring these impaired pathways and promoting resilience is essential in comprehending trauma healing. Concurrently, advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have introduced innovative tools for trauma therapy, including virtual reality exposure therapy, biofeedback-based emotional regulation, and AI-driven cognitive-behavioral interventions. These technologies align with neuroplasticity principles by facilitating repetitive, adaptive practices that aid the brain in reconstructing healthy pathways. The intersection of these domains raises a crucial question: What integrative frameworks can be developed to seamlessly combine AI-based trauma interventions with the principles of neuroplasticity? Such frameworks could potentially revolutionize therapeutic approaches, enhancing neural rewiring and facilitating profound emotional healing for trauma survivors. This interdisciplinary approach has the potential to transform trauma treatment by offering personalized, scalable, and adaptive interventions that can be calibrated to individual progress. By addressing both the psychological and neurological dimensions of trauma, the study seeks to contribute to the evolving landscape of mental health treatment and pave the way for future advancements in this critical field. In the following decades, research has advanced to reveal that brain regions maintain their adaptability well into adulthood, solidifying neuroplasticity as a widely acknowledged scientific concept (Mateos-Aparicio & Rodríguez-Moreno, 2019).

### ***Background of study***

Trauma significantly alters brain function, disrupting neural circuits and impairing emotional regulation, memory processing, and stress responses (Hayduk, 2022). This disruption can lead to enduring psychological conditions such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Although traditional treatments like psychotherapy and pharmacotherapy offer relief, they often face barriers such as limited accessibility, high costs, and a one-size-fits-all approach that may not suit the diverse needs of trauma survivors. Recent advances in artificial intelligence (AI) have introduced transformative possibilities in trauma therapy. AI technologies—including machine learning, virtual reality (VR), and biofeedback—offer scalable, customizable, and innovative interventions. Machine learning algorithms can analyse vast behavioral data, predicting effective treatment pathways tailored to individual trauma histories and neurobiological profiles (Javaid et al., 2022). VR environments facilitate controlled re-exposure to traumatic memories, aiding emotional desensitisation and cognitive restructuring (Suldo et al., 2019). Meanwhile, biofeedback systems enable patients to monitor and regulate physiological responses in real time, fostering emotional self-regulation. Crucially, these AI-driven tools align with the principles of neuroplasticity. By leveraging neuroplastic mechanisms, AI-enhanced therapies can promote neural rewiring and facilitate recovery. Adaptive technologies that offer continuous, personalised feedback can reinforce healthier neural pathways and support long-term healing. This convergence of AI and neuroplasticity as mentioned in Figure 1 signifies a paradigm shift in trauma care, promising interventions that are more accessible, individualised, and effective. As global

mental health challenges intensify, especially in underserved regions, AI-based neuroplastic approaches offer a compelling solution.

**Objectives:** The study centres on three significant objectives. Firstly, it seeks to analyse the impact of trauma on neural pathways, emphasising the brain’s capacity for neuroplasticity as a crucial mechanism in the process of recovery. Secondly, it aims to evaluate current artificial intelligence (AI) technologies employed in trauma therapy, examining how effectively these tools align with the principles of neuroplasticity. Lastly, the study endeavours to propose integrative frameworks for AI-based trauma interventions that not only support neural rewiring but also promote emotional healing, offering a comprehensive approach to trauma-informed care.

Integrated theoretical frameworks: trauma, neuroplasticity and AI

Trauma alters key brain structures—the hippocampus, amygdala, and prefrontal cortex—disrupting memory, emotional regulation, and decision-making. It often results in hippocampal atrophy, amygdala hyperactivity, and reduced prefrontal function, contributing to PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Neuroplasticity enables recovery by fostering new neural connections through repeated, purposeful experiences. Hebbian learning—”neurons that fire together wire together” (Hebb, 2012)—highlights the role of consistent stimuli. Therapies like mindfulness, CBT, EMDR, and TMS harness neuroplasticity to rewire trauma-affected circuits, supporting functional restoration and psychological healing. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing trauma therapy by enhancing accessibility and personalization. Natural Language Processing (NLP) analyzes patient narratives to detect emotional patterns, aiding diagnosis and treatment monitoring. Predictive analytics uses large datasets to forecast outcomes and recommend tailored therapies based on trauma history and biological responses. Virtual Reality (VR) enables exposure therapy in immersive, customizable environments that align with neuroplasticity principles. AI-driven biofeedback systems track physiological signals like heart rate and brainwaves, offering real-time insights to help patients develop emotional regulation skills, thereby supporting effective trauma recovery.

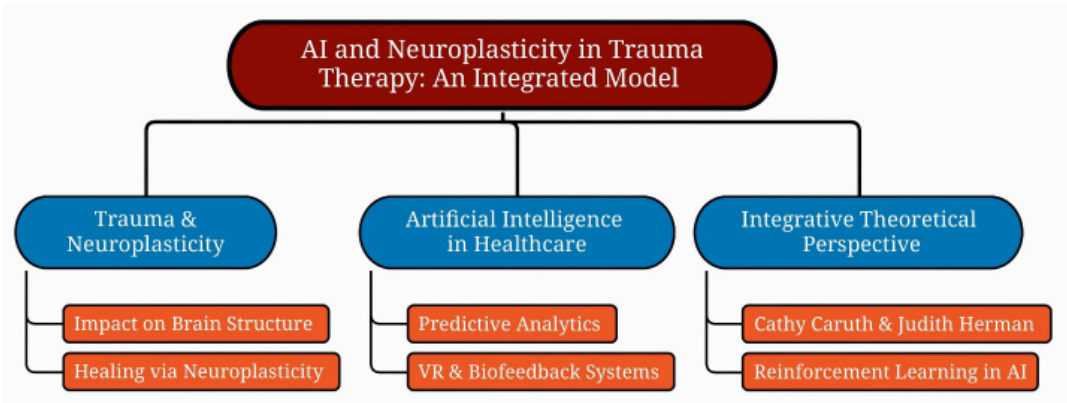
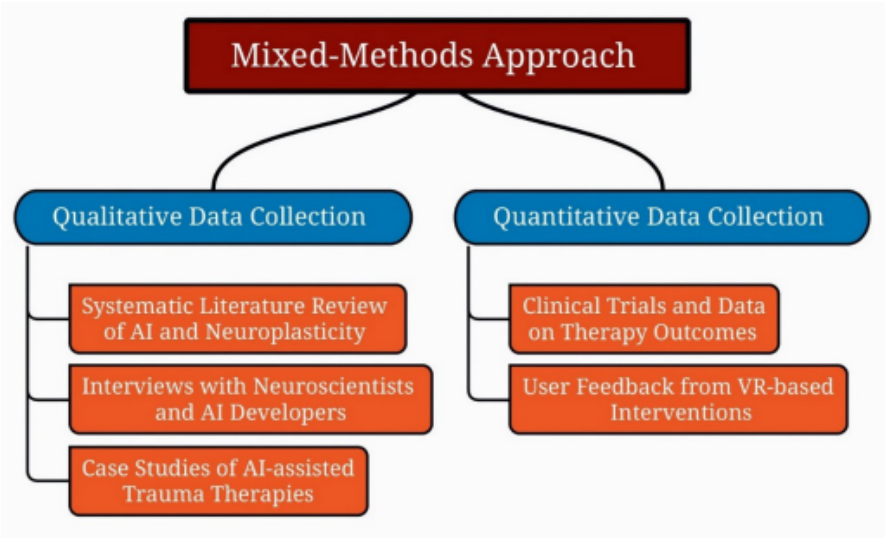


Figure 1. Integrated Theoretical Frameworks

The integration of AI and neuroplasticity in trauma therapy draws on interdisciplinary frameworks bridging psychology, neuroscience, and technology (Medenica et al., 2024). Caruth’s trauma theory highlights the fragmented nature of traumatic memory (Caruth, 1996), while Herman’s stages of recovery—safety, remembrance, and reconnection—align with neuroplastic adaptation (Herman, 1997). Technologically, machine learning theories guide AI tools that emulate neural processes (Zeine et al., 2024), such as reinforcement learning algorithms that adapt to patient progress. A systems-based approach unites these perspectives, promoting scalable, personalized interventions through AI’s computational power and neuroplasticity’s flexibility (Joghataie & Shafiei Dizaji, 2016).

**Methodology**

A mixed-methods approach in Figure 2 is employed to combine qualitative and quantitative analyses. Data collection encompassed a systematic literature review of AI and neuroplasticity applications, interviews with neuroscientists and AI developers, and case studies of AI-assisted trauma therapies. Quantitative data on therapy outcomes were obtained from clinical trials and user feedback from VR-based interventions.



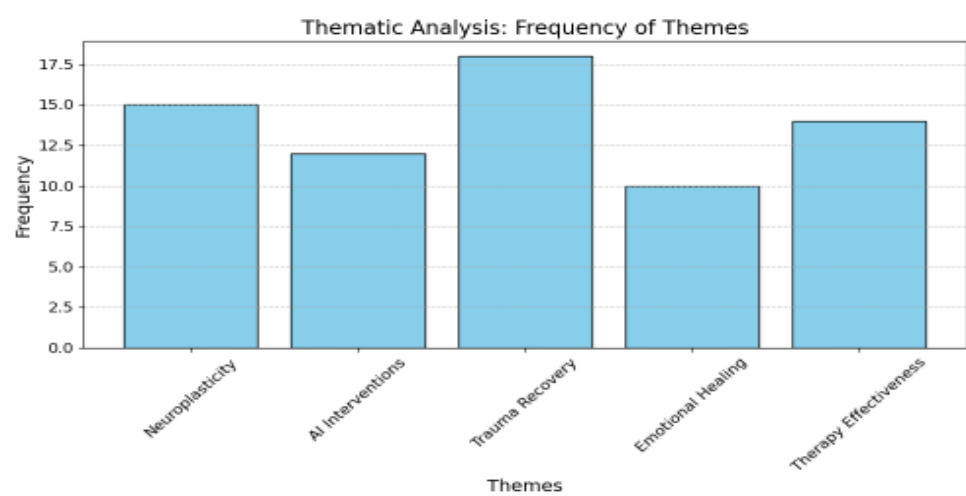
**Figure 2.** Methodology

***Data analysis***

Thematic analysis is conducted on qualitative data to identify recurring themes and patterns. Statistical methods, including regression analysis, are applied to quantitative data to measure the efficacy of AI-based interventions in promoting neuroplasticity and reducing trauma symptoms. The following Table 1 summarizes the frequency of recurring themes identified in the qualitative data:

**Table 1.** Key Themes and Frequencies

Theme	Frequency
Neuroplasticity	15
AI Interventions	12
Trauma Recovery	18
Emotional Healing	10
Therapy Effectiveness	14

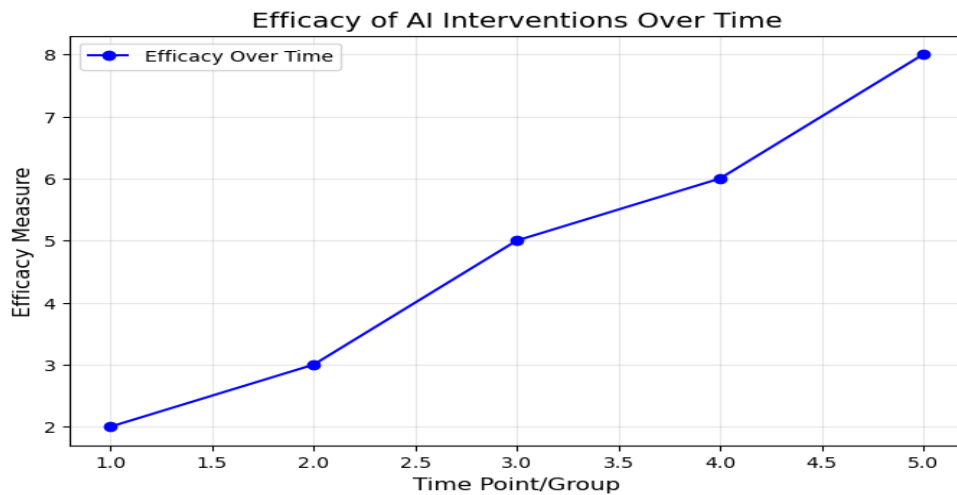


**Figure 3.** Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Data

The following dataset is in Table 2 from clinical trials or user feedback, showing the efficacy of AI interventions over time or across different groups.

**Table 2.** Different groups and efficacy of AI

Time Point/Group	Efficacy Measure
1	2
2	3
3	5
4	6
5	8



**Figure 4.** Regression Analysis of AI-Based Intervention Efficacy

The bar chart in Figure 3 visualizes the results of the thematic analysis, illustrating the frequency of occurrence for different themes such as Neuroplasticity, AI Interventions, Trauma Recovery, Emotional Healing, and Therapy Effectiveness, whereas the line plot in Figure 4 demonstrates the regression analysis for AI-based intervention efficacy, indicating neuroplasticity progress across different intervention groups or time points.

## Discussion

### *Impact of trauma on the brain*

Trauma significantly alters brain function and structure, disrupting the intricate balance between key regions such as the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex. These regions play critical roles in emotional regulation, memory consolidation, and cognitive control. The amygdala, frequently hyperactivated in trauma survivors, becomes excessively sensitive to threats, resulting in heightened fear responses and hyperarousal. Concurrently, the hippocampus, crucial for contextualizing memories, often exhibits reduced volume and impaired function, contributing to fragmented and intrusive memories. The prefrontal cortex, responsible for executive functions such as decision-making and emotional regulation, demonstrates diminished activity, leading to difficulties in controlling emotional responses and maintaining rational thought during distressing situations. Neuroimaging studies have substantiated these findings, revealing structural and functional changes in the brains of trauma survivors (Thomason & Marusak, 2017). However, the brain's capacity for neuroplasticity provides a compelling avenue for recovery. Neuroplasticity refers to the brain's ability to adapt by forming new neural connections and reorganizing existing networks. This adaptability enables trauma survivors to forge new pathways that bypass damaged circuits, restoring cognitive and emotional balance. Interventions grounded in neuroplasticity principles focus on providing intentional, repetitive stimuli to stimulate neural rewiring, a process crucial for trauma recovery.

### ***AI applications in trauma therapy***

Artificial intelligence (AI) technologies have become indispensable in advancing trauma therapy by providing innovative tools for diagnosis, treatment, and recovery. The following applications illustrate AI's transformative potential. Virtual Trauma disrupts the balance among the amygdala, hippocampus, and prefrontal cortex, impairing emotional regulation, memory, and cognitive control. The amygdala becomes hyperactive, heightening fear responses, while the hippocampus shrinks, causing fragmented memories. Simultaneously, the prefrontal cortex shows reduced activity, affecting rational thought and emotional regulation. Neuroimaging confirms these alterations in trauma survivors. Yet, neuroplasticity—the brain's ability to rewire itself—offers a path to recovery. Through repetitive, targeted stimuli, neuroplasticity-based interventions help create new neural pathways, bypassing damaged areas and restoring mental balance. This adaptability forms the foundation for effective trauma therapy and long-term healing. Machine learning models excel at analysing complex datasets to identify patterns and predict outcomes. In trauma therapy, these algorithms are employed to predict high-risk behaviors, such as suicide ideation or relapse into maladaptive coping mechanisms. By analysing variables such as behavioural patterns, physiological markers, and historical data, machine learning can generate personalised intervention strategies tailored to the unique needs of each individual. For example, algorithms might identify that a patient's heart rate variability correlates with heightened anxiety, prompting timely therapeutic interventions. Biofeedback systems utilise real-time monitoring of physiological responses, such as heart rate, skin conductance, and brainwave activity, to provide patients with immediate feedback regarding their emotional and physical states. These systems enable individuals to acquire awareness of their autonomic responses and learn self-regulation techniques, including deep breathing or mindfulness exercises. Over time, consistent utilisation of biofeedback systems can enhance an individual's capacity to modulate their emotional responses, thereby fostering resilience and promoting neuroplastic changes in the brain.

### ***Integration of AI and neuroplasticity***

The integration of AI and neuroplasticity presents a novel approach to trauma therapy, leveraging technology to enhance the brain's inherent capacity for healing and adaptation. AI-driven tools provide the repetitive, engaging, and precise stimuli necessary for neuroplasticity to occur, enabling targeted and efficacious interventions. VR platforms are particularly efficacious in leveraging neuroplasticity because they offer immersive and repetitive stimuli designed to stimulate neural adaptation. For instance, a trauma survivor navigating a virtual scenario involving their fear trigger (e.g., public speaking or an enclosed space) can gradually develop new neural circuits that reduce anxiety and enhance coping mechanisms. The sensory-rich environment engages multiple brain regions simultaneously, reinforcing new neural connections and fostering emotional resilience. Machine learning algorithms play a pivotal role in tailoring neuroplastic interventions to individual progress.



By analyzing data from therapy sessions, physiological feedback, and patient-reported outcomes, these algorithms adjust the intensity, frequency, and type of stimuli delivered during therapy. For instance, a patient experiencing severe anxiety might receive a personalized virtual reality program that gradually increases exposure to anxiety-inducing scenarios while monitoring physiological responses to ensure the therapy remains within manageable parameters. This adaptive approach aligns with Hebbian principles of learning, emphasizing the importance of consistent and intentional neural stimulation (Du et al., 2023). Biofeedback systems complement artificial intelligence's computational capabilities by providing real-time data about an individual's physiological and emotional states. When combined with neuroplasticity-focused interventions, biofeedback enables patients to consciously engage in neural modulation exercises, such as mindfulness or relaxation techniques. Over time, these exercises reinforce adaptive neural pathways, reducing the impact of trauma-related triggers and enhancing emotional regulation.

#### Results and implications

Integrating AI and neuroplasticity in trauma therapy shows promise, with reduced PTSD symptoms, improved emotional regulation, and enhanced well-being. Veterans using VR and machine learning interventions report resilience gains, while neuroimaging reveals stronger prefrontal-amygdala connectivity, indicating improved emotional control and reduced hyperarousal, highlighting AI's role in holistic trauma recovery.

**Challenges and future scope:** Despite its potential, AI-neuroplasticity integration in trauma therapy faces ethical, financial, and accessibility challenges. Addressing data privacy, algorithmic bias, and cost is vital. Culturally sensitive, user-friendly tools and interdisciplinary research are needed. Combining AI with other therapies may enhance outcomes, offering a transformative path for global trauma recovery.

**Ethical considerations:** The implementation of artificial intelligence in trauma therapy raises ethical concerns regarding data privacy, algorithmic bias, and equitable access. These issues necessitate careful consideration to ensure that AI-driven interventions are both efficacious and socially responsible.

**Conclusion:** The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and neuroplasticity offers a transformative path forward in trauma healing, addressing the structural and functional disruptions trauma inflicts on the brain. Traditional therapies, while beneficial, often fall short in terms of scalability, accessibility, and personalisation. In contrast, the synergy of AI and neuroplasticity provides targeted, adaptive, and innovative solutions tailored to individual needs. AI technologies—such as virtual reality (VR), machine learning, and biofeedback systems—align closely with neuroplasticity's principles of adaptive learning and neural rewiring. These tools deliver consistent and intentional stimuli, enabling the formation of new neural pathways and fostering emotional resilience. For example, VR-based exposure therapy supports cognitive restructuring by allowing individuals to safely confront traumatic memories. Biofeedback systems, on the other hand, enhance self-

regulation through real-time monitoring of physiological responses. However, the integration of AI into trauma therapy also introduces ethical, practical, and interdisciplinary challenges. Concerns regarding data privacy, algorithmic bias, and therapeutic autonomy must be addressed to ensure that AI applications are fair, transparent, and inclusive. By harnessing AI's computational power and the brain's inherent adaptability, it is possible to rewire disrupted neural pathways and enhance recovery outcomes. Continued research, grounded in ethics and accessibility, is essential to translating this potential into real-world therapeutic benefits for trauma survivors worldwide. ■

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Vickey Prasad, PhD Research Scholar, Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology, Raipur, Chhatisgarh.

Dr. Anoop Kumar Tiwari, Associate Professor, Dept. of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Technology, Raipur, Chhatisgarh.

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# Orwell's *Animal Farm*: A Study of its Comic and Political Elements

Radhashyam Dey

George Orwell, the English essayist and satirist has been called 'the conscience of his generation' by Pritchett. The subjects he chose and the way in which he approached them fascinate the readers. Orwell belonged to the class of seers who sense the possibility of revolution in society. He had faith in justice, liberty and above all decency. His way of raising a problem and discussing it makes us feel that we were just going to think of it on those lines ourselves. He had a gift for understanding the political implications of his time. His *Animal Farm* is one of the best works of Orwell himself. Through this animal fable, with a gentleness and warmth, Orwell paints the essential tragedy of all Utopias. With distressing clarity he shows how the masses are lured into revolt by the promise of a Sugarcandy Mountain, but when they have done their job, are subjected to a worse tyranny by their new masters. As a satirist of the contemporary political and social scene, he comes in the grand line of Dryden and Swift. Orwell is also distinct among his contemporaries for his comic sense and precision. He became disillusioned with the human techniques adopted by the Communists of Russia in their greed for power. My article is about how Orwell's *Animal Farm* has artistically used comic and political elements.

**Keywords:** power, tyranny, comic, political, elements

## Introduction

Orwell earned for himself wide fame for his *Animal Farm* (1945) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949). These novels elevated him into a cult figure. He sided with the oppressed, the exploited, the down-trodden. He presented a realistic picture of the contemporary society, precisely the inter-war period in his novels with a degree of authenticity which was paralleled only by Gissing and Dickens. His themes are poverty, unemployment, corruption, ills of imperialism, totalitarianism, Fascism, Nazism, fake communism and how power corrupts people and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Orwell was against totalitarianism. For him Hitler, Mussolini and Franco were man-eating mass giants. Totalitarianism found its expression increasingly in Hitler's Germany, Mussolini's Italy and Stalin's Russia. *Animal Farm* is a fine example of political satire on Stalin's communism and Orwell has done this with the fusion of comic and political elements.

George Orwell's personal experiences and observations make his novels a record of the social aspects of his time. *Burmese Days* (1935) is set against the background of the British imperialism in Burma where Orwell was employed in the Imperial Police Service. The novel depicts the social aspects like poverty, abuse of the natives, life without freedom, racism, exploitation and it also exposes the British vanity as the most civilized nation. He saw poverty and worked as dish-washer. In *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1935), he described the dish-washing poignantly. In *Clergyman's Daughter* (1935) we have a brilliant satire on cheap private schools. Orwell also worked as part-time assistant in a London bookshop. He lived in a cheap room above the bookshop. His *Keep the Aspidochelone Flying* (1936) is a dark picture of his own life in the bookshop.

Civil war broke out in Spain and Orwell was commissioned by the publishing firm of Secker and Warburg to report the war. This was the first fight in Europe for democracy against the totalitarians. He soon discovered that there was no chance of democracy flourishing in Spain. Many eager young men had fought and laid down their lives so that democracy might win. But Russia had decided not to give them a chance. This cynical playing with human lives in which leaders indulged, he described in *Homage to Catalonia* (1937). The book tells of the propaganda method by which communists fed the outside world with false stories.

In the history of English literature, Orwell is one of the greatest political satirists. *Animal Farm* is the most effective political satire written by Orwell. He wrote this story of animals to present the evils of Soviet-political-methods. In the same way *Nineteen Eighty Four* is a satire on modern society. In this book he described the proletariat as a body kept in perfect-ignorance. He imagined that the members of the political parties would become mindless, flesh and blood robots with a push button brain. The emotional life of the society would be completely ruined. Orwell used to say that *Animal Farm* was the only book over which he really sweated. It is a brilliant satire on Stalinist Russia in the guise of an animal fairy tale. *Nineteen Eighty Four* is an unpleasantly convincing picture of a terrible world of science. The earth is divided between three tyrannies. Each tyrant exploits science to reduce the citizens into absolute slaves of the political machine. Orwell himself says:

What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art.... Looking back through my work, I see that it is invariably when I lacked political purpose that I wrote lifeless books.(Selected Essays)

Through *Animal Farm* Orwell intended to criticize the communist regime in Russia. In his self-proclaimed "fairy story", Orwell uses his allegorical farm to symbolize the Communist system. Though the original intention of overthrowing Mr. Jones (who represents the Zars), is not inherently evil in itself, Napoleon's subsequent adoption of nearly all of Mr. Jones' principles and harsh mistreatment of the animals proves to the reader that indeed Communism is not equality, but just another form of inequality. The pigs and dogs take most of the power for themselves, thinking that they are the best administrators of government.



Eventually the power corrupts them, and they turn on their fellow animals, eliminating competitors through propaganda and bloodshed. This is of course, a reference to Stalin, who murdered many of his own people in order to maintain his dictatorship of Russia.

Thanks in part to *Animal Farm*, much of the Western world finally realized the danger of Communism. Soon a Cold War began between the world's greatest superpowers – the Soviet Union and the United States. In the end, America would prove that capitalism and democracy could outlive a system of government-mandate equality.

Incongruity is one of the principal sources of comic element. This incongruity is chiefly due the fact that we here find animals thinking, talking, behaving and communicating with one another just like human beings. Incongruity is here due to the wide gulf between the reality as we know it and the author's ingenuity in attributing it to animals a capacity to speak, communicate with one another, and do the work of supervising and organising the farm as any group of human beings would do. This is the cause of much of our mirth and amusement as we go through the book.

We are face to face with an incongruous situation in the opening chapter of *Animal Farm* when the old boar Major calls a secret meeting of all the animals and addresses them. Although his speech contains much serious and weighty matter, we are greatly amused to find that all the farm animals have assembled to hear the old boar whom they regard as a venerable member of the community. The manner in which Orwell describes the arrival of the animals for this crucial meeting is hilarious. For instance, a brood of duckling who have lost their mother come into the farm chirpings feebly and wandering from side to side to find some place where they could not be trodden on. Then there is the cat which on entering the barn, looks around for the warmest place and finally squeezes herself between the two carthorses, Boxer and Clover. Old Major's speech instigating the animals against their human master, Mr. Jones, is a serious affair, but the fact that the speaker is an animal addressing a group of animals amuses us by its incongruity.

Pigs are the leaders of the uprising. The humans think the pigs as in dirtiest and greediest of the animals. They have been presented as the smartest and the best organized. Orwell uses an animal parable to depict human nature, particularly the worst sides of it. Those who have good intentions and who don't wish to lord it over the others are the ones who end up being marginalized. This is how Napoleon, the animal stand-in for Stalin takes over. And the idealistic intentions degenerate into a power struggle in which the animals end up doing the very things they have accused the humans of. Just as people take ideas and texts which are held sacred, and then manipulate or distort them, the pigs convert their founding slogan "All animals are equal" into "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others?" *Animal Farm* is a satire both on human nature and on the Bolshevik Revolution and subsequent history of the Soviet Union.

Every good satire is rich in comic elements. *Animal Farm* is exceptionally a good satire for its comic tone. Let me cite some more examples. Mollie is presented in a comic

way, worried more about her appearance and the ribbons in her hair. The cats are trying to lure the sparrows within their grasp by preaching that all animals were brothers. Squealer is caught red-handed changing the commandment on drinking on the side of the barn wall. Now it says the animals must not drink to excess. We have yet another instance of comic irony in the final episode. Now that Napoleon has restored amicable relations with the animal's worst enemy man, the name of Animal Farm is restored to its original Manor Farm.

Squealer's propaganda is very amusing. He defends the reservation of milk and apples to the pigs by arguing that without the special diet their brains will not function properly and as a result Jones will come back. When the case of whisky is discovered, Squealer, who's himself drunk, changes the commandment to "No animal shall drink alcohol to excess? Napoleon's urinating over the drawings of Snowball creates laughter in every reader. When Jones and his men are kicked and beaten by animals, we feel we are witnessing a regular comedy. Very funny is also Old major's farewell address. We laugh when we see the great leader Snowball running away swishing his tail from side to side trying to escape Napoleon's dogs.

*Animal Farm* is rich in political element too. Orwell was a confirmed socialist who had adopted the principles of socialism in his own personal way of living. It was to defend socialism and democracy that he fought in Spain. In Catalonia he had his first taste of Stalinism which was intent on grabbing power using Communism as a Trojan horse. *Animal Farm* is built on the pillars of wit and humour. Without wit and humour satire becomes mere abuse.

The interest of the readers is aroused in the first line. Mr. Jones of the Manor Farm goes to sleep without shutting the pop-holes. Old major's speech itself contains the all-too-familiar rhetoric and clichés of the mob orator. Old major never reveals about his dreams. The so called politicians also arouse the interest of the people about his tall dreams but they never reveal it. The rebellion and the Battle of the Cowshed are fine parodies of human conflicts. The fun and comedy are the sugar coating over the bitter pill of political self-seeking. The division between man and animal corresponds to the social division between the hereditary upper and lower classes. The uprising of the animals draws over sympathy but on the very first day of the insurrection, it is evident that a new elite is replacing the vanished human rulers. The elite of pigs are the political equivalent of the all-powerful party. The struggle between Snowball and Napoleon is a struggle within the Party elite. Napoleon outmaneuvering Snowball and immediately after the expulsion, initiating the career of purges, atrocities and deepening tyranny reproduces in miniature the history of Russian Revolution from 1910-1940. Stalin outs Trotsky and begins his iron-handed rule. Napoleon's dogs represent the dreaded OGPU or Soviet Police. The sale of timber to Frederick is an echo of Stalin's sale of strategic war materials to Hitler. The fable ends in a fantastic scene in which the pigs banquet the neighboring farmers and both cheat at cards. All the creatures outside look from pig to man and man to pig. It is impossible for them to say which is which. In other words, old and new tyrannies belong to the same family.

Intransigence on the part of the Russians was followed by mutual suspicion, and irritation, resulting in tensions and fears in the Cold War which followed. Orwell could read clearly what we saw later:

All talk about democracy, liberty, equality and revolutionary movements, all visions of Utopia, or the classless society, or the Kingdom of Heaven are humbug (not necessarily conscious humbug) covering the ambitions of some new class which is elbowing its way to power, and in each great revolutionary struggle the masses are led by vague dreams of brotherhood, and then when the new ruling class is well established in power they are thrust back in servitude. History consists of a series of swindles in which the masses are first lured into revolt by the promise of Utopia, and then, When they have done their job, enslaved, over again by new masters.(Review of Nineteen Eighty Four)

Lord Action says, “power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely”. This generalization contains a considerable amount of truth in it and the progress made by Napoleon and Squealer in the *Animal Farm* makes a dry comment as it were on the essential truth of the maxim. Leaders, policy makers and tacticians must be there and they must be supported by the masses. Orwell’s point laid stress in the novel is that these leaders pervert and distort the truth, lose touch with the people at large and in the end dupe them for selfish and mean motives. *Animal Farm* as a political satire is a novella on this theme. It is also a light-hearted potent on what Orwell’s final work Nineteen Eighty Four dealt with:

Power ‘is not a means, it is an end. One does not establish dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to safeguard a dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. (Review of Nineteen Eighty Four)

There are many incidents in the novel which have a parallel to the history of the Russian Revolution. The new economic policy evolved and formulated by Napoleon can be compared with the new economic policy introduced by Lenin with the coming into power of Lenin’s party. Russia became economically bankrupt. It signed a treaty with Germany in 1922 and started trade relations with non-communist countries. Lenin allowed private enterprise which is very much against the principles of communism.

## **Conclusion**

Orwell thought that socialism is the most effective remedy to modern ills. He was tooth and nail opposed to the totalitarian regime of Stalinist Russia and Fascist regime of Franco in Spain. In fact, he was an English Socialist who was opposed to the continental Marxist type. According to him, the so called Socialists of Russia and continental countries had interpreted man as a mere economic entity. Man is much more than that. He is loyal to mankind. Orwell was a social critic because the purpose of his writing was to present social problems. He realized that money is the urgent need of a common man. To him number of

the rich was small while the poor were in great number. According to him socialism was the only way through which a common man could develop his life. *Animal Farm* is a parable and it depicts the human nature, particularly the worst sides of it. It is a satire built with powerful tool of comedy both on human nature and on the Bolshevik Revolution and subsequent history of the Soviet Union. ■

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Dr. Radhashyam Dey, Asst. Prof of English, Yogada Satsanga Mahavidyalaya, Jagannathpur, Dhurwa, Ranchi, Jharkhand.

# Plant as Witness: Ecological Story-telling and Postcolonial Resistance in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

J. Joy Princy

M. Natarajan

This article examines the emerging interdisciplinary field of plant humanities by analysing Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. The study of plant humanities combines botany, cultural history, and literature to examine how plants shape human thought, memory, identity, and power dynamics. Roy's novel, set against the rich backdrop of Kerala, India, highlights the ecological and symbolic importance of plant life, intricately integrating it into the aesthetic, emotional, and political aspects of the story. The study explores how Roy rejuvenates plants as representations of cultural memory, environmental evidence, and resistance against colonial and casteist erasure. This article argues that *The God of Small Things* enriches the domain of plant humanities by showcasing the multisensory experiences of plants while also critiquing ecological degradation through a postcolonial and subaltern lens. The study uses detailed research and ecocritical analyses to demonstrate how the plants in the story witness trauma, represent family connections, and challenge human-centered views. The study concludes by outlining how Roy's work can guide future enquiries in environmental humanities, particularly within the ecological and literary contexts of South Asia.

**Keywords:** Plant Humanities, Environmental Humanities, Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Botanical Memory, Caste and Ecology, Subaltern Environment

## Introduction

Plant Humanities is an interdisciplinary field that combines botany, literature, art history, environmental studies, and cultural anthropology to explore the complex relationship between plants and human cultures. Plants are not passive elements of the landscape or resources for human use but are complex entities influenced by migration, colonization, healing rituals, resistance, and environmental changes. The field explores the influence of plants on language, philosophy, visual arts, culinary traditions, religious practices, and political economy.

The Plant Humanities Initiative at Dumbarton Oaks, affiliated with Harvard University, is a significant institutional milestone in the development of this field. This project uses digital humanities technologies alongside historical, literary, and botanical research to trace the lives of plants across various locations and epistemologies. It illustrates the connections between science and poetry, the tangible world and the spiritual realm, as well as the dynamics between colonizers and natives.

Postcolonial ecocriticism, decolonial studies, and Indigenous knowledge systems are important trends in the environmental humanities that seek to move away from European-centered views and bring attention to ecological perspectives often overlooked. Academics like Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin emphasize the significance of “repositioning the postcolonial subject within ecocritical discourse,” particularly in discussions regarding how colonial plant economies have historically exploited both ecosystems and marginalized labor. Indigenous studies authorities, such as Robin Wall Kimmerer, advocate for a relationship with plants rooted in respect, gratitude, and stewardship rather than one characterised by exploitation and domination.

This article positions Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* as a literary example that effectively embodies the values and enquiries of the Plant Humanities within this expanding area of study. The novel provides a subaltern and postcolonial viewpoint within the plant humanities, examining ecological degradation through the frameworks of caste, gender, and colonial history while simultaneously reviving the significance and emotional resonance of plants in human experience. The analysis highlights the importance of Roy’s novel in expanding the theoretical and methodological dimensions of plant humanities by examining how Roy imbues plant life with emotional depth, vivid representation, and political resonance.

The study also examines how Roy’s novel can be contextualized within contemporary plant studies to enhance our understanding of the literature’s significance from an environmental justice and decolonized ecological perspective.

### **Lush Botanical Setting of Ayemenem**

*The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy (1997) is set in the village of Ayemenem in Kerala, where the narrative is deeply intertwined with the dense, verdant vegetation that characterises the region. The book presents an ecological aesthetic from the very first page. It observes the visual, olfactory, tactile, and auditory characteristics of plants. Roy’s universe is characterised by a deeply sensual connection to nature, blurring the distinction between the environment and the figures within it. Roy observes, “The untamed, lush garden resonated with the subtle sounds of tiny creatures murmuring and darting about.” A rat snake glided past a gleaming stone nestled in the underbrush. “Hopeful yellow bullfrogs navigated the murky pond in search of mates” (Roy, 1997, p. 1).

Plants in Ayemenem are not merely aesthetic elements; they are vital, living organisms that play a crucial role in our ecosystem. This concept, referred to by philosopher



Michael Marder as “vegetal ontology,” suggests that plants actively participate in the process of world-making (Marder, 2013). The book contains numerous mentions of mango trees, jackfruit, banana groves, wildflowers, rubber plantations, and creeping undergrowth. The narrative’s political and psychological atmosphere intertwines every element. The details of these plants are not mere embellishments; they are crucial to what Roy refers to as his “eco-aesthetic imagination,” where the natural world reflects human emotions and preserves memories of past suffering.

For instance, the Meenachal River is flanked by “dense, stout trees... that leant into the water and observed their reflections.” This entity serves as a geographical landmark and a reflection of plant life, embodying themes of contemplation, sensuality, and dissolution. The richness of Roy’s plant descriptions the “slime green” riverbanks, the “coconut palms that bent into the sky,” and “dustgreen trees with crimson hearts” reveals a realm teeming with nonhuman activity and sensory engagement (Roy, 1997, p. 117). Elaine Scarry argues that this form of “mimesis of the sensory” enables the reader to engage with the phenomenological consciousness of the world itself (Scarry, 1999).

Roy’s plant language transcends mere pastoral aesthetics, evolving into something more profound. Rather, it embodies what Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann refer to as “material ecocriticism,” where in matter such as plants, water, and soil functions not as passive elements but as active sites of storytelling and resistance (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014). The overgrowth and rot, the scent of mangoes intertwined with decay, and the onset of monsoons contribute to the novel’s nonlinear temporality, blending natural cycles with an intricate tapestry of human history encompassing caste, colonisation, and forbidden love.

In *The God of Small Things*, the relationship between plants and emotions is intricately woven, with flora acting as metaphorical reflections of human feelings and psychological complexity. In Roy’s writing, nature frequently acts as a medium to express, symbolise, and remind us of emotions such as love, sadness, pain, and transgressions. Although Pappachi’s moth is not a botanical entity, it represents Ammu’s silent emotional suffering, particularly the mistreatment and patriarchal disregard she experiences from her father: “It flapped its velvet wings against the insides of her skull.” “It caused her pain” (Roy, 1997, p. 38). This hidden entity, akin to an intrusive plant growth, emerges as a persistent emblem of emotional legacy, transmitted silently yet firmly embedded in recollection. The functioning of this metaphor resembles the manner in which plants frequently retain memories of events that have occurred but remain unarticulated. Annette Kehnel (2020) refers to this concept as “botanical memory,” highlighting the capacity of plants and nature to retain human experiences over time.

The Meenachal River exhibits remarkable strength. This location embodies a sense of unfulfilled desire and serves as a poignant reminder of the lost. Roy observes, “The river was abundant, and the sky displayed a clear blue in December.” The sky was soft and airy. It enveloped Estha like a heavy quilt.” (Roy, 1997, p. 285). The river’s physical attributes

“swollen,” “slushy,” “quilt-like” mirror the emotional weight of the novel. The river absorbs the loss and social transgressions experienced by Roy’s characters, integrating them into its flora and waters. This results in a hybrid space for flora and individuals, where vegetation and water converge as sites of emotional significance.

Furthermore, Roy’s depiction of the History House, engulfed by vegetation and reclaimed by the jungle, suggests that nature reasserts itself over the structures that once facilitated oppression through colonialism and casteism. The structure, engulfed by creeping vines and decay often called “green rot,” stands as a poignant emblem of the decline following colonial rule and the resilience of marginalised voices. This illustrates Dipesh Chakrabarty’s theory that nature in postcolonial literature often dismantles Enlightenment concepts of progress and modernity (Chakrabarty, 2000).

Roy’s incorporation of plant imagery serves a purpose beyond mere decoration; it carries significant meaning. This approach allows for the use of plant-based metaphors to critique contemporary modernism, caste-related violence, gender injustices, and the enduring impacts of colonialism. In her work, plants serve as what Jeffrey Nealon (2015) refers to as “affective infrastructures,” meaning they structure and influence our emotional responses to history and violence. Roy constructs an ecological aesthetic that challenges Western notions of nature as isolated, static, or apolitical, presenting a richly textured realm of plants. Plants possess emotional resonance, symbolic weight, and epistemic relevance, positioning them as co-narrators in a narrative of personal betrayals and shared history. This perspective on *The God of Small Things* elevates it as an important piece within the realm of Plant Humanities. It gives us new ways to think about human sorrow and resilience, as well as how plants record and express these same experiences.

### **Postcolonial Botanical Histories**

Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* situates the lush botanical landscape of Ayemenem within a complex postcolonial context, where flora bears the marks of colonial exploitation and the impacts of monocultural dominance. The presence of rubber plantations in the narrative is intentional; they symbolise what experts, such as Richard Drayton (2000), refer to as “imperial science.” This project involved the appropriation of native ecosystems by colonial powers, framed as a pursuit of botanical knowledge for profit. Roy asserts, “They removed the old banyan tree by the river to make room for the rubber trees.” “The atmosphere was permeated with the scent of latex and factory smoke” (Roy, 1997, p. 197).

The substitution of the ancient banyan tree, which holds native, sacred, and cultural importance, with rubber, an imperial cash crop, illustrates the detrimental impact of colonial botany on the environment. Vinita Damodaran (2006) argues that colonial forestry and plantation economies transformed ecosystems and altered the way indigenous people perceived and engaged with the land. Roy critiques this alteration by juxtaposing the diversity of indigenous flora with the monotony and harmfulness of rubber cultivation. This incident

illustrates what Rob Nixon (2011) refers to as “slow violence,” highlighting the incremental harm to the environment that disproportionately affects marginalised communities.

The factory adjacent to the plantation, emitting chemical fumes and altering the soil, serves as a tangible illustration of the remnants of colonial capitalism. This exemplifies what Elizabeth DeLoughrey refers to as “botanical imperialism,” which endures well beyond the decline of the empire (DeLoughrey, 2011). Through the incorporation of rubber, an introduced, extractive crop, in her narrative, Roy aligns with the objectives of Plant Humanities, illustrating how plants have historically been utilised to advance empire and exploit labourers.

The integration of plant imagery with themes of caste and the physical form is most evident in the character of Velutha, the Dalit carpenter, who is consistently depicted through representations of vegetation and earth. In Malayalam, the term Velutha translates to “white.” Higher social strata often encounter elements such as soil, river, rain, and organic degradation in sanitised, pristine environments. Roy states, “He can reduce his body size and merge with the surroundings.” Roy (1997, p. 73) stated he could merge with the riverbank, the mud, and the trees.

Velutha’s relationship with the plant world positions him as both marginalised and revered, embodying a blend of ecological interconnectedness and social stratification. The organic embeddedness he exhibits illustrates what Gopal Guru and Sundar Sarukkai (2012) refer to as “epistemic untouchability.” This concept highlights how the knowledge and existence of Dalits have been obscured throughout history yet remain crucial to the fabric of Indian culture and the environment.

Conversely, the ancestral mansion of the Ipe family features meticulously groomed gardens adorned with precisely trimmed hedges and exotic flowers sourced from abroad. These gardens exemplify cultivated, refined nature managed and pristine, reflecting a declaration of social order and class distinction. Roy critiques the dominance of upper-caste authority by highlighting the contrast between indigenous disorder and the polished sensibilities of colonial influence. He employs social hierarchies and the aesthetic manipulation of landscape to convey his argument.

Roy presents nature as a space that embodies both gender dynamics and political undertones, particularly through the character of Ammu, whose engagement with flora and environments highlights her social alienation and sexual agency. The natural world transforms into a sanctuary, a confidant for her secrets, and an accomplice in her romantic connection with Velutha. The landscape appears to conspire against Ammu as she approaches the river: “The water slapped against the dark green mossy stone steps.” “The atmosphere was thick with humidity and expectation” (Roy, 1997, p. 215).

The sexual personification of nature, where water “slaps” and air “holds anticipation,” parallels feminist ecocritical interpretations that view the landscape as a space

for women to express themselves and resist. According to Greta Gaard (2011), such figures challenge the Cartesian dualism of mind/body and culture/nature, which has traditionally maintained patriarchal control over women and the environment.

Ammu's journey through fertility and eventual infertility, her exile, and her mental breakdown reflect the cyclical patterns found in nature, encompassing growth, decay, monsoon, and deterioration. The land acts like a mother both caring and dangerous making Ammu's story easier to understand through what Stacy Alaimo calls "trans-corporeality": the idea that human and nonhuman bodies are connected in both physical and symbolic ways. In this instance, plants reflect women's emotions and illustrate the evolution of gendered lifestyles concerning social, emotional, and political matters over time.

The flora in *The God of Small Things* transcends mere aesthetics or neutrality; they embody significant political and cultural implications. Roy constructs a complex botanical critique of India's postcolonial landscape, examining its evolution from colonial rubber plantations to marginalised plant communities and gendered ecological interactions. The Plant Humanities initiative aims to encourage individuals to recognise plants as historical agents, cultural signifiers, and emotional cartographers, a concept that is also explored in the novel. Roy's meticulous accounts of plant life illustrate the complex relationships that link empire, caste, gender, and ecology. She develops a decolonial archive focused on the plant life of South Asian modernity.

### **Plant Memory and Environmental Witnessing in *The God of Small Things***

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy employs the botanical landscape of Ayemenem as a lens to observe, recall, and document human suffering. The River Meenachal, together with its surrounding flora, serves as a quiet ecological observer of forbidden love, death, and intergenerational trauma. The river's fluctuating presence reflects the rise and fall of memory, indicating a form of witnessing that is non-verbal yet profoundly embodied.

Vegetation, earth, and ecosystems preserve the traces of human narratives through emotional and physical connections. Roy's narrative style embodies a botanical sense of time, emphasising cyclical rhythms, gradual decay, and natural regrowth rather than a straightforward linear progression. His work resonates with Thom van Dooren's exploration of "slow extinction," highlighting how plants endure the temporal burden of human-induced disruption while continuing to exist and reshape histories through their subtle endurance.

Roy creates a living archive, intertwining personal, political, and ecological trauma with the natural world, forming a repository of memory that is deeply connected to the earth. This archive challenges the dominant narratives of the nation-state, which frequently overlook the perspectives of women, Dalits, and ecological entities. Memory is instead encapsulated in the textures of plants the aroma of ripe jackfruit, the gentle movement of banana fronds, the cool, moist feel of the riverbank.

The nonlinearity of Roy's narrative structure mirrors a rhizomatic approach to storytelling, reminiscent of the growth patterns found in plants. The narrative develops intricately, resembling a banyan tree with its expansive aerial roots, revisiting past traumas, and intertwining characters across different spaces and times.

In *The God of Small Things*, plants function as both metaphors and tangible records of memory, trauma, and historical continuity. The Meenachal River and its surrounding flora reflect the ecological principles of the novel, serving as both a participant and observer, able to absorb human suffering and retain its marks through the passage of time.

## Conclusion

Examining Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* through the perspective of Plant Humanities reveals a deeply interconnected ecological narrative, blending elements of botany, literature, environmental history, and decolonial knowledge systems. In Roy's book, plants transcend their role as mere elements of the landscape; they emerge as powerful symbols of memory, emotion, and resistance. The abundant vegetation in Ayemenem, featuring banana trees, jackfruit, and intertwining vines, serves a purpose beyond mere scenery; it holds significant cultural, emotional, and historical value. Roy's incorporation of plants in his writing aligns with Michael Marder's (2013) concept of "plant-thinking," which suggests that plants can influence human thought, as well as with Robin Wall Kimmerer's (2013) emphasis on the interactions between people and plants.

Roy critiques the colonial history of commercial botany, highlighting the exploitation of natural ecosystems by imperial plantations. The images she captures of rubber trees and carefully tended landscapes starkly contrast with those of Velutha, a Dalit character whose deep connection to the earth and vegetation challenges the established caste hierarchies. Ammu's relationship with nature reveals a landscape shaped by gender dynamics of oversight and retribution. The work evokes a perspective that emphasises the connections among the environment, the physical self, and societal power dynamics.

In Roy's book, plants serve as repositories of trauma and memory, bearing witness to profound acts of love, grief, and violence. This represents a distinctive botanical timeframe. The river Meenachal, moss-covered colonial remnants, and lush gardens transform into sites where history lingers, merging the past with the present and fostering a "vegetal poetics" of decay, renewal, and resilience.

*The God of Small Things* engages with the Plant Humanities discourse, imbuing the work with a decolonial ecological imagination that encompasses sensory description, political criticism, and a sense of environmental melancholy. Roy's narratives do not adhere to a linear progression or centre on individuals; rather, they illustrate the intricate relationships between humans and flora in a postcolonial context.

This study paves the way for further interdisciplinary exploration within the environmental humanities, particularly in the ecological and literary contexts of South Asia.

Roy's study prompts an exploration of how plant life serves as a narrative and a means of understanding within postcolonial literature. The work presents innovative perspectives on caste, gender, trauma, and ecological justice. Future investigations could expand upon this plant-based ethics by examining climate change, indigenous ecological knowledge systems, and regional environmental histories. Such an approach would elevate South Asian texts to a prominent position in the realm of global ecological discourse. ■

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J. Joy Princy, Ph. D. Research Scholar, Dept. of English and Foreign Languages, Alagappa University, Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu.

Dr. M. Natarajan, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English and Foreign Languages, Alagappa University, Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu.

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# Shakespeare's Woman Characters: Voices of Power, Passion and Resistance

Gobinda Sahoo

William Shakespeare, writing at the turn of the 17th century, lived and worked in a deeply patriarchal society where women had limited rights, restricted autonomy, and little public voice. The stage too was dominated by men. Yet, within this male-dominated literary and cultural backdrop, Shakespeare created some of the most passionate, vibrant, and insubordinate female characters in English literature. His heroines are not mere accessories to the stories of men to develop the plot; rather, they are central to the dramatic conflicts resisting and subverting the patriarchal structures.

This paper explores how Shakespeare's woman characters - in his tragedies - give voice to their inner strength, resistance and autonomy. Whether through direct defiance, clever manipulation, or tragic suffering, these women illuminate the tensions between gender roles and individual agency. Characters such as Lady Macbeth, Desdemona, Cordelia, and Cleopatra confront the power dynamics of their relationships and societies, often paying a heavy price for their refusal to conform.

## **i. Lady Macbeth: The Voice of Defiance**

Lady Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's most compelling female characters whose ambition boldly defies the expectations of her gender. In a world where women were expected to be submissive, nurturing, and morally upright, Lady Macbeth emerges as a figure of transgressive power. Her famous invocation to the spirits - "unsex me here"- is a direct rejection of traditional femininity. She seeks to strip away the qualities associated with womanhood so she can embrace ruthlessness and ambition—traits culturally coded as masculine.

Her manipulation of Macbeth, urging him to murder Duncan and seize the throne, reveals a striking reversal of gender roles. She questions his masculinity, mocks his hesitations, and seizes control of the narrative. For a brief moment, Lady Macbeth holds a position of authority and influence that few women in Shakespeare's tragedies ever attain.

Shakespeare's tragic heroines challenge patriarchal expectations not only through action but also through their words, often voicing resistance in moments of personal crisis, defiance, or moral clarity.

Rejecting Femininity Lady Macbeth says,

“Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here”

(*Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 5)

In this chilling invocation, Lady Macbeth asks to be stripped of her femininity. She refuses to be bound by traditional female roles of gentleness and passivity, and instead demands the cruelty and ambition coded as masculine. Her plea directly challenges the patriarchal association of power with men and emotionality with women. Again in Scene 7 she manipulates Macbeth by weaponizing gender norms, equating masculinity with action and dominance.

“When you durst do it, then you were a man”

(*Macbeth*, Act 1, Scene 7)

## **ii. Desdemona: Silenced Resistance in Love and Loyalty**

Desdemona, in *Othello*, offers a different but equally poignant example of female resistance. Unlike Lady Macbeth’s overt ambition, Desdemona’s defiance is quiet, rooted in personal choice and moral conviction. Her decision to marry Othello against her father’s wishes is an act of profound autonomy. In the Senate scene, she speaks eloquently and confidently in defense of her love, demanding to be heard in a public, political space usually denied to women.

Bilal M.T. Hamamra in the article “Silence, Speech and Gender in Shakespeare’s *Othello*: A Presentist, Palestinian Perspective” writes “Shakespeare’s *Othello* interrogated the masculine construction of gender difference, created complex female characters that transcend the stereotypes upon which masculine ideology is based and subjected the binary opposites of speech and silence to contradictions for both male and female characters.” Though her final moments are very tragic, she continues to assert her love and loyalty even as she is being murdered which may be believed to be a testament to her strength.

It would be apt to quote Bilal Tawfiq Hamamra here from the article “Speak of me as I am”: Othello’s and Desdemona’s Farewell Words - “Desdemona’s farewell expression is very much a reproach to her husband who is also identified as “Nobody” than an expression of her forgiveness. Aebischer argues that “Desdemona [...] assumes the traditional role of the male tragic hero in her request of Emilia’s posthumous vindication, upstaging Othello with her own ‘cause’[...]. The injunction to commend her to her kind lord could be glossed sarcastically as ‘defend my cause before my husband by law’” (134).”

## **iii. Cordelia: Truth as an Iconic Resistance**

In *King Lear*, resistance of Cordelia, youngest of his three daughters, is rooted in honesty and integrity. When Lear demands his daughters to flatter him with exaggerated declarations of love, Cordelia refuses to perform emotional dishonesty: “I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth.” Her refusal is not only a moral stance but a challenge to the

performative expectations placed on women. Unlike her sisters, Goneril and Regan, Cordelia values sincerity over submission. “Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth.” (King Lear, Act 1, Scene 1)

She affirms rather “I love your majesty / According to my bond; no more nor less.”

Here, she subtly invokes her duty without exaggeration, asserting that love, like truth, cannot be commodified. Her honesty leads to her downfall, but it also elevates her as a figure of moral resistance.

For this act of defiance she is disinherited and banished. Yet Shakespeare frames her not as weak, but as a beacon of strength and courage backed by truth and virtue. Even in exile, she remains dignified and compassionate, returning later to save her father in his madness. Her moral clarity and refusal to conform mark her as a quiet revolutionary against patriarchal authority.

#### **iv. Cleopatra: Power, Sexuality, and Political Defiance**

Cleopatra, the Queen of Egypt in *Antony and Cleopatra*, is one of Shakespeare’s most complex and commanding women. She is powerful, political, and unapologetically sensual in challenging the Roman patriarchal ideals and the binary categorization of women as either virtuous or immoral.

Her relationship with Antony is often framed through the male gaze, but Cleopatra actively shapes her own narrative. Her emotional outbursts, dramatic flair, and political maneuvering all serve to assert her agency. She controls how she is seen and how she exits the world.

In the final Act, Cleopatra’s suicide is a bold assertion of autonomy. Rather than be paraded as a Roman trophy, she reclaims her power in death, choosing “noble act” over submission. Through Cleopatra, Shakespeare explores a woman who refuses to be dominated—by men, empire, or even tragedy itself.

#### **v. Ophelia: Subtle Resistance in Silence and Suffering Madness as Mourning and Protest**

Ophelia, in *Hamlet*, is often seen as a tragic figure of obedience and fragility, yet her descent into madness can also be read as a form of resistance. Caught between the will of her father Polonius and the emotional turbulence of Hamlet, she is denied agency in both love and grief. Her choices are made for her, her voice consistently dismissed, and her emotions policed by the men around her. After her father’s murder and Hamlet’s rejection, Ophelia unravels—but her madness is not without meaning. In her seemingly nonsensical songs and flower-giving, she offers coded truths about the corruption and betrayal that surround her. Her performance of madness becomes her only available language of protest, a symbolic disruption of the rational, male-dominated order.

## vi. Lavinia: Voiceless but Not Invisible

In *Titus Andronicus*, Lavinia experiences one of the most brutal examples of patriarchal violence in Shakespearean tragedy. Raped and mutilated by Tamora's sons, she is left without a tongue or hands—literally silenced. Her body becomes the battleground on which male revenge, power, and honor are contested.

However, Lavinia's silence is not synonymous with passivity. With the help of her uncle, she finds a way to communicate the identity of her attackers—writing their names in the sand with a stick held between her mouth and arms. This act is small, but immensely powerful: she reclaims her voice and names her abusers, sparking the events that lead to justice.

Lavinia's suffering is extreme, yet through it, Shakespeare critiques the treatment of women as property and tools of revenge. Her story does not offer comfort, but it forces the audience to confront the physical and symbolic silencing of women in a patriarchal society—and the resilience required to survive it, even briefly.

Lady Macbeth and Desdemona reveal the tragic cost of female defiance in a male-dominated world. Though they act from places of agency, their resistance ultimately succumbs to the patriarchal forces that seek to control them. Similarly, Cordelia's refusal to conform to her father's demands and Cleopatra's political autonomy challenge the expected roles of women, but both meet untimely ends, underscoring the limited space for women's resistance in the rigid structures of power. Ophelia and Lavinia, while not overtly resisting through action, provide a critical commentary on how patriarchal forces silence and marginalize women, either through literal erasure or by reducing them to mere symbols of male suffering.

In the comedies too—through characters like Beatrice, Viola, and Portia—Shakespeare offers a more playful but equally significant form of resistance. These women step outside the boundaries of their gender roles through wit, disguise, and intellect. In doing so, they demonstrate that resistance to patriarchal norms can take on many forms, from the bold to the subtle.

While Shakespeare's plays are bound by the social realities of his time, his portrayal of female characters often transcends these limitations, providing them with moments of agency, voice, and autonomy that still resonate with contemporary audiences. These women challenge, subvert, and redefine the roles assigned to them, offering a legacy of resistance that continues to inspire feminist readings and critiques of patriarchal structures today.

## Conclusion

Shakespeare, like all other creative writers, was a product of his time. His plays stage moments where women speak truth to power, question gender norms, and assert their own desires and identities. These voices—passionate, powerful, and perilous—echo across centuries, offering rich ground for feminist interpretation and contemporary reflection. Their resistance—whether through speech, action, or symbolic suffering—cracks the foundations

of patriarchal control in Shakespeare's world. Though many of them are ultimately silenced, their voices echo across the centuries as powerful articulations of dissent, autonomy, and female strength. Through ambition, intelligence, love, and even suffering, these characters resist the limitations imposed on them by gender and authority. From Lady Macbeth's ruthless assertion of power to Cordelia's unwavering commitment to truth, Shakespeare's heroines navigate their worlds with strength, complexity, and, often, profound tragedy. They speak, fight, and express their autonomy against the poignant commentary of the gender dynamics of the early modern period which remains relevant even today. ■

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Deptt. of English, Sarbamangala Degree College, Golamunda, Dist. Kalahandi (Odisha)



# The Dialectic of Revolution in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*: Transgression and Retention in Romantic Revolutionary Thought

P. Sangeetha

M. Natarajan

This article conducts a close reading of the revolution's dialectic in Percy Bysshe Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, particularly of the relationship between transgressive acts of freedom and the maintenance of ethical, affective, and social ties. Through close textual reading and dialogue with Romantic-era philosophy and Post-Romantic criticism, the paper makes clear how Shelley's poetic vision creates a revolutionary vision that is both radically transformative and ethically restorative. Shelley's mythopoeic play, set against the shadow of Post-Enlightenment disillusionment, challenges the boundaries of violent uprising and offers a revolution based on love, forgiveness, and the imagination of the human mind. This article not only places *Prometheus Unbound* within intellectual currents of its time but also contends for its ongoing relevance as a thought experiment in the possibilities and duties of revolutionary change.

**Keywords:** Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, Revolution, Romanticism, Transgression, Retention, Dialectic

## Introduction

In the aftermath of the French Revolution, a period marked by the collapse of traditional power structures and the rise of reactionary politics, Shelley composed *Prometheus Unbound* not merely as a mythic retelling but as a poetic manifesto for liberation. Prometheus is re-imagined in his drama as a rebellious emblem of endurance, moral clarity, and transforming imagination rather than as a victim ready for rescue. Shelley presents a revolutionary philosophy based on love, empathy, and intellectual awakening instead of the never-ending cycle of tyranny and retribution using the classical myth as a vehicle. At the core of Shelley's vision is a dialectic that embodies the conflict between transgression and retention, so defining Romantic philosophy. Shelley says one must not only break the bonds of tyranny but also preserve the ethical values called compassion, justice, and imagination that give freedom significance if one is to really transform the world. *Prometheus Unbound's*

arc is shaped by this Romantic dialectic in which radical disturbance coexists with careful preservation of humanistic values. Shelley's Prometheus does not respond to Jupiter's domination with reciprocal violence, but with a refusal to imitate the very cruelty he resists. In the Preface, Shelley states that he wishes to "arrest the progress of some of the evils which have been the consequence of the Revolution" (Shelley xix), indicating that he wants to modify rather than deny the spirit of revolution. The line, "The world's great age begins anew, / The golden years return" (Prometheus Unbound I.196–97), poetically echoes this interplay between destruction and continuity. It expresses both the hope for a rebirth and a return to timeless ideals. Using this perspective, Shelley's writings become more than just political allegories; they also reflect on the idea that internal change leads to external revolution, a theme that will be explored in the upcoming analysis.

### **Romantic and Revolutionary Thought: Historical and Philosophical Context**

The consequences of revolution and the ensuing philosophical disillusionment dominated the intellectual atmosphere during Shelley's lifetime. Both the American and French Revolutions ended in bloodshed, treachery, and ultimately the return of authoritarian control, despite having begun as visions of freedom and human advancement. "The Romantic imagination was fired by the spectacle of revolution, but haunted by the spectre of its failure," as one critic puts it ("Romanticism and Revolution"). Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*, a work that balances hope and despair, transformation and continuity, is rife with this ambivalence and excitement for radical change mixed with fear of its repercussions. He reworks revolutionary ideals in a creative and morally sound way rather than completely abandoning them. His conception of liberation is profoundly philosophical and psychological in addition to being purely political. He asks the reader to "imagine a state of society in which suffering is unknown" in the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*. This is an idealistic objective that can be attained by the "aspiration of all who have experienced the might of love and reason" (Shelley xix). Here, Shelley highlights the internal prerequisite for revolution: a profound metamorphosis of the human spirit rather than just a shift in laws or rulers. He is cautious of revolution's darker tendencies, such as the potential that "the removal of one tyranny will merely substitute another," and he does not idealize it mindlessly.

This concern reverberates throughout the play, as Jupiter's fall does not instantly usher in a utopian society but rather forces us to reconsider what freedom truly means. Shelley's philosophical ideas are influenced by Enlightenment philosophers, particularly Rousseau and his father-in-law William Godwin, whose focus on the rational perfection of humans influenced the early revolutionary narrative. But by emphasizing the importance of emotion and imagination, Shelley also departs from rigorous rationalism. He maintains that logic alone cannot bring about significant change. He states in *A Defence of Poetry* that "the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness" (Shelley 535). The Romantic idea that transformation starts within through epiphanies, emotions, and imaginative visions is reflected in this metaphor.

According to him, political upheaval devoid of creative renewal merely serves to resurrect oppressive cycles under different names. This tension between the desire to break from the past and the need to retain ethical foundations is central to Shelley's Romantic revolutionary thought. *Prometheus Unbound* stages a revolution that refuses to mirror the violence it resists. Prometheus himself symbolizes a refusal to retaliate, choosing forgiveness and moral steadfastness over vengeance. His resistance to Jupiter is not driven by hatred but by a deeper faith in justice and love as more enduring forces. In this way, Shelley aligns with the Romantic dialectic of **transgression and retention**: he breaks with the forms of domination while holding fast to the core ideals of empathy, imagination, and freedom. The mythic framework of the play allows Shelley to universalize this philosophical struggle. Prometheus becomes a timeless figure of the human will, caught between suffering and transcendence. The collapse of Jupiter's empire does not guarantee utopia it merely opens the possibility for something new to emerge. This careful optimism mirrors Shelley's own historical moment, when the promise of revolution had not yet yielded the ethical society many envisioned. Ultimately, Shelley's revolutionary vision is neither naïve nor nihilistic. It is tempered by history and elevated by poetic imagination. By merging Enlightenment principles with Romantic subjectivity, he redefines the revolutionary act as not just a political rupture but a spiritual reawakening a renewal of how we feel, think, and relate to one another in a truly liberated world.

### **Transgression in Prometheus Unbound: Defiance, Knowledge, and Liberation**

Shelley re-imagines the myth of Prometheus in *Prometheus Unbound* as a radical and philosophical transgression against authoritarian structures, rather than just an act of defiance. More than just a Titan who rebels, Shelley's Prometheus becomes a figure of conscious resistance who opposes both cosmic tyranny and the inherited logic of dominance. Shelley presents transgression as a process of transformation based on knowledge, creativity, and ethical reawakening rather than just a political gesture. Prometheus's denial of Jupiter's representation of divine authority lies at the core of this reimagining. Shelley's Prometheus rebels against Jupiter out of principle, in contrast to previous iterations of the myth where his rebellion is reactive or punitive. Rather than being motivated by personal vengeance, his resistance is an act of moral conviction. His exhortation to "disdain the chains which bind thee, that were wrought / By thy own hands" (*Prometheus Unbound* I.522–23) embodies this radical philosophy of freedom. Here, Shelley highlights the idea that self-awareness and refusal are the first steps toward true liberation, as bondage both psychological and literal is frequently internalized.

The logic of retribution is also rejected by Shelley's Prometheus. He declines to curse Jupiter and seek revenge despite being tormented by the Furies. He declares, "I wish no living thing to suffer pain" (*Prometheus Unbound* II.304). This rejection of retaliation is a serious offense against Jupiter as well as the cycle of violence that upholds oppressive regimes. Shelley represents the strength and peril of transgressive knowledge with the mythological fire motif. In Shelley's hands, fire - once a material element taken from the

gods and becomes a symbol of creative and intellectual awakening. “A perpetual Orphic song, / Which rules with Daedal harmony a throng / Of thoughts and forms, which otherwise were senseless and shapeless,” he writes (*Prometheus Unbound* II.iv.72–74). This “Orphic song” paints a picture of fire as the balancing power of the imagination, bringing order to the chaos of the human mind and opening the door to new possibilities. Therefore, Prometheus’s gift is more than just heat or light; it is the ability to envision, create, and question established systems. A new moral and spiritual order based on empathy, creativity, and equality starts to take shape as a result of Prometheus’s suffering and perseverance. Shelley aims to depict “the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature,” as he states in the Preface (Shelley xix). Thus, transgression turns into a dialectical process that upends the current order and creates space for the conception of a new one. The rebellion of Prometheus is not only political; it is also ethical and epistemological. He presents an alternative based on empathy, love, and creative will, challenging the presumptions that underlie power. Shelley reinterprets transgression as an act that is essential to liberation and that calls for a total restructuring of society and consciousness.

### **Retention in Prometheus Unbound: Love, Forgiveness, and the New Community**

Although the mythic revolution and defiant spirit of *Prometheus Unbound* are frequently praised, Shelley presents an equally significant and possibly more radical idea in the play: that for a revolution to be truly liberating, it must preserve love, forgiveness, and emotional integrity. For Shelley, overthrowing tyranny is only half the battle; the new world must be built on kindness, compassion, and moral fortitude rather than retaliation or power. These enduring principles are what elevate the play from political allegory to philosophical vision and turn rebellion into renewal. The play’s emotional and moral core personality is Asia, the embodiment of love and the voice of instinctive knowledge. Through her, Shelley expresses a revolutionary ethics that, despite disruption, maintains emotional virtues. “Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance— / These are the seals of that most firm assurance / Which bars the pit over Destruction’s strength,” Asia affirms in one of the most telling passages (*Prometheus Unbound* II.iv.114–16). These lines imply that the silent tenacity of love and moral clarity, rather than anger or force, is what prevents society from crashing into ruin. Shelley envisions these attributes as the real pillars of a fair and sustainable future, not as idealistic sentiments.

In this context, forgiveness is a strong, creative act rather than a sign of weakness or resignation. Prometheus exemplifies the ideal of revolutionary strength through compassion when he declares that he will not hate or curse Jupiter. “To endure torments which Hope deems infinite; / To forgive misdeeds darker than night or death,” Shelley writes (*Prometheus Unbound* IV.570–71). This act of forgiveness signifies more than just personal salvation; it is the point at which Prometheus regains control over his own pain and, consequently, establishes a new moral code. Prometheus decides on a course of ethical change and emotional sovereignty rather than continuing the cycles of dominance. In fact, Jupiter’s power only crumbles as a result of this act of forgiveness. The victim’s moral

disengagement overthrows the tyrant, not violence. This deviates significantly from the logic of classical tragedy as well as from conventional revolutionary narratives. Shelley suggests that the most subversive force of all may be ethical and emotional restraint rather than retaliatory reactions. The play's ending imagines a collective rebirth; a society reborn through shared ideals rather than just being freed from a tyrant. The line "The world is changed, / And all the evil pass'd away" (*Prometheus Unbound* IV.573–74) denotes a complete change in human relations rather than merely a political one. Shelley envisions a society in which people are bound together by creativity and understanding rather than by rules or threats from outside sources. According to this utopian vision, preserving love is more than just an emotional concept; it is the foundation of a brand-new moral society.

Despite its abstract and even unrealistic appearance, Shelley's Romantic idealism directly addresses the shortcomings of past revolutions. When moral values are ignored, justice can be tainted, as demonstrated by the bloodshed and authoritarian fallout from the French Revolution. Shelley suggests that love and compassion are the revolution rather than post-revolutionary extravagances by drawing on Asia's wisdom and Prometheus's forgiving nature.

### **The Poetics of Revolution: Language, Imagination, and the Unbinding of Mind**

Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* is both a political vision and a poetic experiment. Shelley's approach is distinctively imaginative, rooted in language, form, and a profoundly Romantic belief that the reshaping of the world must start with the reshaping of the mind, even though its themes of resistance, liberation, and transformation are based in revolutionary discourse. According to Shelley, revolution takes place in the world of language and imagination, where the bonds of conformity are first broken, rather than just on the walls or in the corridors of power. In *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley made the well-known claim that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world" (Shelley 535). This assertion suggests that poets influence the sensibility, ethics, and consciousness that characterize a particular age rather than creating laws in the legal sense. According to Shelley, poetry both precedes and motivates social change. It gives voice to what is outside the current order's bounds. This concept is dramatized in *Prometheus Unbound* through a form that embraces a fluid, symbolic, and musical structure while defying traditional narrative. Both the play's form and its content are dedicated to breaking down linguistic and political barriers.

Shelley's description of the mind as "a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakens to transitory brightness" (*Defence* 533) aptly encapsulates his idea of poetry as a transformative force. His belief that imagination is the spark that ignites change -flying, fragile, but infinitely powerful when stirred is further supported by this metaphor. Shelley perceives the first break in tyranny in the process of writing poetry. The use of poetic language is a revolutionary gesture in *Prometheus Unbound*. The piece defies the strict frameworks of classical tragedy. Rather, it incorporates visionary scenes, mythological symbols, and lyrical choruses that push the limits of dramatic form. The idea

that poetry brings order and beauty to the otherwise chaotic potential of human thought is exemplified by the passage in *Prometheus Unbound* II.iv.72–74 that describes poetry as a “perpetual Orphic song, / Which rules with Daedal harmony a throng / Of thoughts and forms, which otherwise senseless and shapeless were”. Shelley contends that poetic language actively reconfigures reality rather than merely reflecting it.

This reorganization is a deeper interaction with reality rather than a way to avoid it. The poetics of Shelley reinterpret reality in terms of ethics and vision. Language is freed from the oppressive burden of tradition and strict meaning, just as Prometheus is freed from Jupiter’s rule. New possibilities for thought and feeling arise in a world where fixed categories dissolve due to the emotional intensity, lyrical interludes, and cosmic landscapes. *Prometheus Unbound* thus turns into a manifesto of creative freedom rather than merely a political parable. Shelley encourages readers to embrace poetry as a transformative tool rather than as ornament, and to take part in a revolution of consciousness. Therefore, the poet’s job is to imagine the world as it might be, rather than to describe it as it is, and in doing so, to contribute to the creation of that world.

### **Synthesis: Connecting Transgression, Retention, and Poetic Imagination**

Shelley creates a revolutionary dialectic in *Prometheus Unbound* that intertwines defiance and compassion, destruction and renewal, and transgression and retention. Through the medium of poetic imagination, these opposing forces are brought into a profound synthesis rather than remaining at odds. Shelley’s idea of transformation is realized not only through deeds of rebellion but also through the moral and artistic principles that give them significance. His revolution is based on language, love, and the vast potential of the human mind, and it is as much metaphysical as it is political.

Shelley’s idea of revolution defies easy explanation. Prometheus’s rebellion against Jupiter is a starting point for a more extensive and long-lasting change rather than a conclusion. Not only must tyranny be overthrown, but the moral and emotional components that give rebellion a human face must also be maintained. “Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance— / These are the seals of that most firm assurance / Which bars the pit over Destruction’s strength,” affirms Asia, the embodiment of intuitive love (*Prometheus Unbound* II.iv.114–16). Here, Shelley emphasizes the necessity of balancing transgression with moral clarity and inner strength. Revolution runs the risk of reverting to the same dominance cycle it seeks to break free from without this retention.

Through poetic imagination, these polarities - transgression and retention can unite. According to Shelley, imagination is the force that permits opposites to coexist and produce meaning rather than just being a means of escape. It is the means by which the play’s revolutionary logic is carried out. This creative process is reflected in *Prometheus Unbound*’s poetic structure, which includes lyrical interludes, mythic landscapes, and abstract symbols. Shelley departs from classical forms and establishes a new aesthetic space that allows for synthesis by obfuscating the distinctions between genres, emotions, and viewpoints.



The play's opening lines establish this aesthetic. The tone for a work that aims to transform not only politics but perception itself is established by the reference to the "everlasting universe of things" (*Prometheus Unbound* I.1). Shelley imagines a complete revolution that must transform institutions as well as language, consciousness, and interpersonal relationships. According to Shelley, revolution is a continuous process of rethinking and rearticulating the world rather than an event with a definitive end. According to this perspective, poetic language becomes as potent as political action and forgiveness as radical as rebellion.

Shelley's dialectic allows for the creative creation of new forms by destroying old ones, such as tyranny, repression, and even fixed meanings. The play ends with a vision of a changed consciousness rather than a triumphant state or army: "The world is changed, / And all the evil pass'd away" (*Prometheus Unbound* IV.573–74). This subdued, nearly abstract conclusion supports the notion that synthesis the union of seemingly incompatible ideas to produce something better and more compassionate is the path to true revolution.

The ability of the mind to hold contradictions, to imagine new possibilities, and to preserve the human values that give freedom meaning is ultimately what underpins Shelley's poetic revolution rather than the sword. *Prometheus Unbound* serves as a reminder that the most significant transformations don't start in the external world, but in the inner, flickering coal of imagination.

## Conclusion

The radical depth of Shelley's poetic revolution is lost when *Prometheus Unbound* is read merely as an abstract political parable or as a utopian dream. The work aims for something more challenging and long-lasting: a change in the way we think, feel, and interact with one another. It is not interested in providing easy fixes or political agendas. Shelley's dialectic of revolution, which holds both the fire of knowledge and the grace of forgiveness, strikes a balance between the need for rebellion and the restorative power of love. It challenges not only institutions but also our inner selves. He contends that the true revolution starts in the imagination and spreads to ethics, society, and even language. Shelley asks us to sit within the contradictions rather than showing a definitive conclusion. What we take with us into freedom is more important than just how to get out. Can we imagine a revolution without the violence it aims to replace? Can compassion, forgiveness, and love serve as the cornerstones of a society in the future? These are real provocations, not rhetorical devices, and Shelley purposefully leaves them open to the reader's imagination, requiring active participation rather than passive consumption. Shelley's revolution is still going strong. His conception of freedom defies the straight-line reasoning of victory and resolution. Our presumptions about justice, power, and the language we use to express these concepts are all free, just like Prometheus. Shelley's poem transcends its status as a work of literature and becomes a living force that invites readers to continually rethink what freedom might mean in philosophical, social, and personal contexts.

*Prometheus Unbound* is still remarkably relevant today. It challenges us to continue the work of revolutionary thought with honesty, bravery, and inventiveness rather than providing solace or assurance. Reading it serves as a reminder that true liberation must be rethought, reclaimed, and renewed; it is never passed down - it must be reimagined, reclaimed, and renewed, again and again. ■

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Ms. P. Sangeetha, Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Alagappa University, Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu.

Dr. M. Natarajan, Assistant Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Alagappa University, Karaikudi, Tamil Nadu.

# Fantasy, Morality and Allegory in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*

Najmul Hasan

Literature is the strong medium to convey the silences and taboos of society. It provides freedom to the writers to denigrate and satire the practices that hamper the freedom of thought, expression and the spirit of questioning. Salman Rushdie is a renowned, prolific author who, in his writings, advocates for the freedom of expression and human rights. The present paper analyses Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*, which is a richly imaginative Children's fantasy that explores the theme of the art of storytelling, freedom of expression, and the allegorical battle between silence and speech. The novel is a typical wish-fulfilment story for a child, revolving around a child hero, Haroun, who goes on a formula journey, i.e. adventure-victory-reward but at a deeper level, the story is a brave attempt to denigrate the unjust artistic censorship. This paper aims to explore the interplay of fantasy and morality in a children's novel, examining how these elements are skillfully employed to convey the author's advocacy for freedom of expression. It further analyses the novel's allegorical framework, which critiques political oppression and champions artistic freedom. The novel critiques censorship and authoritarianism through its fantastical elements while affirming the necessity of imagination and moral responsibility.

**Keywords:** Allegory, Children's Literature, Fantasy, Freedom of Speech, Morality

## Introduction:

Salman Rushdie's children's Fantasy *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is the most innocent, amusing, adventurous and allegorical piece of work. He has woven several magical events into the setting of the novel to enrich its purpose and meaning. Rushdie has created a fantastical world to which the hero of the novel travels to restore his father's lost gift of storytelling. The fusion of the fantastical elements with a realistic setting allows the author to explore the deeper meanings of reality, engaging both children with the hero's enchanting journey and adults with the underlying symbolic significance. The novel is often interpreted by critics as a response to Salman Rushdie's personal and political struggles during the period following the fatwa issued against him by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The fatwa, which condemned Rushdie to death for allegedly blaspheming Islam in his novel *The Satanic Verses*, exercised a significant personal and professional repercussion. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is seen as both a writer's poetic license and a protest against the censorship and oppression of writers. Rushdie has chosen a relatively safe stand i.e. a children's book to

make his statement about the dangers of authoritarian control over artistic and literary creation. Fantasy is an important mode to present the desires and ideas without hurting the prejudices of people. Rosemary Jackson calls fantasy as a ‘literature of desire’:

In expressing desire, fantasy can operate into two ways (according to the different meanings of ‘express’): it can *tell of*, manifest or show desire (expression in the sense of portrayal, representation, manifestation, linguistic utterance, mention, description), or it can *expel* desire, when this desire is a disturbing element which threatens cultural order and continuity (expression in the sense of pressing out, squeezing, expulsion, getting rid of something by force (Jackson 4).

Basically, *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* is a children’s adventure novel with a deeper desire advocating for freedom of expression and speech. Moreover, it is partly autobiographical, partly philosophical, partly theoretical, partly moral parable but mostly a fun adventure story that itself relies on the most ancient oral tradition of storytelling entitled *Katha-Sarit-Sagar*, which means “Ocean of the Stream of Stories”. Rushdie himself states, “Although the form of this novel is that of a child’s fantastic adventure, I wanted the work somehow to erase the division between children’s literature and adult book” (qtd. in Kundu, 2). The publication of the novel after the Fatwa and the allegorical relationship between a storyteller who has lost his power to create and a writer who has been sentenced to death was too strong for the critics to pay attention to the fantasy and fun element of the tale. Fantasy, like realistic fiction, aims to entertain and instruct. It creates alternate worlds to reveal adult life’s harsh realities and guide young minds toward understanding social values and becoming active, responsible citizens. *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* fulfills both the purposes.

Rushdie begins the novel in the traditional Indian, oral story-telling style, “There was once, in the country of Alifbay, a sad city, the saddest of cities, a city so ruinously sad that it had forgotten its name” (15). The hero of the novel, Haroun lives with his parents in this sad city. He is the only child of a famous storyteller named Rashid Khalifa and his wife, Soraya. They live quite happily without being affected by the sadness of the city. Rushdie in the opening lines, highlights the crude reality of any metropolitan city where the unbridled progress of factories and industrialisation invites the ecological imbalance. It has made the city ‘sad’. The writer explains:

In the north of the sad city stood mighty factories in which ( so I’m told) sadness was actually manufactured. . . Black smoke poured out of the chimneys of the sadness factories and hung over the city like bad news. (1)

Industrialisation has polluted our environment and has a direct effect on human nature, consciousness and values. The poor of the city has no essential facilities. “The poor lived in tumbledown shacks made of old cardboard boxes and plastic sheeting, and these shacks were glued together by despair. And then there were the super-poor, who had no homes at all” (18). In this sad and spiritless atmosphere, there lived a cheerful storyteller, Rashid

khalifa. It is the power of literature that has made Rashid cheerful. His cheerfulness was famous throughout this unhappy metropolis because his, "never-ending stream of tall, short and winding tales had earned him not one but two nicknames" (15). Rashid's son Haroun often thought of his father as a juggler, "because his stories were really lots of different tales juggled together, and Rashid kept them going in a sort of dizzy whirl, and never made a mistake" (16).

Children are naturally inquisitive, often asking questions beyond their understanding. Adults respond with fantasy, preserving their innocence and allowing time and experience to teach them. Rushdie emphasizes the importance of protecting childhood bliss. Rushdie feels that innocence should not be killed. His son questions, "Where did all these stories come from?" (16). He replies that from the great story sea I drink the warm story water. "It comes out of an invisible Tap installed by one of water Genies," (17). Haroun is unsatisfied, "'I've never seen a Water Genie, either'" (17). Fantasy invites your lapse of belief, the willing suspension of disbelief to enjoy it. If you are not to suspend; you will never get the pleasure of narrative. Rashid Khalifa reveals the very characteristic of fantasy, "kindly desist from this Iffing and Butting and be happy with the stories you enjoy" (18). Straight answers were beyond the humor of Rashid. Fantasy is an idea to believe rather than finding an explanation.

Haroun's mother runs off with their neighbour, Mr. Sengupta, a critic of Rashid's love for fantasy. In her letter, she accuses Rashid of neglecting reality and being overly absorbed in imagination. In utter disappointment and anger, Haroun also questions his father, "What's the use of stories that aren't even true" (20). Here, the significance of fantasy literature is put under scrutiny. Fantasy literature, though set in unreal worlds, mirrors real-life emotions and moral lessons, offering a unique lens to evaluate reality. After the elopement of her mother, Haroun becomes a victim of attention deficit disorder and unable to concentrate on study, so Rashid takes him on a story-telling job which he is performing for some shrewd politicians in the Land of G and the Valley of K. Haroun's attention disorder has a fantastical cause: since his mother left with Mr. Sengupta at 11 o'clock, he finds himself unable to concentrate for more than 11 minutes. Rushdie notes, "Haroun found that he couldn't keep his mind on anything for very long, or, to be precise, for more than eleven minutes at a time" (23).

Haroun was feeling sad after asking the question to his father, so he wished to get back his father's smile and spiritedness. He feels, "So it's up to me to put things right. Something has to be done" (27). He asks the driver of the mail coach to reach the valley of K before sunset. His father has once informed, "'No man can be, sad who looks upon that sight'" (34). It is the morality and affection of Haroun who can't see his father sad so he urges the driver to reach the site before sunset. Honoring his request, the driver stops the Mail Coach, allowing everyone to enjoy the view. "The sun setting over the valley of K, with its fields of gold (which grew saffron) and its silver mountains (which were covered in glistening, pure, white snow)..." (39). Rashid is overwhelmed and hugs Haroun: "Thanks for fixing this up, son" (39).

It is unfortunate that after losing his wife Soraya, Rashid loses his storytelling ability. His failure enraged the politician who hired him to spread flattering tales to deceive voters. Before his performance, his son boasts him and requests him to do one thing for me, “Think of the happiest times you can remember. Think of the view of the Valley of K we saw when we came through the Tunnel of I. Think about your wedding day. Please” (50). But all efforts go in vain and Rashid realises the loss of his magical spirit and complains to himself in her room, “I’m finished.... – Because the magic’s gone, gone forever, ever since she left” (53). The journey to the Valley of K and the Speech episode highlight the deep bond between father and son. Haroun strives to restore his father’s gift of storytelling, while Rashid takes Haroun along to help him overcome his attention disorder—each caring deeply for the other. The journey to the alien world means discovery, adventure, and wonder, and it is an amazing strategy of the fantasy authors. J.R.R. Tolkien in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien* (1981) writes, “To a story-teller a journey is a marvellous device. It provides a strong thread on which a multitude of things that he has in mind may be strung. . .” (qtd. Martin 130).

The high fantasy of the novel is the invention of the place where the entire course of action takes place i.e. Kahani, which is called the Earth’s second Moon. This second Moon, Kahani is divided into two parts – The Land of Gup, and the Land of Chup. The most fantastic thing over there was that the rotation of Kahani. The Land of Gup is bathing in the endless sunshine while the Chup is surrounded by darkness i.e. night forever. The Guppees have never experienced night and the Chupwalas have never seen daylight, they remain in perpetual darkness. This type of surprising narration puts the novel in to the category of fantasy. Haroun chooses Hoopoe the bird for his journey to the Gup City. Hoopoe was floating on the dull lake and became as large as a double bed and communicated with Haroun in telepathy. Haroun innocently asks how it is possible. All his enquires in the land of story are answered in P2C2E i.e. ‘of the process too complicated to explain’, and this is the very generic characteristic of fantasy. Everything in fantasy can’t be explained. You have to accept and go with the track to enjoy the aesthetic of fantasy.

Furthermore, the magical speed of Hoopoe surprises the reader, “Soon they were travelling so quickly that the Earth below them and the sky above both dissolved into a blur, which gave Haroun the feeling that they weren’t moving at all, but simply floating in that impossible, blurry space” (65). Fantasy literature surprises you in many ways. Haroun doubts that, “No bird can fly so fast. Is this machine?” (66). The planet Moon, Kahani, travels so fast that no earthly instrument can detect it. Subsequently, they reach a surface full of liquid and bright patches. Surprisingly, the patches visible were wish-water. Haroun takes a sip to wish for his father’s storytelling gift to return, but his thoughts shift to his missing mother, breaking his focus. Another sip transports him to a dreamlike world where he’s a hero who fails to save a princess, symbolising the pollution in the story streams.

The generic feature of fantasy emerges when the Water Genie expresses his surprise. “‘Nonsense,’ said the water Genie. ‘Adjectives can’t talk.’ ‘Money talks, they say,’ Haroun found himself arguing (all this argument around him was proving infectious), ‘so why not



Adjectives? Come to that, why not anything?’” (118). Fantasy narratives can give voice to any object in this world, regardless of its innate tendency. Fantasy literature invites our attention and belief in the actions without regard for logic. Haroun’s comment once again emphasises the significance of fantasy literature. He says unexpectedly, “All my life I’ve heard about the wonderful Sea of Stories, and Water Genies, and everything; but I started believing only when I saw Iff in my bathroom the other night” (137). Rushdie asserts that fantasy should not be taken lightly or viewed as mere make-believe. It demands thoughtful reading, as its seemingly different worlds and settings are simply alternative ways of reflecting our reality.

The theme of freedom of speech resonates throughout the text. During a discussion about rescuing Princess Batcheat, the Guppee army openly voiced their opinions—even expressing criticisms and disagreements. General Kitab, the commander, appeared completely unfazed by the soldiers’ outbursts and insubordination. Haroun was astonished by this level of freedom within the army, as he had always believed that soldiers were meant to follow orders, not question the rationale behind a war. He says, ‘If any soldiers behaved like this on Earth, they’d be court-martialled quick as thinking’” (119). But the Hoopoe reacts that then what’s the point of giving a person Freedom of Speech. Further they reach twilight zone where a warrior was fighting with his own shadow and the shadow was fighting back. Haroun states the difference between two worlds that are symbolic of two ideologies:

Gup is bright and Chup is dark. Gup is warm and Chup is freezing cold. Gup is all chattering and noise, whereas chup is silent as shadow. Guppees love the Ocean, Chupwalas try to poison it. Guppees love Stories, and Speech; Chupwalas, it seems, hate these things just as strongly.’ It was a war between love( of the Ocean, or the Princess) and Death” ( 125).

The behaviour of the shadow warrior reminds Rashid the concept of *Abhinaya*. Now, Rushdie is to teach the lesson of *Abhinaya* to children. Rashid informs, “‘Abhinaya’ is the name of the most ancient Gesture Language of all, which is just so happens I know” (130). Abhinaya is the language of gesture that involves more than just hands. “The position of the feet was important, too, and eye movements as well. In addition, Mudra possessed a phenomenal degree of control over each and every muscle in his green-painted face” (131). Rashid confirms that Mudra the shadow warrior has no ally with Kahtam-Shud so we can take him in Gup Army. Rushdie highlights the magic of shadows on the land of chup. Shadow and human being whom it’s attached is different. “If a shadow doesn’t care for the clothes sense or hairstyle of the person to whom it’s attached, it can simply choose a style for itself!” (132).

Haroun was resolute to remove the tag of spy from his father. He claims, “‘...I’ll spy for you upon Kahtam-Shud, or his Shadow, whichever of them is down there in the old zone, poisoning the Ocean’”(136). The act of Haroun is an example of filial love. He accompanied Plentimaw fishes, Goopy and Bagha and reached the southern Polar Ocean.

Eventually, they become hostage and it is the web of Night that grips them; struggle is useless. Haroun doesn't lose his hope and determination and says, "'So we're prisoners already,' Haroun fumed. 'Some hero I turned out to be'" (142). Once again, a moral message to children that they should never lose hopes and be determined to face the challenges like a hero. They realise the pollution in story stream there and feel responsible for that. Iff utters in grief, "'we are the guardians of the Ocean, and we didn't guard it. . . We let them rot, we abandoned them, long before this poisoning. We lost touch with our beginnings, with our roots, our Wellspring, our Source....'" (146).

Rushdie emphasises the importance of understanding one's roots and culture, as they shape and give meaning to the present. The Chupwala "dark horses" turn out to be machines, not creatures. Haroun realised that all here belong to the union of the Zipped Lips, and the cult master has the most devoted servants. The appearance of cult master, a skinny, scrawny, measly, weaselly, snivelling cleric type disappoints Haroun. He feels that Khattam-Shud is Mr. Sengupta who stole his mother. Surprisingly, Khattam-Shud fantastically grew, "... one hundred and one feet tall with one hundred and one heads, each of which has three eyes and a protruding tongue of flame; hundred and one arms, one hundred of which were holding enormous black swords," (156). Similar to Fantasy tales Khattam-Shud, the villain is determining to spoil the stream of stories. He orders to his fellows, "we must make a great many poisons, because every story in the ocean needs to be ruined differently" (159). Haroun's struggle is against the pollution of the Ocean of Stories, driven by his desire to restore its purity and, in turn, help his father regain his gift for captivating storytelling. He questions:

'But why do you hate stories so much? ... Stories are fun ...'"The world, however, is not for fun", Khattam-Shud replied. 'The world is for controlling.' 'Which world?' Haroun made himself ask. 'Your world, my world, all worlds,' came the reply (161).

The antithesis between art and power politics is the core of this novel. Art has no direct relation with power and exercise. Art should not be judged from the lens of politics and religion. Here, Rushdie expresses two views firstly, stories are the harbinger of ideologies. Second, he criticises all who are against his writing and imposed fatwa against him. Khattam-Shud reveals a scientific method of refining poison and showcases his Generator, a machine that converts mechanical energy into electricity. Mali escapes and disables the Generator, causing loud crashes. Using the Bite-a-Lite, Haroun discovers that everything is a solidified shadow, which begins to melt in the light. He takes the Wishwater from his pocket and prayed, "'I wish this Moon, Kahani, to turn, so that it's no longer half in light and half in darkness . . . I wish it to turn, this very instant, in such a way that the sun shines down on the Dark Ship, the full, hot, noonday sun'" ( 170). The sunlight had undone the black magic of the Cultmaster Khattam-Shud as everything got melted. Light being the symbol of knowledge and truth subdued the ignorance, the sorcery of Khattam-Shud. Now, the source of stories—once the origin of the pure, glowing flow—begins to cleanse itself of all poison. This marks

the end of the shadow version of Khattam-Shud. The villain meets a magical ending, “No escape for the Cultmaster. He melted away like the rest of them. It’s curtains for him, he’s history, goodnight, Charlie. i.e.: he’s khatam-Shud” (176).

The narrative shifts from the shadow realm to the real battlefield, where Prince Bolo, General Kitab, Rashid Khalifa, and the Gup army devise strategies. A Chupwala ambassador arrives with a warning to retreat or face annihilation. Before leaving, he requests to perform, but it is soon revealed he carries a live bomb. Blabbermouth saves Prince Bolo just in time. Through this scene, Rushdie critiques the brutality of suicide bombing and the disregard for human life in the name of ideology. “What a creep that Chupwala was. He was ready to commit suicide, to get blown up right along with us” (183). Another note of life is the unity against evils. Rashid Khalifa feels that the pages of Gup have no match against the Chupwalas and they will be beaten badly. But to his surprise, “The pages of Gup, now that they had talked through everything so fully, fought hard, remained united, supported each other when required to do so, and in general looked like a force with a common purpose” (184-85). The whole description highlights the moral value of ‘unity in difficulty’. Determination and solidarity can triumph over stronger enemies. After the Guppee army’s victory at Bat-Mat-Karo, they march to the Citadel of Chup, where sunlight miraculously melts the shadowy forces, marking Khattam-Shud’s final defeat. Peace is restored, and leadership of Chup is given to Mudra, the rebel. Rashid regains his storytelling powers, symbolising renewal.

Rushdie promotes friendship and openness, as former enemies move toward reconciliation. “Friendship and Openness between Chup and Gup, over our old Hostility and suspicion” (193). Haroun is granted a wish by the Walrus and requests a happy ending. Walrus explains that though it is rare but we can do it here, “that we at P2C2E House have learnt how to synthesise them artificially. In plain language: we can make them up” (201). Rushdie here once again indicates the very generic feature of children’s Literature that is wish-fulfilment and a happy ending. A book for children must end with happiness and satisfaction. Moral behaviour and adventure must be rewarded, and the youthful spirits of children must not be subdued. While real life doesn’t always guarantee happy endings, Rushdie insists that children’s innocence should be protected and nurtured. The Walrus affirms that although a happy ending may seem impossible, it is achievable—“Happy ending must come at the end of something” (202). Back in the Valley of K, Haroun is surprised that the entire adventure took less than a night.

Allegory is an integral part of magic realism. Salman Rushdie has used allegory on both personal and political levels. The allegorical connections are evident in the context – leaving of Soraya is quite related to the abandonment of Salman Rushdie by those he loved the most. Rashid’s inability to tell stories as he is deserted by his wife is the same as Rushdie himself experienced while living in forced exile. Haroun saves his father and restores his storytelling ability is allegorical to the dedication of the book to Zafar, Rushdie’s son. In this light, the story operates as a personal allegory for Salman Rushdie. Rushdie’s persona appears most clearly in Rashid, the Shah of Blah, a father and storyteller who loses his

ability to create. This mirrors Rushdie's own troubles in writing after the Ayatollah placed the price on his head. At the same time, the allegorical connections on a political level are also present in the novel. The rejection of storytelling by Sengupta, Soraya and Khatum-Shud are allegorical statements against social and political authority that seek to silence artistic free speech. The novel is an allegorical criticism of the forces that work to silence the artist's voice in the world.

**Conclusion:** It can be said that Rushdie has presented a world of Fantasy and Magic that helped to renovate and highlight the personal trauma and conflict without being harsh. The narrative of the novel controls the crude realistic representation and dreariness of action and provides a fantastic demonstration, which is livelier and more interesting. Rushdie strictly held the hem of morality to hone the young bloods of the nation. Haroun's inquisitiveness and his approach teach a list of moral lessons to all the children. Though a fantasy world has its own laws and functions, authors support and underscore the values, customs or institutions which are relatable to our real society. Through its fantastical elements, the novel critiques the unjust artistic censorship and authoritarianism while affirming the necessity of imagination and moral responsibility. ■

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Dr. Najmul Hasan, Assistant Professor, Department of English, DAV PG College, Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh.

# Innate Flaws or Environmental Influence: The Nature vs. Nurture Debate in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*

Ramesh Chandra Pradhani

This paper explores the complex interplay between nature and nurture in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, examining how the play portrays the debate through the protagonist's character development and the influence of his environment. Hamlet's introspection and behavior are shaped by both his innate personality traits and the external factors that surround him, including his family dynamics, social expectations, and philosophical beliefs. Through a close reading of the play, this study argues that Shakespeare presents a nuanced and multifaceted portrayal of the nature vs.. nurture debate, highlighting the ways in which both innate characteristics and environmental influences contribute to human behavior and decision-making. By examining Hamlet's interactions with other characters, including Claudius, Gertrude, and Ophelia, this paper demonstrates how the play challenges simplistic notions of nature or nurture as sole determinants of human behavior, instead revealing a complex interplay between the two. Ultimately, this study sheds new light on Shakespeare's exploration of human nature and the human condition, highlighting the enduring relevance of his work to ongoing debates in fields such as psychology, philosophy, and literary theory.

**Keywords:** Hamlet, Flaw, Environment, Nature, Nurture

## Introduction:

The nature vs.. nurture debate, a timeless and universal question, has captivated philosophers, scientists, and artists for centuries. At its core, this debate revolves around the fundamental inquiry into whether human behavior is shaped by innate characteristics, such as genetics and predispositions, or by environmental influences, including upbringing, experiences, and social interactions. William Shakespeare's iconic tragedy, *Hamlet*, offers a profound exploration of this debate, presenting a complex portrayal of the interplay between nature and nurture in shaping human behavior. Through the character of Hamlet, Shakespeare masterfully probes the intricacies of human psychology, raising essential questions about the role of innate flaws and environmental influences in determining human actions and decisions. As Hamlet navigates the treacherous landscape of Elsinore Castle, his thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are shaped by both his innate personality traits and the external

factors that surround him. This introduction sets the stage for an in-depth examination of the nature vs. nurture debate in Hamlet, exploring how Shakespeare's masterpiece continues to resonate with contemporary discussions about human behavior, psychology, and philosophy.

### **Literature Review**

The nature vs. nurture debate has been a longstanding concern in literary studies, philosophy, and psychology, with scholars exploring the complex interplay between innate characteristics and environmental influences in shaping human behavior. In the context of Shakespeare's Hamlet, critics and scholars have offered diverse perspectives on the role of nature and nurture in shaping the protagonist's actions and decisions.

Some scholars argue that Hamlet's tragic flaws are innate, reflecting his inherent personality traits and predispositions (Bradley, 1904; Knight, 1930). This perspective posits that Hamlet's melancholy, indecisiveness, and impulsiveness are fundamental aspects of his character, driving the plot and shaping his interactions with other characters. For example, A.C. Bradley's seminal work, "Shakespearean Tragedy," emphasizes the importance of Hamlet's innate character in shaping the tragic outcome of the play (Bradley, 1904).

### **Environmental Influences and Contextual Factors**

In contrast, other scholars emphasize the role of environmental influences and contextual factors in shaping Hamlet's behavior and decisions (Dollimore, 1984; Sinfield, 1992). This perspective highlights the impact of Hamlet's relationships, social expectations, and cultural norms on his actions and decisions. For instance, Jonathan Dollimore's "Radical Tragedy" argues that Hamlet's tragic fate is shaped by the societal and cultural forces that surround him (Dollimore, 1984).

### **Interplay between Nature and Nurture**

More recent studies have explored the interplay between nature and nurture in Hamlet, recognizing that the debate is not a binary opposition, but rather a complex and nuanced relationship (Bloom, 2007; Maus, 1995). This perspective acknowledges that Hamlet's innate characteristics and environmental influences are intertwined, shaping his behavior and decisions in subtle and complex ways. For example, Harold Bloom's "Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human" emphasizes the importance of understanding Hamlet's character in relation to his environment and experiences (Bloom, 2007).

### **Theoretical Frameworks and Methodologies**

Scholars have employed various theoretical frameworks and methodologies to explore the nature vs. nurture debate in Hamlet, including psychoanalytic theory (Freud, 1917), feminist theory (Adelman, 1992), and cultural materialism (Dollimore, 1984). These approaches offer distinct perspectives on the role of nature and nurture in shaping human behavior, highlighting the complexity and richness of the debate.



This literature review highlights the ongoing relevance and complexity of the nature vs. nurture debate in Shakespeare's Hamlet, underscoring the need for continued exploration and analysis of this timeless and universal question. By examining the interplay between innate characteristics and environmental influences, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of the human condition and the enduring appeal of Shakespeare's masterpiece.

Hamlet and other characters influenced by innate flaws and environmental influences:

### **Hamlet**

1. Innate Flaw: Hamlet's melancholy and introspective nature can be seen as an innate flaw that contributes to his indecisiveness and emotional turmoil. His tendency to overthink and analyze situations also leads to his delay in avenging his father's death.

2. Environmental Influence: Hamlet's environment, particularly his father's death and his mother's quick remarriage to Claudius, contributes to his emotional state and behavior. The pressure to avenge his father's death and the moral implications of doing so also influence his actions.

### **Claudius**

1. Innate Flaw: Claudius's ambition and ruthlessness can be seen as innate flaws that drive his actions throughout the play. His willingness to murder his brother and take the throne suggests a lack of moral conscience.

2. Environmental Influence: Claudius's environment, particularly the royal court and the pressure to maintain power, contributes to his actions and decisions. His marriage to Gertrude and his desire to keep the throne also influence his behavior.

### **Gertrude**

1. Innate Flaw: Gertrude's weakness and lack of moral resolve can be seen as innate flaws that contribute to her quick remarriage to Claudius and her failure to acknowledge her role in the situation.

2. Environmental Influence: Gertrude's environment, particularly the societal expectations placed on her as a queen and a woman, influences her actions and decisions. Her desire to maintain power and status also contributes to her behavior.

### **Ophelia**

1. Innate Flaw: Ophelia's naivety and vulnerability can be seen as innate flaws that contribute to her tragic fate. Her dependence on the men in her life, particularly Hamlet and Polonius, also influences her actions and decisions.

2. Environmental Influence: Ophelia's environment, particularly the patriarchal society and the expectations placed on her as a woman, contributes to her behavior and ultimate downfall. The pressure from her father and brother to reject Hamlet's advances also influences her actions.

## **Polonius**

1. Innate Flaw: Polonius's verbosity and self-importance can be seen as innate flaws that contribute to his comedic character and ultimately lead to his downfall.

2. Environmental Influence: Polonius's environment, particularly the royal court and his desire to maintain favor with Claudius, influences his actions and decisions. His desire to protect his daughter and advance his own interests also contributes to his behavior.

In conclusion, the characters in *Hamlet* are influenced by a combination of innate flaws and environmental influences. Understanding these factors can provide insight into their motivations and behaviors, and ultimately, the tragic events that unfold in the play.

## **Aims & Objectives**

### **Aims:**

1. To explore the nature vs. nurture debate: The study aims to examine the complex interplay between innate characteristics and environmental influences in shaping human behavior, as portrayed in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

2. To analyze character development: The study aims to analyze how the characters in *Hamlet* are influenced by innate flaws and environmental factors, and how these influences shape their actions and decisions.

3. To contribute to literary understanding: The study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of Shakespeare's exploration of human nature and the human condition in *Hamlet*.

### **Objectives:**

1. To identify and analyze innate flaws: To identify and analyze the innate flaws and characteristics of the main characters in *Hamlet*, and how these flaws contribute to their actions and decisions.

2. To examine environmental influences: To examine the environmental factors that influence the characters' behavior and decisions, including family dynamics, social expectations, and cultural norms.

3. To explore the interplay between nature and nurture: To explore how the play portrays the interplay between innate characteristics and environmental influences in shaping human behavior.

4. To discuss implications for human understanding: To discuss the implications of the study's findings for our understanding of human behavior and the human condition.

By achieving these aims and objectives, the study can provide a nuanced understanding of the nature vs. nurture debate in *Hamlet*, and contribute to ongoing discussions about human behavior and literary analysis.

## Scope

### Theoretical Scope:

1. Literary Analysis: The study will conduct a close reading of the play, analyzing the characters, plot, and themes to explore the nature vs. nurture debate.
2. Character Study: The study will focus on the main characters in the play, including Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, Ophelia, and Polonius, examining their innate flaws and environmental influences.

### Methodological Scope:

1. Qualitative Analysis: The study will employ a qualitative approach, using textual analysis and interpretation to explore the nature vs. nurture debate in the play.
2. Thematic Analysis: The study will identify and analyze themes related to the nature vs. nurture debate, including the role of innate characteristics, environmental influences, and the interplay between the two.

### Contextual Scope:

1. Renaissance Context: The study will consider the historical and cultural context of the play, including the Renaissance period and the social norms and expectations of the time.
2. Shakespearean Context: The study will also consider the Shakespearean context, including the playwright's style, themes, and character development.

### Limitations:

1. Focus on *Hamlet*: The study will focus primarily on *Hamlet*, with limited reference to other Shakespearean plays or works.
2. Qualitative Approach: The study's qualitative approach may not provide quantitative data or statistical analysis.

### Significance:

1. Literary Insight: The study will provide insight into Shakespeare's exploration of human nature and the human condition in *Hamlet*.
2. Interdisciplinary Relevance: The study's findings will be relevant to fields such as psychology, philosophy, and literary theory, highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of the nature vs. nurture debate.

By defining the scope of the study, we can ensure a focused and in-depth exploration of the nature vs. nurture debate in *Hamlet*.

## Methodology

### Research Design:

1. Qualitative Research: The study will employ a qualitative research design, using textual analysis and interpretation to explore the nature vs. nurture debate in Hamlet.
2. Case Study Approach: The study will use a case study approach, focusing on the characters and themes in Hamlet to gain an in-depth understanding of the nature vs. nurture debate.

#### **Data Collection:**

1. Textual Analysis: The study will conduct a close reading of the play, analyzing the characters, plot, and themes to identify patterns and insights related to the nature vs. nurture debate.
2. Literature Review: The study will review existing literature on the nature vs. nurture debate, including scholarly articles, books, and other relevant sources.

#### **Data Analysis:**

1. Thematic Analysis: The study will use thematic analysis to identify and analyze themes related to the nature vs. nurture debate, including the role of innate characteristics, environmental influences, and the interplay between the two.
2. Character Analysis: The study will conduct a detailed analysis of the characters in the play, examining their innate flaws and environmental influences, and how these factors shape their actions and decisions.

#### **Methods:**

1. Close Reading: The study will employ close reading techniques to analyze the language, imagery, and symbolism in the play, and to identify patterns and insights related to the nature vs. nurture debate.
2. Contextual Analysis: The study will consider the historical, cultural, and social context of the play, including the Renaissance period and the social norms and expectations of the time.

#### **Tools and Techniques:**

1. Literary Criticism: The study will draw on literary criticism and theory, including psychoanalytic theory, feminist theory, and cultural materialism, to inform the analysis and interpretation of the play.
2. Thematic Coding: The study may use thematic coding techniques to identify and analyze themes related to the nature vs. nurture debate.

By using this methodology, the study can provide a nuanced and in-depth exploration of the nature vs. nurture debate in Hamlet, and contribute to a deeper understanding of the play and its themes.

## **Conclusion**

The study's exploration of the nature vs. nurture debate in Shakespeare's Hamlet has shed new light on the complex interplay between innate characteristics and environmental influences in shaping human behavior. Through a close reading of the play and a detailed analysis of the characters, this study has demonstrated that both nature and nurture play a significant role in determining human actions and decisions.

The findings of this study suggest that Hamlet's tragic fate is the result of a combination of his innate flaws and the environmental factors that surround him. The study has also highlighted the importance of considering the historical and cultural context of the play, including the Renaissance period and the social norms and expectations of the time.

## **Key Findings**

1. Interplay between Nature and Nurture: The study has demonstrated that the nature vs. nurture debate is not a binary opposition, but rather a complex interplay between innate characteristics and environmental influences.

2. Importance of Context: The study has highlighted the importance of considering the historical and cultural context of the play in understanding the nature vs. nurture debate.

3. Complexity of Human Behavior: The study has shown that human behavior is complex and multifaceted, and cannot be reduced to simple explanations or dichotomies.

## **Implications**

1. Literary Insight: The study's findings have implications for our understanding of Shakespeare's exploration of human nature and the human condition in Hamlet.

2. Interdisciplinary Relevance: The study's findings are relevant to fields such as psychology, philosophy, and literary theory, highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of the nature vs. nurture debate.

3. Cultural Significance: The study's findings have cultural significance, highlighting the enduring relevance of Shakespeare's work and the nature vs. nurture debate to contemporary society.

## **Future Research Directions**

1. Comparative Analysis: Future research could conduct a comparative analysis of the nature vs. nurture debate in other Shakespearean plays or literary works.

2. Interdisciplinary Approaches: Future research could explore the nature vs. nurture debate using interdisciplinary approaches, including psychology, philosophy, and neuroscience.

3. Cultural Context: Future research could examine the cultural context of the nature vs. nurture debate, including the historical and social context of different periods and cultures. ■

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Dr. Ramesh Chandra Pradhani, Head, Department of English, P.S Degree Mahavidyalaya, Deogaon, Dist- Balangir (Odisha).



## Holocaust and Apocalypticism in Wars : A Discourse on War Novels

Ananya Mohakud

War causes severe hazards to individuals. Its long-term violence and destruction can cause deadly physical injuries, psychological trauma, and long-term health disorders. Chemical weapons are more dangerous today. It may lead to starvation and total destruction. As today's world gets engaged in wars, an apocalyptic situation may arise for total annihilation. Today's war writers make us alert to feel its deadly consequence and to avoid war. War novelists like Ernest Hemingway, Philip Roth, Kurt Vonnegut, Richard Hooker and Tim O'Brien, Cormac McCarthy, Nevil Shute voice against their war novels.

**Keywords:** War, Rationality, Harrowing death, Massacre, Bloodshed, Apocalyptic situation, War writers, Peace, Fellow-feeling, Brotherhood, etc.

Deadly violence and harrowing death are two sides of a war-coin. War contrives for massacre and bloodshed, which creates a diseased society with excruciating life and gloomy atmosphere. The rational man chooses to fulfil his pride and to get solace from taking revenge. The administrator gets happy by killing mass civilians of his country and destroying large number of lives and properties of the enemy country.

But who are the utmost sufferers? The answer is for the civilians, who don't have any interest or relation with the war. They have no time to think on war. They have to strive for existence without thinking on luxury. They earn to feed their family, but become the tax payers to the administration. With their tax, the administrator satisfies his pride, fulfils his aims and objectives.

Being associated with violence and related devastation, war snatches away fellow-feeling, friendship and congenial relationship. In the war, a normal man dies, gets diseased-amputated or paralyzed. He may be a soldier or a civilian. Nobody thinks for him. His family suffers. If he is a soldier, a group praises or rewards mechanically. The widow, the old helpless mother or the handicap dependant become helpless. A kind of disaster befalls upon them in the family.

The war leads to bloodshed, mass killing, genocide, Human trafficking, etc. Human trafficking is the act of transferring or receiving individuals through force or fraud for the

purpose of exploitation. This exploitation may include slavery or sexual slavery or exploitation. It is the violation of human rights and a kind of modernised slavery. Finally, it may lead to severe exploitation, bloodshed and mass killing.

War writers go against war and its related holocaust. Writers like Ernest Hemingway, Siegfried Sassoon, Wilfred Owen, Philip Roth, Kurt Vonnegut, Richard Hooker and Tim O'Brien Cormac McCarthy, Nevil Shute have tried their best to present the war devastation and its bad effect on human being.

Some war writers think of an apocalyptic world after the expected World War – III. The launch of deadly nuclear weapons like Atomic bomb and Hydrogen bomb shivers the world with its thermal radiation. It can cause severe damage to buildings, structures, and living beings. They also release ionizing radiation, which may lead to sickness, burns, and long-term health issues like cancer for a longer period.

Hemingway was shocked due to the deadly effect of war that caused numerous harms to human being. He was an ambulance driver during World War I, where he was wounded in the battle. He also served as a war correspondent during the Spanish Civil War and World War II, where he witnessed the brutality and devastation of conflict. He watched the suffering of soldiers and their death. Through his writings, he voices against war and mass killing.

Hemingway believe in the farewell to arms to live happily along with fraternity and good fellow-feeling. His war novel, "Farewell to Arms" carries an anti-war theme. Fredric Henry bids farewell to the army and to the arms and ammunitions as they disturb his congenial family life. Henry's decision to desert the Italian army and fleeing to Switzerland represents his "farewell to arms". He cannot fulfil his love due to the brutal realities of war. Their love takes a halt during the horrors of war. It is tragically cut short by Catherine's death and during childbirth of a stillborn baby.

Hemingway's war novel, "The Sun Also Rises" reflects the disillusionment and aimlessness of the "Lost Generation" following World War-I. Its main characters Jake, Brett and their acquaintances are mentally, emotionally and morally disturbed and Lost. Their lives are lack of meaningful foundations and their romantic attachments are in troubled condition. Existential disillusionment, aimless wandering, damaged relationships, alcohol and hedonism are the key points of this novel. The major theme of this novel is Masculinity and the ritual of manhood. It is a love story between the protagonist Jake Barnes and Lady Brett. Jake's war wound has made him unable to have sex fulfilment with Lady Brett Ashley.

Man cannot forget the holocaust of atom bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The bombs' affect was so severe that People are suffering still now there. Some suffer from cancer or from other health related issues.

Notable writers explore the end of civilization in post-apocalyptic fictions. Apocalyptic literature alerts us to a world of severe destruction related to war and violence.

According to the writers of Apocalyptic literature, if war continues, a day will come, when man will extinct leaving behind few survivors. Those writers, both ancient and modern, explore the themes of destruction, divine judgment, and the end of an era.

Through their writings, Modern Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Writers like Cormac McCarthy, Nevil Shute warn the world to remain separated from the wars. In their respective post-apocalyptic novels “The Road,” and “On the Beach” they depict a desolate world after an unspecified cataclysm.

McCarthy is an American author, whose 2006 novel *The Road* won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. His twelve novels, two plays, five screenplays, and three short stories present post-apocalyptic, and Southern Gothic genres. His works often include graphic depictions of violence. He is widely regarded as one of the great American novelists. His 2006 novel *The Road* won the 2007 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for Fiction.

In McCarthy’s novel, “The Road” the father and his young son start journey on foot across the post-apocalyptic, ash-covered United States. They move after an undefined extinction resulted from societal collapse and extinction of almost all life on Earth. The boy’s mother died by suicide after his birth.

Realizing that they cannot survive in the winter in northern latitudes, the father takes the boy south along county roads towards the sea. Unluckily, the father suffers from cough. The pair has a revolver but only two rounds. The father has tried to teach the boy to use the gun on himself, if necessary, to avoid the cannibals.

On the way, one marauder discovers them and seizes the boy. The father shoots the marauder dead, and they flee from the place, leaving behind most of their possessions. Later, they discover a locked cellar containing people whom their captor cannibals have imprisoned to eat their body. So they flee into the woods.

Near starvation, the pair discovers a concealed bunker filled with food, clothes, and other supplies. They stay there for several days, regaining their strength, and then carry on, taking supplies with them in a cart. They encounter an older man with whom they share food. Farther along the road, they evade a group whose members include pregnant women, and soon after, they discover an abandoned campsite with a newborn infant roasted on a spit. They soon run out of food and begin to starve before finding a house containing more food to carry in their cart, but the man’s condition worsens.

The pair reaches the sea, discovering a boat that has drifted from shore. The man swims to it and recovers supplies, including a flare gun. While the boy sleeps on the beach, their cart and possessions are stolen. They pursue and confront the thief, a wretched man traveling alone. The father forces him to strip naked at gunpoint and takes his clothes together with the cart. This distresses the boy, so the father returns and leaves the man’s clothes and shoes on the road, but the man has disappeared then.

As they are walking through a town inland, a man in a window shoots the father in the leg with an arrow. The father responds by shooting his assailant with the flare gun. Later, the father's condition worsens, and he dies. After the death of the father, the boy stays with his body for three days. The boy is approached by a man with his wife, a son and a daughter. He convinces the boy and takes him under his protection.

Likewise, *On the Beach* is another apocalyptic novel. It is published in 1957. It is written by the British author Nevil Shute after his emigration to Australia. The novel details the experiences of a mixed group of people in Melbourne as they await the arrival of deadly radiation spreading towards them from the Northern Hemisphere, following a nuclear war some years ago. As the radiation approaches, each person deals with impending death differently.

It can clearly be concluded that man is moving towards an apocalyptic situation, where he is going to face loveless life and distress in a land of no man or few cannibals and dacoits. Man is a social animal, but there will be no society.

Can war appease the heart of man? Will he welcome death to satisfy his arrogance? Can't he forget violence and help forming a peaceful and healthy society, universal brotherhood and friendship? Let's have universal brotherhood and think mor..... ■

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Ananya Mohakud, M.A. in English, Central University of Odisha, Dist. Koraput, Odisha.

# Heart Lamp: An Assessment of Banu Mushtaq's Representation of the Crude Reality of the Muslim Community of Southern India.

Alok Kumar  
Kusum Sharma  
Prakash Bhadury

The short story, “Heart Lamp” by Banu Mushtaq, has bagged the Booker Prize for literature in May 2025, which provides an unapologetic glimpse into the crude realities of the Muslim community of southern India in general and of Muslim women and girls in particular. Originally written in Kannada and translated by Deepa Bhashti, the paper attempts to eloquently capture women’s predicament and torture in the patriarchal systems. The methodology of analysis and comparative study also highlights the hypocrisy and hollowness of men against society. Reproductive rights, gender inequity, the weight of family honour, and the effects of male entitlement, frequently concealed by religious approval, are the major themes examined. Mushtaq reveals the hypocrisy and systematic disregard inside communal power systems, focusing on her experience as a journalist and lawyer who advocates for women’s rights. The characters in “Heart Lamp” exhibit subtle and profound forms of resistance in the face of cruelty, injustice, and apathy; these forms are frequently manifested through their inner lives, silent acts of defiance, or group unity. The stories provide a complex and sympathetic depiction of their experiences by fusing moving tales with sardonic flashes of humour. With its strong cultural and theological roots in the unique cultural and religious setting of South Indian Muslim communities, it offers a critical social commentary on the community.

**Keywords:** Community, Gender inequality, Justice, Muslim women’s lives, Patriarchy

## **Introduction:**

The collection of short stories “Heart Lamp,” which was expertly translated from Kannada by Deepa Bhashti, by Banu Mushtaq, provides a fascinating and frequently unsettling look into the life of Muslim women and girls in southern India. These twelve gripping tales, which span more than thirty years of Mushtaq’s prolific writing career, reveal the complex social realities of these communities, including societal and religious

expectations, economic vulnerabilities, and battles against deeply rooted patriarchal norms. The collection offers a complex mosaic of events rather than a single story, highlighting the extreme adversity these ladies endured as well as their extraordinary, frequently silent, fortitude. The short stories are a testament to Mushtaq's powerful voice and have received significant literary acclaim, including a longlisting for the International Booker Prize 2025. It provides readers with an uncompromising look at universal themes of gender, justice, and the enduring human spirit within a particular, vibrant cultural context.

The very first story, "StoneSlab for Shaista Mahal", is a pun on the Taj Mahal monument built to commemorate the great emperor's love for his wife. Shaista led a life of drudgery, apathy, and a loveless marriage that is full of home chores and rearing several babies and still the seventh baby is in the womb. Iftikhar, her husband, just makes a false show of love for his wife as if he is playing a role of love in a theatre every day in his home. the author is pained to see such ruthless drama in the lives of average women in this country, and few pay heed to their predicament.

Zeenath, the newly wed young protagonist, observes all this falsity as a close associate and family friend of Shaista as she upholds the shameless nature of Shaista's husband. At the end of the story, the sense of shame and guilt is heightened as the man who lost his beloved and faithful wife just a few days ago, is yet in wedlock with another tender girl of barely eighteen years of age and engaged shamelessly in baser pleasure in the afternoon in a closed place when his own grown-up daughter and all the six children are forced to be out of the room. The grown-up daughter looks after all the siblings in the yard so that her father is not disturbed or else, the consequence is understood by any average reader.

The irony is that the marriage was for looking after kids but otherwise, it was for his sexual gratification as on the said date and sudden decision to visit Shaista that followed the description of the room with dim bed lamp, closed windows, shut doors, the young woman's standing there with head bent and Zeenath's feeling of giddiness bear ample evidence of what was going on and worse still is the mindset of Iftikhar : "if a wife dies...one can get another wife"( 13). The eldest Asifa seemed to be unhappy while she was managing all her young brothers and sisters, including the last one, a two-month-old baby who lost his mother unfortunately and who would never know who his mother was! Zeenath played the role of a mother when she called her affectionately and gave a soft touch, 'her eyes overflowed with tears' (22)!

The protagonist herself was tired of such pretentious relationships, as she was hesitant to call her husband 'pati' and narrates her relationship with indirectness and with equivocal meaning to let the readers know the reality: "By now you must have understood what my relationship with Mujahid is "(8). How women are given apathetic treatment is clear when Asifa was denied education. In society, women's education is still not valued. The father feels: "A high school certificate is enough ...we can get her married off next year" (11). If such mentality continues, how the society and the community grow, and will women get



equality of opportunity? In an interview, the author has expressed her view clearly, as it is her duty as a woman and a lawyer to make an impact through creative writing for change and ensure justice for women across communities. On the occasion of the invitation, Asia was totally ignored in the family, and she was engaged in household chores to attend to the guests. The guests were sensitive enough to see the plight of women through this ordinary family incident.

The second story, "Fire Rain", speaks of the hypocrisy and hollowness of the people around Mutuwalli, the president of the local mosque committee. He, with a political background, dispenses justice for the Muslim community in the area, and he misuses his authority as: "He was under the illusion that he had the capacity to get all Muslim votes for a candidate he backed" (31). He enjoys the ancestral property for his own family, depriving the four sisters' share. When his most beloved youngest sister, Jameela, came with her husband to demand her legitimate share of parent's property, he swiftly moved to the mosque 'piercing the veils of the dawn mist (24); his body moved to the mosque with mind disturbed for the demand as he wants to deceive them all. He showers justice for others as mosque president, but his own sisters are the subject of his cheating and deceptions, shamelessly. Jameela frantically entreats: Anna, this is the share over which I have rights according to Allah and the Prophet's Shariat (24). Another sister, Sakeena, is a widow who took to tailoring to raise her three children, and is now in distress to marry her daughters off with no money for the ceremony. Legitimate demand sounds like audacity to him, which the author contrasted with the incident of a crow he witnessed to fall due to an electric shock, and several crows gathered there cawing ka kaka which sounded like it came out of their obligations. Some cawing seemed like a curse or trumpet of freedom. Circling of the crows around his head was a warning for him for justice, yet he was stubborn in his mind not to give in his share of property.

His sagacious wife did not want the daughters of the house is deprived as: "Hakdarta seto hangaar ka nuuh barse" ... If the one who has rights is deprived, a rain of fire will fall" (27). Sakeena begs for her son's job as an attendant in an institution in which Mutuwalli is a committee member. So many such cases gathered around him during the hour of public interaction time in which a destitute woman requests for money for her poor baby's treatment or an old man asks for help for his daughter's marriage. But Mutuwalli is unmoved of anyone's troubles and wants as: "A Saitan sniggered in a corner of the Mutuwalli's mind" (31). The story takes a turn to its height when Dawood, his right-hand man, churns out sensitive issues like "Islam' is being destroyed, Annavare...there is no respect left for Muslims..." (32) in the context of death of a drunkard painter, Nissar who died in a pond and the dead body was buried in a Hindu cemetery. Mutuwalli, so unperturbed at the plight of his own sisters' predicament, now shows great concern for injustice against Islam, for the dead body was not given a proper burial and he knew well that this issue would be a palatable sauce to cover up many of his corrupt designs, hence he joins his voice: "Che! What a terrible time...this poor fellow doesn't get a shroud and a decent burial (34).

For making the issue ultra-sensitive, Dawood contrasts the case against other communities citing that: “Mutawalli saheb, somehow – you are there to give us direction, that is why we still remain human- one day they will go to the court for something related to the Qur’an, that woman, Shah Bano’s case, they made it big deal and insulted us repeatedly.” (34). Mutuwalli saheb took all the pain to pursue the case and met the DC, a young Bengali Brahmin and a product of JNU, who knew well the messy community relations. But for Mutuwalli, it is an opportunity, and the pain is too little to gain popularity. That the case was false became obvious as the narrative progresses when the body was exhumed; it was draped in new clothes sprinkled with all sweet flowers and perfumes, and the funeral procession paraded through the locality, the said dead man shouted all sorts of abuse in a drunken state against the coffin bearers. Mutuwalli and his cohorts became motionless and pale, yet silent! That is the hypocrisy of the community leader and his associates, the author drew our attention to, and the incident is, perhaps, common to so many places, and none seems to be courageous enough to lay bare the facts for making amends to the mindsets of people.

The story “The Arabic Teacher and Gobi Manchurian” is narrated by an unnamed Muslim woman, a professional lawyer. She has compromised with the abusive male-dominated society, and she faced the patriarchy within her own family despite being lawyer. But surviving inside the womb of patriarchal society and after being treated as a subaltern, she reflects the strong character through her work by raising her voice against the criminals like the Arabic teacher, by filing a case against him and saving an innocent woman from the clutches of a criminal. Here, we can trace how the ‘Gobi Manchurian’ reflect a symbol of obsession for a person, which gives rise to a criminal act. The teacher’s obsession with a dish leads him to marry a woman who cannot cook to his expectations, and he starts mistreating the woman, which reflects a pathway towards violence, and it has been normalised by saying it a domestic violence. In a patriarchal society, violence can be normalised because women are suffering under the patriarchal societal structure and being subalterns, they cannot raise their voice. The woman has their voice and rights but women were forced to compromise for their survival. women are under marginalised group so they represent the voice of the voiceless in a male-dominated society, especially the backwards-class women.

Mushtaq’s “Red Lungis,” which is a dark and humorous look at the drastic methods a mother named Razia takes to deal with the heavy strain of childcare during summer vacation, is featured. Razia’s family is overrun with 18 children, including her own six children as well as the children of her younger sister and brothers-in-law. Her repressed anger, fuelled by the constant demands and loudness, leads her to a radical and startling plan: planning for all ten of the boys in the house, including her son, to be circumcised. The narrative emphasises the unrelenting and frequently ignored “woes mothers face” in a patriarchal culture where their emotional and domestic effort is largely unappreciated and unpaid. Razia’s choice to incapacitate some of the children to obtain “bed rest” for

herself, motivated by a perverted sense of self-interest, highlights the psychological costs of such a life.

Mushtaq adds a layer of dark comedy and ironic poetic justice to the sombre theme. A less fortunate child in the community who gets circumcised by a barber recovers swiftly, but Razia hires a surgeon to perform the “better” circumcision on her son. On the other hand, Razia’s son sustains an infected wound and needs to be admitted to the hospital, resulting in a moving and unsettling turn of events that quietly criticise social differences and the unanticipated outcomes of Razia’s desperate schemes. “Red Lungi” is a compelling and disturbing examination of female agency stretched to its breaking point, exposing the deep-seated animosity and extreme tactics that can result from structural oppression and the dearth of assistance for women in home responsibilities.

In the chapter “Be a Woman Once, Oh Lord”, Banu Mushtaq beautifully portray the real situation of a woman in society in her parents’ house as well as in her in-laws’ house. a woman is born to be a slave in a male-dominated society. She needs permission to take a breath because she is restricted to moving inside the four walls. here she was only praying to God for her freedom and questioning god why you created woman? In this story, she is explaining her real situation by saying, ‘My feet never touched the front yard, and stepped only on the floor inside the threshold of the house’ (199), which vividly reflects that she is a ‘Caged Bird inside’ in her own home. This echoes the painful effusion of Maya Angelou’s celebrated poem “The Caged Bird”:

The caged bird sings/with a fearful trill /of things unknown  
But longed for still /and his tune is heard  
On the distant hill/for the caged bird sings of freedom (Maya 16).

By contrasting the imprisonment and agony of the “caged bird” with the freedom of the “free bird,” the poem draws attention to the differences in experiences and the desire for escape. With this picture, Angelou explores identity, resiliency, and the quest for self-discovery in the face of social constraints and the quest for freedom.

Now, with a heavy heart, a woman is expressing her inner pain, disappointment, her wishes and her dreams which she left in her mother’s place after her marriage. She just lost her original identity even her name got lost after her marriage. she is now in search of her existence and identity; “while my identity was melting away. Even my name got lost. Do you know what my new name was? His wife. To my surprise, he desired my body, whose power to bounce back even I was unaware of.” (201).Now she is someone’s wife, and she is now a doll in her husband’s hands. This particular event can be traced in the famous work by Henrik Ibsen’s “A Doll’s House.

This draws parallel with “The Handmaid’s Tale” by Atwood’s where the author shows through the character of the Handmaid that extreme oppression, dehumanisation, and the total deprivation of their identities and rights are all features of The Handmaid’s Tale. They are relegated to their biological role as reproductive organs, existing only to

bear offspring for Gilead's ruling elite. This is a summary of their complex pain. The actions of handmaids are strictly regulated, closely watched, and need authorisation. They are unable to walk by themselves or go wherever they choose. Public and private forms of misogyny interact in *The Handmaid's Tale*, as they work together to oppress and control women. Women are kept inside the four walls of the home by the public version of patriarchy, which denies them the opportunity to pursue their desired careers or participate in any kind of social life."I am a prisoner of soul whose doors and windows are shut. I did not see my Amma or Appa or my younger brother ever again. His greed for money swallowed all our attachment, love and affection." (203). Now her husband is demanding dowry from her parents, and if they are unable to pay, then he will not allow her to meet her parents. Now her soul is also trapped, and there is darkness everywhere because she is helpless. She is facing both mental and physical trauma. Now she is questioning God, what mistake she has made and asking for solace; "Grant me one solace at least. What is my fault in all this, tell me" (203)?

After some days, she is experiencing the most beautiful phase of life because she is going to be a mother. A daughter was born, and she felt that her eyes were like her Amma's. After her daughter's birth, she is trying to forget her bad days. now she is happy and spending a beautiful moment with her daughter. Now she has the news that a tumour is growing inside her stomach and the doctor advised her to undergo an urgent surgery. after the surgery was over, she is now in the hospital for further recovery. After some days, her husband asked, 'Give me the neck chain you are wearing' (206). She is in a traumatic situation and was confused why his husband was asking for the chain, then her husband explained to her that he will sell the chain and he is getting married again. He will gift that chain to the new girl, and at that particular moment, he dares to question her husband and refuses to give the chain. she questioned her husband first time why you are getting married to another woman, then he replied that, "I don't wish to waste my life with a beggar like you. What is the use of a sick person?" (207). After listening to her husband's words, her eyes were filled with tears. She was silent from within.

Now she asked questions to people but they advised her that, "look, you are not well. Let him get married again. one voice said, 'Arey, this is all very well, he is a man, not just one, he can marry four, what can you ask?'" (207). So, this is the reality of a male-dominated society where they have the right to make mistakes, but a woman has no right to speak anything, even though she cannot raise her voice for her rights, only reason is that woman is being treated as a marginalised group. Now she is helpless and praying to God by saying, "If you were to build the world again, to create males and females again, do not be like an inexperienced potter. Come to earth as a woman, Prabhu! Be a woman once, oh Lord!" (208). Thus, the story stands as a powerful and significant work in contemporary literature. Its critical gaze stems from Mushtaq's unflinching honesty, deep empathy for her characters, and keen socio-political insight. The narrative is celebrated not only for its

literary merit but also for its cultural and political importance, giving voice to marginalised experiences and challenging prevailing storytelling, for the author narrates in her interview what made her write such poignant stories:

The 1970s were a decade of movements in Karnataka – the Dalit movement, farmers’ movement, language movement, rebellion movement, women’s struggles, environmental activism, and theatre, among others, had a profound impact on me. My direct engagement with the lives of marginalised communities, women, and the neglected, along with their expressions, gave me the strength to write. Overall, the social conditions of Karnataka shaped me (Banu Mushtaq and Bhasthi).

However, the collection’s enduring message is not one of abject despair. Instead, it subtly showcases the quiet battles fought and the small victories achieved. Whether through a woman’s unwavering maternal love that pulls her back from the brink, collective solidarity in challenging male authority, or simply the persistent inner lives and emotional resilience of characters who refuse to be entirely erased, Mushtaq demonstrates that agency, though often constrained, is never absent. The book challenges readers to look beyond stereotypes and appreciate the nuanced complexities of these women’s lives, underscoring the universal nature of their struggles for dignity, justice, and self-determination. The social reality of Muslim communities, as experienced by their women, is a complex tapestry of profound hardship interwoven with remarkable strength. It is a call for understanding rather than just sympathy, urging a critical examination of the systems that perpetuate suffering and recognising the enduring light that flickers within those who navigate such challenging realities.

### **Conclusion:**

“Heart Lamp” by Banu Mushtaq provides a compelling and profoundly perceptive conclusion about the social reality of Muslim communities, especially when viewed through the experiences of women in southern India. The collection concludes that although deeply rooted patriarchal structures—which frequently misinterpret religious principles, economic dependence, and social expectations—cause great suffering and restrict Muslim women’s agency, their spirit of fortitude, silent resistance, and unwavering humanity continues to be a resolute “heart lamp”—a tiny but essential spark against the darkness. Drawing from her experience as a journalist and women’s rights attorney, Mushtaq’s stories act as a critical mirror, capturing the frequently “hellish and brutal” realities of impoverished, illiterate Muslim women. They draw attention to the ways that male dominance, which is occasionally even justified by a perverted view of religious authority, leads to a variety of oppressions, ranging from physical and mental abuse to control over reproductive rights and education. The stories reveal the widespread influence of establishments such as the madrasa and mosque, as well as the social forces that put “family honour” ahead of personal welfare. Women in Muslim societies face a complicated social reality that is stitched together with incredible courage and extreme adversity. Instead of merely expressing compassion, it



calls for a critical analysis of the structures that sustain suffering and acknowledges the enduring light that shines within those who deal with such difficult circumstances. ■

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Dr. Alok Kumar, Registrar, ITM Vocational University, Vadodara, Gujarat.

Dr. Kusum Sharma, Assistant Professor of English, IIMT University, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh.

Dr. Prakash Bhadury, Professor of English, IIMT University, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh.



Felicitations to poet Bijay Mohan Roy in a ROCK PEBBLES program  
at Lohia Academy, Bhubaneswar, Odisha

## SHORT STORY

# The Lost Spring

Original Odia : **Rohit Kumar Dash**

Translation : Sukomal Dash

Sudha Bose was surprised when she heard the announcement of a name Sushital in the poetry recitation programme of the University . Sudha comes from a Bengali family. Since long they have shifted to Sambalpur from Kolkata. No one can assume her to be a Bengali from her get up, gesture, posture or even dress-up. Her grandpa had shifted here during the partition to safeguard the family but her father was born and brought up in this soil. Her father did bear a few traces of the Bengali traits but in case of Sudha, those too had vanished and she boasted of being a daughter of the soil and a pure Sambalpuria.

But how come today she was as startled by this name? She felt as if the name could be owned only by a Bengali. She does come across such unique names in her Bengali clan but seldom does she stumble upon such names in Odia families. She assumed in her mind that Sushital has to be a Bengali chap and to verify the truth of her presumption she sat against her will till the end of the programme.

It was five in the evening when the programme ended. She might miss the bus to Sambalpur if she delayed much. But she has to meet Sushital by any means. Once the session was over, she hastened to the gate of the hall and looked at Sushital.

The chap is not a fellow to be missed in the crowd - about six feet three inches tall, having a macho figure, and despite swarthy colour, a countenance to be reckoned in a herd, hanging a sweet smile over his lips and a pair of brunette moustache above them. Of course a tiny dark mole he carried beside his eye lid resembling a dot of \_kjal\_ usually smeared by mothers on that spot of kids to avert evil eyes. Sushital could easily be located amidst the crowd with his denim blue jeans and peach coloured crew neck T shirt. With a pair of three red striped Adidas white sneaker, he was approaching smilingly along with a few friends.

How to stop him? How Sudha would address him? She was clueless if Sushital was senior or junior to her or a batch mate. Usually the hostel inmates were more familiar with each other in Jyoti Vihar. Sudha, being a day-scholar hardly knew much of any boys,



except only of course a few, who belonged either to her department or who moved to and fro between Sambalpur and Jyoti Vihar campus in the same bus she boarded. Where did she have the time to develop acquaintance even? The whole time she only ran either for the classroom or to the bus-stop.

Oh here! Sushital is chatting with someone and once she missed this golden chance he would vanish. Sudha approached him and said “Hello!” Sushital lowering his head greeted her with a “Hello” and waited for Sudha to speak up. But, Sudha felt as if her lips were sealed. She only gazed at him.

“You want something?” Asked Sushital.

Mustering her courage Sudha said, “Yes, a bit of personal talk.”

“OK then, see you soon,” Sushital took leave of his friends and signalled at Sudha to follow.

Silently as they walked down, they reached the bus stop at the out post. Sushital broke the silence, “Didn’t you wish to tell me something?”

Again Sudha gathered courage to tell, “Today you read a wonderful poem.”

“Thanks” . Is that all you wished to tell after we had walked down this far?” He asked.

Sudha giggled and said, “No, I have to speak much more, but let’s reserve them for a next meet.” Sushital was surprised.

‘What could it be that Sudha wished to tell but couldn’t . Hers was the right age for a girl to fall in love.’ Sushital, even though was anxious to hear some thing like that, not a single word slipped off the tongue of Sudha and before the conversation could proceed further, the campus bus arrived. Hurriedly Sudha arranged her saree, bade him farewell, with a word to meet him the next day at that very spot and at that very time. She waved at him and boarded the red government bus.

Sushital had never waited for anybody till date. But the next day, he had reached the bus-stop much before the clock struck five and waited for Sudha. The conversation of the previous day had not furthered much. His anxiety was mounting to learn what exactly Sudha had intended to speak. The loss of his previous night’s sleep was due to many such anticipations and possibilities.

A few friends who had noticed both of them sitting at the bus stop had cooked up a story and missed not a chance to tease him. They even indicated that the matter had been heading towards an affair. Sushital didn’t have any such prior experience so he only waited for the course the events might take.

Sudha came after sometime after her classes were over. The zephyr of the Springtime had messed up her hair. She tidied her ruffled hair, brought out a hanky from her vanity bag, wiped her face and smeared a pinch of face powder on her face looking into the tiny mirror attached to the bag.

Until then, Sudha was not aware that, Sushital had been waiting for her at a corner of the bus stop holding a magazine. Sudha flushed a bit. However as she got over, Sushital started, “Didn’t you wish to tell me something? Gosh! We are yet to be introduced. By the by, I am Sushital, in 2nd year English. I come from Jharsuguda. My dad was a lecturer teaching English. So I was allured to the subject instinctively. Of course I was confused between English and Odia. But dot at the last moment I decided in favour of English. And yourself?” He looked at Sudha.

Without looking at Sushital she said, “I am Sudha Bose. Don’t go by the surname to consider me a Bengali. Of course my grandpa was from Bengal but my dad was born here, at Sambalpur. And I am a proud Sambalpuria. You may be surprised to learn that, I could be one of those who cannot speak proper Bengali. Ok — I am in 1st year, Sociology.”

“That means you are junior to me.”

“Oh yes! You are senior to me. Namaskar.”

“Didn’t you wish to tell me something? Just see, you left me in such suspense that I couldn’t sleep last night.”

Sudha, raising her eye brow, asked, “Is that really true?” Sudha in that posture appeared highly romantic. An attractive pair of dimples danced on her cheeks to agitate Sushital.

Sudha said, “You know, I intensely love your name.” At once Sushital wished to ask, ‘Only my name, not me?’ However he restrained himself.

Silently he kept listening to Sudha. “You know, only Bengalis choose such names. I am yet to find this name in Odisha, except yours. That day, at the poetry recitation programme, I got interested listening to your name Sushital and was curious to find out if you too came from Bengal. That’s why I was anxious to meet you.”

Sushital said, “Just a few moments before didn’t you claim yourself to be a Sambalpuria and where from did this love for Bengal crop up suddenly?”

Sudha answered, “When Did I claim myself to be Bengali? True, I am born in a Bengali family but at my heart I am a pure Odia. Still, doesn’t one rear a pull for one’s own clansmen?” Sushital smiled. Before he could utter a word further, the red government bus blew its horn and Sudha bidding a bye had left for Sambalpur.

Sushital possibly wished not to fall in such a love affair and spoil his career. He was aware of many senior boys who were yet to clear their semesters for being tangled in such affairs. They were still in unauthorised possession of hostel rooms and the juniors were adjusting with their friends painstakingly.

His relation with Sudha couldn't proceed beyond the formal greetings like hello, hey, bye bye. One day his semesters were over and Sushital left bidding farewell to the campus. He couldn't meet Sudha despite his wishes. Then his professional career started as a lecturer in a government college.

Sushital Mishra, of late is a prominent poet of Odisha, presiding over countless literary functions. Today on the occasion of the Bhubaneswar Pustak Mela when a youngster poet was announced as Sushital to read out a poem, Sushital Mishra, president of the session was curious. Until the end, was brooding over his past days of the Jyoti Vihar campus. Sudha had once told him, "If ever I am blessed with a son, I'll name him Sushital." Could this boy be the same one?

No sooner did the poetry recitation programme was over then he got off the chair and hastened at Sushital anxiously and appreciating his poem said, "Your poem was very nice, My Son! What's the name of your father?"

"Samarendra Bose," said Sushital.

"And your mother?" He asked to verify.

"Sudharani Bose."

"Where is your mom these days?"

"In the next world," replied Sushital, sinking his head.

Sushital felt as if the earth beneath his feet was caving in and someone held him before he fell down. Hugging Sushital with copious tears rolling down his cheeks, he felt the warmth of Sudha in his arms. ■

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The author Rohit Kumar Dash can be reached at [rohitchash28@gmail.com](mailto:rohitchash28@gmail.com)

# The Silent Shape of Memories

Madhumita Chanda

The blue palette of melting hues. Strokes of golden ochre, red and amber dotted with white-specked birds, on its expansive breast, flapping homewards. Sudha cupped her small face in her palm. Her gaze was lost somewhere in the far sky; indistinct murmurs buzzed in her ears.

In these forty years, nature has remained unspoilt, unlike humans. Man has consciously broken down into disconnected islands, with channels of uncertainty curling around them.

She heaved a deep sigh.

“She “was begging in the street next to the main hospital. Atri didn’t recognise her at first. He thought the woman with matted hair and in a dirty saree bore a resemblance to Moni. He was in a hurry to meet the cardiologist. But he stopped and turned around. To his dismay, he found her staggering with a gangrenous foot. How can she be Moni? When she called him in her inimitable soft voice, his doubts swirled in the air like a hollow shaft of a feather. It was Moni, of course. He rushed her to the emergency ward and informed us about her dire condition. The doctors attended to her visible wounds but failed to halt the unkind spread. She left us, in the wee hours...” Ma broke off. The words were lost amidst a myriad of emotions.

When did she last think of those carefree days spent with Moni *Masi* in Kolkata? Did she even ask Ma about her well-being in the last twenty years? Sudha felt a little uneasy.

But how could she?  
She has been so busy.  
Always.

In the maddening pace of life, interspersed with unanticipated hitches, it was a challenge to give a thought to herself or her needs! One day began, only to fade into the next. Imperceptibly. She got up early in the morning, rustled up a quick breakfast for all, and dashed to school with two daughters in tow. A bagful of homework usurped her evenings.

She watered the plants, cooked, cleaned and hummed lullabies to the children. And went to bed only to be startled by the deceptive alarm the following morning!

She loved to paint. When she dipped her brush in the glass bowl, the vibrant colours made dreamlike patterns in the quiet water, as beautiful as her paintings. If not more! She also loved to read. Strings of words lured her to a world of unspeakable joy.

From where can she source books or a canvas? She wondered.

The colony where they lived was reasonably far from human civilisation. Life was like the meandering river, which lost its course in the baked red earth.

A mobile phone was a luxury then. She had to cover a distance of twelve kilometres to place a call, which did not happen often. She had no clue of Moni's whereabouts. Otherwise, she would have written to her. She reasoned.

She had promised.

Does it sound a little selfish? Sudha had no answer.

What if the past gathered dust and lies were buried under the towers of a newly built citadel? Her memories were like Moni. She lost her home when the old house with a pre-colonial facade was pulled down to make way for a modern high-rise apartment. But did she have a home? Unlike her Kona *masi*, Sudha always found her at her *dadu* grandpa's house. The small four-by-six-foot verandah was her world. Moni and Sudha spent most of their time in the verandah that hung over the bazaar.

Colourful shops dotted the pavements as far as one could see. Sudha spent hours ogling at rainbow-coloured bangles, strips of embellished clips, ribbons, hair bands, soft toys, and bottled candies. Was there anything that they did not sell? People jostled to pick the wares of their choice. Sudha was not sure what Moni searched for in the sun-warmed narrow streets.

The adjoining neighbourhood was a chaotic wonderland.

Nestled to the shop was the half-stripped road with its belly slit open and arteries torn asunder. Iron girdles reared their head through the gaping wounds. Bags of cement, jutting steel pipes and mounds of stone chips with swirling dust reaching up to the sky made it impossible to see what lay beyond.

When she asked *Dadu*, he had rolled his eyes, "They are constructing the metro railway. Trains will soon run through the innards of the city." "When, Dadu? The next time we are here?" She implored. His toothless smile broadened until his eyes were mere slits. "No, *didibhai*, it will take another five years. The Kolkata Metro will be India's first underground rail, similar to the London tube system". "Will the sky be topaz and the trees emerald again? They have lost their colour and look lifeless!" Sudha asked impatiently. Dadu nodded his head and walked away. Whatever that meant!

Moni called her. "Sudha, come here. Can you see that man? Over there!" Her face glowed with bizarre happiness. Sudha looked hard but could not see anyone.

She turned to face Moni. Her face was like Ma Durga, and her skin was that of beaten bronze. A mass of curly hair framed her chiselled features. A big, round vermilion *bindi* shone on her forehead. "There is no one, Moni." Moni blushed. "He is your *Mesho* uncle and has come to take me home." Moni did not seem to have heard. She hummed in her silky voice a few verses from Gitanjali.

*Spring murmurs eagerly  
At my window this day,  
The lazy bee buzzes on  
Circling the garden lawn  
This is a day for reposing...*

Moni had a euphonious voice. It was a daily ritual to sing bhajans at sundown. While her dainty fingers danced on the rids, her eyes remained half-closed. The purity of her heart glistened on her face, as Dadu looked on. His moist eyes shifted between the idols on the marble throne before him and his daughter.

Sudha dashed towards the staircase. "Mesho is coming," she panted. Ma pulled her aside and shook her hard. "What are you saying?" Her face bore a stony expression. "Go and play with your dolls". Why has no one ever discussed Mesho other than Moni? Sudha thought to herself.

"When will she come to her senses? The divorce case is on, and we are struggling to gather proof to claim the jewellery and the kind we gave her in dowry." Dida grandma hollered from the kitchen. "This is why Khoka thrashes her often," she fumed. Sudha was only ten. She did not understand most of it. But why did Uncle beat her? Moni was older than him. And was not mischievous like her!

The faraway sky was a blur. All of a sudden.

The asphalt glistened in the light cast by the adjoining lamp posts lining up the main street. "Didibhai, you can take a ride this summer. The metro rail is the new lifeline of this old city." Dadu smiled. Five years had gone by in a wink. The sky was limp grey. The trees had been wrenched out to make room for more skyscrapers and shopping centres; their untidy heads crumpled the sky to a fistful of hope. Sudha was in the Intermediate College. She looked around for Moni. Of course, she must be in the verandah. And she was; the unremarkable baggage with no claimant. Sudha hugged her so hard that she winced. The bare skin of her right shoulder was blue-black. Moni smiled and kissed her forehead lightly. "Why don't you come often to our house?" From somewhere, Uncle stormed in with a belt swaying like a black serpent, ready to strike, "Be careful, Sudha. Your Moni has lost her senses. Stay away from her." He warned.



“Your father gifted me two shawls last year. I have made floral patterns on them. Do you want to see it?” Moni did not seem to have heard.

I followed her quietly into the room. Moni was so quiet. Like the lizard in the corner of the yellowing wall.

She opened her suitcase and placed the shawls on the low table next to the divan. My jaw dropped open. Before me lay beautifully embroidered pashmina shawls with crimson, yellow, and off-white threadwork, the warp and woof of her dreams.

“Moni, how did you get hurt?”

She kept the shawls in the suitcase with much affection. “I told your Baba to bring a plain shawl for me from Kashmir. He remembered and brought two instead of one.” She did not seem to have heard! Sudha struggled with the silence.

Dadu won the court case after battling for twelve long years. Dida ran to the famous Kali temple to acknowledge her blessings. Moni did not, after all, lose much. Her in-laws had to return the jewellery. Justice delayed, but not denied. The crumbling picture of Moni in all her finery was accepted as evidential proof in the court. Moni’s future was secure, now that she had the ornaments. Happiness flooded the house.

Moni rummaged through the wooden drawer for days!

After the vacation, as Sudha boarded the train for home, she pleaded with her mother, “Ma, why did Moni get divorced? Marriage is a sacred union of two souls, not just bodies. It is meant for the continuation of the family and practice of dharma. In Hindu tradition, there is no concept of divorce. Once married, a couple is wedded for life. Isn’t it, Ma?” What unfolded was more magical than any bedtime story. There was love, but no ‘happily ever after.’ Ma heaved a deep sigh. “When I got married, Moni, my cousin, was in college. A young gentleman was engaged to help her with the science subjects. Moni excelled under his care and guidance. I don’t know why he was terminated suddenly, and Moni was hastily married into a family of great wealth.”

“Was Moni in love with him?” Sudha asked quietly.

“I don’t know. But he had expressed his desire to marry her and was booted out. One month had hardly passed after her marriage when Bijon, Moni’s husband, informed your Dadu over the phone that they had hospitalised her as she was mentally unstable and did not wish to take her back. Kona rushed to the hospital with Dadu. The physician told them that though he was not very sure of her mental health, she was brought in with multiple injuries, a broken rib and a fractured elbow. It took her months to heal, and when she finally came back, she was slapped with a legal notice of separation. The opposing party claimed that Moni was mad, hence unfit for conjugal life. Bijon married soon after... world’s wealthier people are offered a cornucopia of choice” Ma paused. “Don’t you worry; she has enough to see her through...”

As our knowledge expands and understanding deepens, we recognise that some of the old customs and norms are mere taboos that limit our freedom. It was good to see her uncles as trailblazers. Sudha's younger uncle married his beloved, who was two years older than him. The elder one, Khoka, settled for a clandestine alliance as her paramour was unlettered and raised on the fringes of the so-called cultured society. Sudha's chest swelled with unspeakable pride. Moni was the eldest and the quietest. Why was Moni deprived of her rights? Why wasn't she allowed to pursue her studies and marry only when and whom she wanted to? Over the years, a list of dos and don'ts was subconsciously planted into her life. Nevertheless, new waves of emancipated thoughts rippled on the turbulent lines of patriarchy.

She does not know why Dadu was sad most of the time. Sudha was not sure, but she discerned a shadow of guilt on his face. He was a man of few words and mostly kept to himself. One morning, he quietly slipped into his final abode of peace. The family disintegrated like a stale piece of flatbread.

The last time Sudha visited the place, the ugly roots of the banyan tree had bound the entire house in a stifling embrace. Deep cracks ran through the red cemented floor and up the colourless walls.

"Sudha, my darling! It is so good to see you after so many years. I am leaving for Gwalior tomorrow with Khoka." Moni smiled, her eyes were sombre. Light breeze flirted with her hair.

"And Dida. Where will she go?" Sudha asked unwittingly.

"She will stay here, at Kona's place."

They have been splitting the household essentials and the non-essential items for a long time.

The promoter had promised them a flat. Strangely, after Dadu left, nobody was too keen. Money exchanged hands. No one knew how! Non-inheritance of the property wasn't unheard of, especially when Moni had her *streedhan*. These two words imply that the property over which a woman has absolute ownership is her jewellery.

Uncle did not have a stable job with a family to support. How will he accommodate Moni? Sudha wondered. Nevertheless, I felt proud of his thoughtfulness and sense of duty.

"Khoka has asked me to take only the jewellery and nothing else. He told me that it was for my security. But I shall take the shawls too. How is your baba? I don't know when I shall come again. I wanted to meet him."

"I shall write to you, Moni," Sudha promised.

Moni was indeed *Lakshmi Sawrupa*, bountiful and blessed like the Goddess of wealth.

Immediately after, Khoka left his job and started a new business in the heart of Gwalior city. It was because of Moni. Her presence in their house brought in all the material prosperity they could think of.

Moni disappeared. One day. Mysteriously.

Khoka frantically searched for her but to no avail. He lodged an F.I.R. at the local police station, and left no stone unturned. He loved his sister so much that he went on a fast. His friends rushed to his palatial house to comfort him. His pain was so palpable that it left everyone numb. He wrote to Kona and his younger brother and informed them about Moni.

After a couple of weeks of mourning and mayhem, Uncle arranged for an elaborate shradh ceremony.

The worth of a particular object or a person depends on its necessity at a given time and situation. And, its value depends on the quality to satisfy the needs of the concerned person.

Sudha was inconsolable. They could have waited or searched for a few more days. Moni could not have vanished like the rabbits in a magician's cap!

How could she have forgotten Moni? With the commendable understanding that she had in the field of psychology, it wasn't a case of motivated forgetting. This theory suggests that people can block unpleasant, painful, or traumatic memories if there is a motivation to do so. Perhaps it was 'memory substitution'. This technique suggests that people can substitute a negative memory by redirecting their consciousness toward an alternative memory. Her memory of Moni was not that of loss and pain. It was a blueprint for unlimited happiness.

"The doctor has sent the body to the morgue on Atri's request. The cremation will take place tomorrow evening. You may come, in case you are free." Maa concluded.

It was a matter of four hours.

Sudha decided to take a day off.

She wanted to meet Moni.

Leaving her children in the care of her neighbour, she took the first train to Kolkata.

Sudha pushed her way through the throng jostling near the morgue. She was in a crowd of impoverished and beggarly people covered in rags. So these despicable people have not spared the morgues. Begging has become quite a paying profession! It is the moral duty of people to help the weak, the hungry and the suffering. But by dispensing alms as a charity, one does not help them. They must be apprehended and taught some craft, and made to work.

She saw Ma, Kona and Atri leaning against the creaking gate. She went and stood next to them.

The radiant afternoon sky reminded her of summers on the verandah, eating ice cream with Moni after a day spent by the small lake. She looked up at the huge Gulmohar tree with concrete feet. Where were its roots? The orange and yellow speckled flowers sat like a crown on the umbrella-shaped top. The green leaves competed with the blossoms to wave back.

A sudden commotion broke her reverie. Two burly men threw open the rusty iron gate and pushed the trolley unceremoniously towards them. Before they could move closer to take a look, the beggarly crowd surged like a wave towards Moni. But they were quiet like the tombstone. Some caressed her forehead, cold lips and frozen cheeks. A few picked up the trampled flowers from the street and placed them on her swollen feet. It was a far cry from what people generally saw at bus depots, railway stations, on the streets or in religious places. Values cannot be directly observed. Rather, they are made evident in the actions expressed by the people in a given sociocultural and temporal context.

One turned to make way for us, “Many belong to good families, but being neglected and abandoned by their children or relatives, they beg. She was from a humble background, though she never told us. She had a melodious voice. People gave alms freely. She lived in a shanty close to the railway station. Only if she hadn’t contracted the infection...” She sighed.

I took a step forward. Flies were swarming over the rotting wounds. It was difficult to believe that she was Moni. I touched her skin, so cold. She looked like a frightened bird with broken wings, battered by the unkind wind and rain. Her eyes were half-closed, upturned towards the sky in a silent prayer. They were stony, brimming with unfulfilled dreams. Her chapped lips were partly opened, recounting an unfinished tale.

She had been a linnet all her days, the tiniest one born to enthrall. Only upon seeing her corpse did I realise that all that was her noble spirit, and I had been in love with her soul all these years. To the soul comes the light of heaven. She was a shadow of the past. ■

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Dr. Madhumita Chanda, Asst. Prof., Heritage Institute of Technology, Kolkata, West Bengal.

## POEMS

### Blue Heaven

Saroj K. Padhi

I asked the seer seated  
under the village banyan tree,  
“Where is the blue heaven?”  
He kept mum, urging  
the spirit to awaken;  
a voice rose from within  
beckoning to many doors  
inside the heart  
where joy lay in plenty  
in impressions etched on its floors  
of cliffs, streams and sandy shores.

Lying on beach with eyes  
trying to outreach the pole star,  
the dew-drenched sands  
into us, spreading a sweet fire!

Blue heaven is a such a drug  
that with light of divine love  
your soul doth hug .

It doesn't lie behind tallest mountains  
or beyond floppy clouds of the sky,  
rather in intense love, beneath the eye.  
It lies in love of stars  
in their blinking eyes  
in flowers' amorous sighs!

It's the music of fountains,  
a lullaby for Moon-lit trees  
It's Spring's enchanting breeze  
poised inside giving life a new lease. ■

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✉ skpadhi407@gmail.com

### Spring Sorrow

Original Odia : **Bishnu Dalai**

Translation : Saroj K Padhi

Where has Spring been held up?  
In calamity or evolution?  
In ecstasy or agony?  
Or someone has arrested her  
in some ugly prison?  
Or has she lost her way  
in to the dark web of some illusion?  
Spring ! Spring!—  
the call spreads from earth to horizon.  
The song of koel whimpers  
in the poet's invocation!  
The Spring is helpless, charmless  
and out of tune in the midst  
of the tug of war  
between poet and the season.

Poetry today is only a stream of pathos.

The village has lost its pristine beauty  
in clutches of concrete construction;  
dust has lost its wetness  
and *mahula* has lost its fragrance  
being away from breeze's soft touches.

Comraderie is distanced from colors  
Spring is worried about venom-ridden  
belief.  
Morning of colors is replaced by blood-bath.

Geographical borders are infested  
with hunger;  
Globalization has put flora and fauna  
in danger.

The primordial desire to feel  
Spring is eternal,

Spring belongs to lovers,  
flowers, letters,  
to mirrors of eyes romantic  
and to possibilities.

Come dear poet,  
Let's search for Spring  
from trees bare  
that up to sky blankly stare  
from heat of naked tops of mountain  
from missiles and death-trapped men. ■

☎ 9437669390

## The Shirt

P. Raja

Hanging loose  
From a hanger,  
My shirt  
Dances to the tune of  
The whirling fan above.  
What a comic scene  
It creates in daylight!  
Oh, what a weird scene  
It makes in the dim night lamp!  
A smile flits  
Across my face  
On both occasions,  
For I know my shirt.  
When I move out, I know,  
I will be its tight hanger.  
The dancing shirt  
Will forget its dance.  
Curtailed is its freedom.  
Doubtless, my shirt  
Will deem it a shame  
To hang from  
a human frame. ■

✉ rajbusybee@gmail.com

## Bug

Original in Odia : Srihari Dhal

Translation : Saroj K Padhi

A tiny bug can eat into  
the interior of a big timber.  
We ignore such an ordinary bug  
which keeps sharpening its fangs  
beneath our hate;  
it weaves the web of conspiracy  
with its net  
and goes on digging secret tunnel  
into the core of the heart.  
It robs the bone of its stamina  
and strips the mind of belief.  
A trifle bug eats into the legs of the chair  
and into the audacity of the crown.

Slowly it assumes the form  
of an extraordinary foe  
in eyes of fear:  
it robs us of sleep and calm breath.  
A trifle bug eats into the legs of the chair  
and the audacity of the crown.  
An ordinary bug  
appears extraordinary  
from the battle ground. ■

☎ 8117081906

## Fire

Debendra Kumar Bauri

I am fire-  
In every cell of my being  
Fiery particles spark and blaze  
If I explode  
I am a bomb  
If I spark revolt

I am the flame of revolution  
When I glow  
I become the guiding light

I dwell  
Like lightning veiled in thunder  
At times, I sleep-  
An innocent child Gunpowder curled  
In a matchbox bed

I am torrid-  
Burning on the stove  
And also In the belly's hunger

I am the fire  
Of the unhei  
That welcomes the first cry  
In the labour room

I am the desperate flame  
Flickering in the funeral pyre  
Bidding farewell to the dead

I am the Phoenix-  
Rising from my scorching ashes  
It is my passion  
That anoints me  
With the power to ignite  
My infinite willpower

I turn my doubts  
Into wood,  
And my fears into coal,  
I keep burning ceaselessly  
Even after the storm tears  
Everything down  
I am the unextinguished  
Divine flame of hope  
I am the fire. ■

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✉ debendra.bauri2018@gmail.com

## A Soul on the Shore:

**Khushnuma Anwari**

Sitting on a sea shore,  
Staring at the sky;  
My heart ached,  
My soul wanted to die.

I was lost in my thoughts,  
About the feelings which were unknown;  
Maybe I was a fool,  
To think them as my own.

Fool of you to think,  
Love is the only feeling;  
But oh dear, you don't know,  
how a broken heart craves healing.

It's hard to hold the tears,  
Also embarrassing to let it go;  
I'm sinking in the depth of my life,  
When I should've been swimming  
with a flow.

The urge to scream and cry,  
is suppressed by hesitance;  
But what if we just disappear,  
Leaving no search & evidence.

It's still unknown to me,  
How it feels to live at home;  
We ain't social sweetheart,  
We share us through unseen poems. ■

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✉ khushnumapkanwari090@gmail.com



## No Endless Sorrow, No Boundless Joy

Sayeed Abubakar

(1)

Sorrow entered, so cold and deep,  
As if it came the soul to keep.  
It seemed it never would depart,  
A shadow cast upon the heart.  
But then came joy, so bright, so fair,  
It lit the world with gentle care.  
It felt as though it ne'er would cease,  
A time of light, a time of peace.

(2)

The sweet Spring came with blooms anew,  
With skies of gold and morning dew.  
The birds began their songs to raise—  
It seemed we'd live in endless days.  
But Winter swept across the land,  
With frozen breath and icy hand.  
The leaves were gone, the flowers too,  
The birds were still, the sky turned blue.

O Traveler, choose your path with grace,  
Each road will fade without a trace.  
No grief remains, nor joy can stay—  
All things must pass along the way. ■

✉ sayeedabubakar1972@gmail.com

## Crawling Insects

Debendra Sahu

Perhaps inside us  
Dangling loosely our fragile beliefs,  
Swinging from this side to the other side  
Our frail yet dissipated faiths,  
Screaming like jangling bells

through holy books  
Preaching gospels to choose goodness  
over sins.

But in reality, we burn far-off farms  
Down the forlorn mountains  
Pull and drain out the fetus unborn  
In the filthy, yet dancing streams,  
In the name of wars and battles  
Pillage cities after villages,  
Depriving of guileless lives of infants  
In their mothers' arms,  
We don't take note of then, on our faces  
The crawling insects of sins.

They say,  
We have free will and are wise humans  
Always with a choice or an option  
To choose between gems and pebbles,  
Then how we always  
Ignore the goodness over the horrible sins! ■

✉ deven.cay@gmail.com

## You

Pranit Rath

In the age of dreamless nights,  
All I longed for was solace.  
How maddened I was by the starless skies!  
For a twinkle of touch amused me no less.

Your voice it was that I held so dear,  
When no word of mine could reach  
their shore.  
Oh! It was you who lent me an ear,  
For the silent hours could deafen me  
no more!

In tattered shoes and empty bellies,

We roam and reign the City of Rain.  
“My days, written with your relish”—  
What more is needed to ease my pain!

Feathered you! Oh bard of my light!  
My once-dimmed world beams again  
at your sight. ■

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✉ rathpranit@gmail.com

## After Writing a Poem

Debendra Lal

After writing a poem  
I thought the world's pain would fade away...

After writing a poem  
I thought the rains would pour down,  
the earth would smile,  
and crops would grow...

After writing a poem  
I thought hunger would vanish,  
and bellies would no longer wail...

After writing a poem  
I thought what else was left to say?  
Hadn't I written everything?

Finally, after writing a poem  
I prepared to sleep,  
spread out my bedding,  
and lay down calmly...

After writing a poem;  
like one inebriated,  
I fell into a deep slumber. ■

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✉ lilakanta27@gmail.com

## The Tale of Civilizations

Rajashree Mohapatra

Stories of death, anxiety, sorrow, and pain,  
Fail to combat the strain,  
Driving far away  
From peace and tranquility any way.  
Clashes between  
Individuality and societal expectations,  
Leads to moments of perpetual discontent,  
With ethical conflicts and confusions.

It is time to decide peace,  
As soul of life that at present passes  
like a horror show.  
People around  
When slumber in madness  
And now  
Ready under the circumstances to bow.

Neighbours though choose  
To be masquerading as the men in placidity  
Yet they fail to grasp life's true meaning,  
Never venturing inward  
To explore the depths of implacability.  
When a conscious soul emerges  
That leads the society out of its slumber,  
Administers a hemlock's silence,  
Unlike the Jesus Christ crucifies  
the pain in a bargain for peace.

Let the world  
Rise beyond its profound trances,  
And search in a state of love,  
Beyond a boundary blurred ,  
The oceanic feeling that would overflow,  
May end the suffering,  
And exhibit a world transformed. ■

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✉ rajashreemohapatra2018@gmail.com

## The Lifeless Life

**Mahima Gantayat**

Heavily painful was my chest  
That whole night  
Mind couldn't cope up  
Was almost ready  
To end everything.  
In my heart's feeling  
It was all my fault  
Laid lifeless on my bed  
And that wasn't a mere dreadful night  
It wasn't lesser than my death.  
That night passed ultimately  
After breaking me from within.  
A ray of hope came again  
When I felt  
Still some remnants  
Left in me as hope of living  
Tonight has come exactly as before  
Has it brought in its fold  
My certain and abrupt death  
Or a hopeful life to live again ? ■

---

✉ gantayatmahima@gmail.com

## A Small Desire

**Abnish Singh Chauhan**

Listen, my dear Mother!  
Please listen to me,  
I have a small desire:  
'to sing for the suffering ones.'

My lovely Mother!  
Someone told me—  
You believe in *karma*.  
and stand with those  
who walk  
the path of *dharma*.

Lo, I sing a song now—  
but, why does my voice tremble,  
why do my words tumble  
like the fragile leaves  
falling from  
an unsteady branch?

O my kind Mother!  
Could You please  
lend your grace  
to my trembling voice?  
to my tumbling words?  
as it was lent  
to your dear ones,  
who sing with ease and charm,  
having your love and praise. ■

---

✉ abnishsighchhauhan@gmail.com

## Different

**Basudev Paul**

You were altogether different yesterday.  
Even the wind you feel today  
was different yesterday.  
What you look today seems  
to have been different.  
What you speak today was  
more mellifluous yesterday.  
The robes you put on today  
differ from yesterday.  
When you were born yesterday  
is different today.  
Your eagerness augments today  
than that of yesteryear!  
The road you take today was dark  
and deep yesteryear.  
The meal you make today  
differs from infancy.

When you played with the elders  
you get scared today!  
What deemed notoriety yesterday  
comes as a motivation.  
The dream you dreamt yesternight  
is reminiscent of today.  
You look before and after,  
always seeking what is not! ■

---

✉ basudev paul01@gmail.com

## Haiku

**Bipasha Majumder (De)**

(1)  
Wet noon  
the weight of worry  
washed away  
(2)  
black hair hue  
dad's holiday stuffed  
with greens  
(3)  
false spring  
his paper moon passion  
for her  
(4)  
rainy dawn  
an angler's net full  
of rainbows  
(5)  
flight  
to the butterfly days  
berry moon  
(6)  
red anemones  
the fast descent  
of a vulture. ■

---

✉ bipashademajumder@gmail.com

## I Too Exist

**Sudipta Mishra**

I am both a man and a woman,  
And between us,  
I am not the 'other.'  
I am not the inferior one.  
Do not compare me to flowing water;  
Instead, I am the wildfire  
that can destroy you!  
It will be a curse for all to hold that view.  
I can choose to spark and  
consume everyone!  
Do not impose yourself upon me,  
For you have not yet measured  
my depths—  
They are as endless as the infinite sea!  
I can shape and deconstruct phrases;  
I am not a toy with alluring tresses,  
Nor am I a coy mistress!  
Celebrate my presence;  
Do not ignore it!  
I am everywhere.  
Feel my fragrance,  
See the buds—  
I am also there.  
Do not pluck and crush;  
Caress my essence and feel me.  
Let me coexist with you! ■

---

✉ sudiptamishra71@gmail.com

## The Lover

**Arbind Kumar Choudhary**

The monsieur is a spirit of good humour  
Who shows his true colours  
For the affaird'amour  
Amidst many a paramour?

The proneur is a knight in shining armour  
Who keeps good-hours  
Without fear or favour  
Amidst many a pot valour?

The garnur is a man of hour  
Who comes out in his true colours  
For the maid of honour  
Amidst many an unearthly hour?

How can one assume one's true colour  
Amidst many a lecherous humour? ■

✉ arbind.choudhory11@gmail.com

## I Become the Morning

**Tuhinamsu Rath**

In the glittering eyes of Nature  
Anything that glitters is morning.  
Coming out of the cave of matter  
I open up myself  
Like soft breeze in the ripe-paddy field  
Like the youth of spring dancing  
on hard rock.

I open up myself  
Throw away piled up inside me  
Pride, arrogance and ego  
Throw away built inside me  
weapons of plunder  
The attachment of dominance.

I open up  
I become light  
I become intimate with me  
By making journey with nature.

What is limitlessness?  
What is unbound?

To identify with tree.  
To identify with blue mountain  
To identify with spring  
And to identify with light.

In the morning I open up myself  
And in me glitters  
Limitless, untouched, bright morning  
I become the morning. ■

✉ tuhinamsu@gmail.com

## Just for Three Minutes

Original Odia : **Phani Mohanty**

Translation : Namita Laxmi Jagaddeb

Just for three minutes,  
she will come  
in a moon-lit night  
draped with dew,  
to meet  
a wandering soul  
awaiting his love.

She will seem to say nothing,  
but her eloquent eyes  
will go on speaking a lot,  
just for three minutes,  
she will come, stand and wait  
there on the other side of the green fence;  
robed in the elegance of a silk *saree*,  
red-hemmed and pear-hued  
with pashapali motifs,  
she will mesmerize me with her charm.

Just for three minutes,  
my Draksha will come...  
surely she will come.  
From that moment will begin

a new chapter in my life,  
steeped in grief,  
from the heavens will stream down  
silver-lit showers of cold,  
while a wild wind frenzied with passion  
will go out -  
just for three minutes -  
a grand procession of mask dancers  
for Draksha will emerge from  
the fourth heaven;  
I will be waiting  
for moment to moment  
sensing her arrival  
as I am sure  
she will come -  
just for three minutes. ■

☎ 9937961878

with unbridled passion:  
With each time our eyes meet:  
She goes deeper into my heart's ocean.  
She rules over the stage with music:  
But with love she rules over me:  
Sometimes sweet, sometimes fierce:  
Oh, what an amazing expression of thee.  
I wish I had thousand hands:  
So, with applause I shall fill:  
The entire stage and you my darling:  
With admiration I would seal.  
You spread like a perfume of Arab:  
And finally, you make  
my heartbeat stable:  
Now I am not me but you, dancing:  
Sometimes fierce, sometimes graceful. ■

✉ auroprasadparida@gmail.com

## Urvasi

Auro Prasad Parida

What a magic she brings onto the stage:  
As if the heavenly dancer Urvasi.  
New excitement and new vibration in air:  
A noble phase is to begin in Odissi.  
With little steps she comes to the dais:  
But I feel that she descends into my heart.  
To win such a brave but cold heart:  
What can be beautiful than this form  
of art.  
The audience watches as she performs  
to the music:  
With the pattern of my heartbeats  
dances she:  
The girl dominates me  
with each graceful step:  
And starts consciously living in me.  
With each countenance she makes:  
My heart enthralled

## Relationship

Original Odia: Soubhagyabanta Maharana

Translation : Ipsita Sarangi

He, whose relationship  
Is not bound by any strong rope  
Is ready to tolerate  
In time and bad time  
The invisible storm  
Taking place around him.

He, whose relationship  
Is near to nearer  
And of self to more of one's own  
Is not prepared  
To lift the weight of a straw.  
He wants to stay  
Being unrivalled or like that  
Without dipping his feet in mud.

It is heard that  
Only consolation is God.  
In friendship and faith  
You are certainly found  
Like all relationships being lost  
Can your name be blotted out ?

Can the helpless sea-wind  
With acute salinity  
Eat away the Jagannath temple ?  
Like hand of the triangle  
Who will then keep earth's  
Centre of gravity steady ? ■

---

☎ 9437457736

Still carries the same sincerity  
and a newer valor for once  
But tonight, the moon responds —  
The voyager feels a jolt of joy,  
Unknown to the outcast.  
He cries yet never stops smiling ,  
A promise to the long lost .  
The voyager goes away,  
and I feel a lingering pain of loss.  
The moon turns to me,  
Smiles and whispers —  
“Forever with you”.  
I cried, that night. ■

---

✉ irpatra@gmail.com

## A Serenade to the Moon

Yashraj P. Patra

The moon shines brightly  
In the melancholy night ,  
I hear the same hums and tunes —  
The voyager sings again . His voice ,  
filled with sincerity and fear,  
Sings a ballad that grew  
fond to me at last.  
His gaze remains hopeful,  
longing for a response,  
But the dreary night refuses to budge .  
the voyager sings,  
Still hoping for a word ,  
His gaze fixated on the moon .  
But the moon does not respond .  
Years go by ,times on the clock ,  
Day shifts to night ; the night  
We all sought .  
A familiar tune echoes  
through the pavement  
I have grown to love.  
His voice ,now shaky and raspy ,

## My Earnest Desires

Sulekha Samantaray

My heart pines  
for hours long meeting  
with a secluded sea shore,  
when the golden rays of  
the setting sun would be  
dancing on the waves like  
a long tunnel of burning logs.

My heart yearns  
for a rarified morning walk,  
an aimless roaming in a  
reclining valley filled with  
wild colourful flowers;  
when the breeze would bring  
their sweet aroma and touch  
my body with misty grass.  
My mind desires to  
befriend uninterrupted loneliness,  
days of undisturbed silence;  
where the seeds of my creativity



could germinate and grow  
unfettered by unwanted presence.

My tired mortal frame  
craves no earthly pleasures  
but prays for some peaceful rest  
to rejuvenate and invigorate  
for garnering enough strength to  
fight the unending battle of life.  
My soul hankers  
after a reunion with  
my true soul mate, my God  
who would liberate me soon  
from this meaningless  
mundane existence. ■

---

✉ sule khasamantaray54@gmail.com

## Storm

**Sankha Ranjan Patra**

On a sudden  
Storm stopped  
Why not demolished everything  
Like a nightmare of the night?  
The earth may reboot  
All those as before .  
And Who felt  
What storm felt  
Except some boughs ,  
Electric poles and cottage rigs,  
Who can console or conquer  
This wild wind of the world?

Broken into pieces  
All the pride of Humans ,  
Promises in the ears of air  
To be back in work,  
What if this warrior does come?  
Will creation rise without destruction? ■

---

✉ psankharanjan@gmail.com

## A Summer Poem

**Kajal Suman**

An ordinary day  
With extra ordinary moments  
Where flowers nod  
With murmuring sound of river  
Blue sky misses clouds  
to share his mourning..  
Hot sunny weather dances in its rhythm..  
Wind whispers jovial memories  
A new sketch of split seconds..  
Time is dominant..  
Never looks back...  
Adore each bit of it...  
Applause its elegance ...  
At the same time a blue collar Sweats  
silently to bring sweets for his family ..  
The hottest hour still not breaks the  
Fortitude of women working  
in the farmland ...  
Ducks go wobbling by in straight lines  
Slow flocked cows move  
as sweet grass sprang for their grazing...  
Neighborhood child is still staring  
at the icecream seller  
with an exciting eyes..  
And the smooth hour smiles..  
Throughout the long,wild birds are flying  
to their secret places..  
All images separate and blushes..  
With the golden light..  
Touching the feet of memories  
to shine forever.....!!!!!! ■

---

✉ kajalsumansamantaray224@gmail.com

## Measured Smiles.....

Susanta Kishore Bal

Subdued smile,  
also called toned smile  
is ever laced with mystery !  
It may symbolise a success story,  
indicative of pride and glory.  
points towards self-approval.  
It express the feeling  
of abject satisfaction,  
in-no-uncertain-terms.  
It marks a winning  
situation during a negotiation.

This smile is a proof of silent love,  
thru' lips.  
That smile is a proof of approval,  
no need of book knowledge.  
The silent smile has deep meaning  
inbuilt in it.  
does not encompass any pretension  
or ostentation,  
This smile is called for  
during a photography.  
This act as an external expression  
of inner feeling.

In case of first love,  
the smiles are the indicator of cosy  
affinity, closeness and compassion.  
Shrikrishna only understands and gauge  
the underlying meaning  
of this soft smiles of Gopis.

Even this oblique smiles sometimes,  
are indicative of distaste and disapproval  
of other's words and utterances,  
Lies hidden are complexities,  
intricacies and aftermaths.

These cryptic smiles are created  
by Almighty.

Some smiles are hidden under the lips,  
some clearly visible in the face,  
but all subdued smiles are meaningful  
in more than one ways.

One may not posses every thing in life,  
but is there real harm in giving  
a hearty smile to others,  
lest it brings cheers in their face and heart.

Even this oblique smiles sometimes, are  
indicative of distaste and disapproval of  
other's words and utterances,  
Lies hidden are complexities,  
intricacies and aftermaths.  
These smiles, may it be cryptic,  
may be hidden, may be oblique  
or may be broad or open.  
But take heart that  
all smiles are created  
Almighty only.  
Depends on how you apply it  
or operate it or disfigure it,  
choice is yours ! ■

---

✉ skbal54@gmail.com

## Phoenix

*(An Ode to Women)*

Sangeeta Roy

Her soul has been reborn like phoenix,  
To light her life  
from the diminishing darkness.  
Her life has been renewed as she rises  
from the ashes,  
Not letting her purity to be lost

in the world of lies and greed.  
She is strong enough to not to hold back,  
Finding her deepest truth  
and freedom every day.  
She burns, weeps, but rises stronger,  
Living her life to the fullest,  
Inhaling the scent of new feelings  
and experiences.  
With new hope and aspirations,  
She is filling the garden of jealousy,  
ignorance and ego,  
With the blossoming flowers of patience,  
knowledge and love. ■

---

✉ roysangi98@gmail.com

## Bloodshed in Kashmir

**V.R. Badiger**

Those who went to see  
the beautiful Kashmir  
in search of fun and pleasure  
ended their precious lives  
in death,  
as unexpectedly killed  
by the invisible terrorists  
who came from nowhere  
and fired on them  
asking their religion.  
Twenty-six of our tourists  
were killed heeneously;  
Some were hid in fear  
behind the big green trees,  
some ran away to save their lives.  
Now the whole country is  
shimmering with revenge  
against them and the country  
which backed them for the misdeed.  
The government sent the army, and police  
to search them out and punish them.

This work would have been done  
long ago  
wipe them out as if they were flies.  
Let the God bless the beavered families  
who sacrificed their lives  
for the nation. ■

---

☎ 8660049713

## Child's Call

**Pramod Kumar Rath**

The land laments,sighs the sky.  
Moans Mother,groans the grass.  
Matter and Machines run high,  
Sylvan left sans essence,as if the trash!

Chariot of Progress crushes the best.  
On the corridor of power walks the boaster!  
Sources of Survival get lost  
As marrow crunched by the Monster!

Hypocrisy is what the words wear.  
Measures,gestures pose hollow.  
When will Super powers really care?  
After the Doom which road to follow?  
Calls the child,call its tears.  
O'Brothers!pray,lend your ears. ■

---

✉ pkrathpoet@gmail.com

## Raped by Rain

Original Odia : **Bharata C. Dash**  
Translation : Sudipta Mishra

Not just once,  
but many times,  
I have been harassed  
by the harsh blow of rain,  
The dark clouds hover

around the sky  
Making a deep scar  
in my heart  
What can I do?

It's four o'clock.  
Now it has become a habit  
to wake up  
at this same time each day.  
My mind struggles to explore,  
while my body hardly recognizes hunger.  
With a restless mind,  
I wander  
from thought to thought—  
seeking connection,  
yearning for the joy of union.

A divine bliss unfolds  
during my morning walk.  
It comes naturally:  
the merging of emotions  
with excitement.  
The drowsy eyes at dawn  
fill the soul  
with dreamy fantasies.  
Unknowingly,  
the poet is lost in his muses.

It's heavily raining outside,  
and my inner heart  
is drenched in feelings.  
The raincoat is powerless;  
the helpless bike refuses to move,  
just like the tremors of rain.  
To whom can I whisper  
my wish to be touched by someone?

Oppressed by the ravages of rain,  
the torturous heavy storm,  
my careless attire has left me  
without an umbrella.

Ruined and devastated,  
I am soaked in the rain.  
Where could I go?  
Where did I find shelter?  
Is this the fruit of my bad luck? ■

---

✉ bharata012@gmail.com

## In the Making

**Amiya Kumar Rout**

Into love's beauty the poet enquires;  
Into a corner to observe himself  
he drives;  
And to discuss soul situation  
he must be free.

To escape from endless reflection  
of ideas;  
Being drugged by words intuitively  
he thirsts for truth.

To condense images into words;  
In a bid to have high beauty;  
Needed what : To be still alone.

O life, so real as beauty,  
light and love,  
As images or ideas,  
now and exciting.

The poet saintly carries these  
to extreme, disgusting;  
To mould all grossness  
into subtle forming. ■

---

✉ dramiyarout1959@gmail.com

## Night

Prafulla Panda

Ah! The moon shines very bright tonight  
As the clouds rest behind the hills  
and not in sight  
The stars twinkle in bleary eyes  
amid their fluorescent light

And the day shares her bed with the sun  
at the horizon  
In silence, since no scream,  
no hullabaloo rise from any avian  
Nor a cock crows,  
or the mountain thunders  
with a roaring lion

Here, under the still starry sky  
many a dream are spun  
When lovers throb and their hearts sizzle  
with fiery passion  
And their fingers run on velvety skin  
and their lips many kisses churn

And a poet feels restless and reels  
like a pregnant woman  
Under the pangs of his rife  
and pregnant emotion  
When he listens to mothers' whispering  
lullabies for their new born

And on the corridor of the night  
the ecstatic owls hoot along  
While the sassy crickets ceaselessly sing  
their sultry song. ■

---

✉ prpanda1979@gmail.com

## Wake ... Skeleton ... Wake (utha-kankala)

Original Odia : Godavarish Mohapatra

Translation -Tusar Ranjan Mohanty

Crouched across the threshold  
of a brittle castle-wall,  
the sorcerer amidst stubborn hilly-terrains,  
is busy chanting hymns to invoke; wakeup  
citizens  
from the cadaverous sleep, to rip the crust  
of earth in haste,  
to lend a hundred commanders of  
'Khorda' hoist their heads in jest.  
Wake up skeletons; the emaciated lot  
casting off shackles,  
to let the glory of yore; once beset and  
obliterated; hustle.

The militant-muse about the foot-hills of  
"Meghasan" pokes the hearts of  
'Phuljhar',  
and the battle song of 'Raibania', beckons  
along the stretch to 'Ganjam'.  
'Singhbhum' from the brink of death  
laments as 'Bisakhpatanam' stares  
at the face of posterity to forebode;  
"hearts here have gone into the  
graveyard".  
Wake up the wizened; rise up skeletons; to  
let the fetter storn,  
and let the glory of yore, once beset and  
vanquished; sown.

Letting off the ever-worshipped mother  
land from its shackles,  
does the Sambal-warriors of Sambalpur  
lose their aplomb in crackles?

the land whose tresses once the 'Ganges'  
washed and its feet the 'Krishna'  
the same 'Utkal' is ravaged now to make it  
the land of corpses.

Wakeup the wizened; letting off shackles,  
the skeleton must rise  
to let the glory of yore once lost and  
frittered; arise.

Whacking the barriers once into the  
domain of Nizam's "Kulberga",  
the warrior 'Gajapati' wrought the triumph  
over 'Berar'.

The glory being sung even now by the  
invincible fort 'Devarkonda',  
where the warriors of 'Barabati' staked  
their lives in a heroic fare.  
Shirking shackles away, Wakeup  
skeletons, rekindling the race undaunted  
to let the past glory once lost and frittered;  
vaunted.

The skilled Khandayat's wordsmen by  
their invincible blades,  
had lain million indomitable Bengal-  
warriors on the fields to fade,  
to cause the domain of 'Gaudas' trodden,  
and the empire 'Magadha' in wreckage,  
besides the marauding 'Pushpamitra'  
chased away by 'Utkal' from the siege.  
Wake.. wake.. wake up skeleton; rise from  
your angst,  
To let the past glory, once lost and dead,  
boom in a gust.

Speak up, speak up, eh skeleton-the tales  
of an era bygone,  
when this race in its peak of military  
might, fathomed the Himalaya's horizon.  
the victor 'Bijayanagaram' implored refuge  
at its feet,

as the alien ruler of 'Bahamani' spurned  
war in fright.

Wake up the skeleton, wake up the  
wizened, making the shackles shorn  
to let the glory of yore, once lost and dead,  
emblazon.

The bones must speak the words of hope,  
and corpses flash smiles  
to let temples of this shattered fort rung  
with ceaseless clarion in bristle.

Let the denizens haul fistful of dust from  
this funeral ground  
which myriad lost lives justify in its hunt  
for glory profound.

Wake up skeleton, wake up the wizened,  
fathoming murky eternity  
to let the glory of yore once lost and dead,  
bloom in tenacity.

No more time to squander 'eh skeleton' to  
raise your crest,  
ripping the rocky crust on your ribcage to  
unleash passion in a fest.

Let the triumphant flute once sting that  
beaten heart  
into vigor to shun mendicant tresses  
of abandon be blown in juvenile galore.  
Wake up skeleton, wake up the wizened,  
rise from your slumber  
to let the glory of yore once lost and dead  
jostle in clamber. ■

---

This is a glorious poem of patriotic fervor. The  
versatile poet late Godavarish Mohapatra  
(1898-1965) had composed this poem during  
British India period to reawaken the Odia race.

The translator Dr. Tusar Ranjan Mohanty can  
be reached at [tusarranjan27@gmail.com](mailto:tusarranjan27@gmail.com)

## Kannaki Has Not Died

Pankajam Kottarath

I'm not Draupadi,  
to be pushed into polyandry  
nor that forgiving  
to the extent of tolerating  
the shame of being disrobed  
or for being offered  
like a subject for a lost dice game;  
Revenge boils in each atom of my being  
for the modern day Dussahasana's.

I'm not generous as Urmila  
I can't be that loyal in fulfilling a vow  
sleeping fourteen years  
enabling her husband to keep awake;  
In today's misogynous world  
one's senses need always to be alert.

I'm not Gandhari  
who blindfolded herself to show solidarity  
to her husband, blind;  
it's a world deceptive  
both inside and outside  
and one needs to be extra vigilant.

I'm not Vaidehi  
I can't be entering into fire to prove my  
purity  
nor I wish mother earth to part  
and take me into its depths,  
rather wish I fight back and prove my  
worth.

Nor am I Ahalya  
to be cursed by her husband sage Gautama  
to turn into a stone  
for her being tricked by Indra,  
a stony existence I can never put up with.

Let all the tales remain tales forever.  
I'm a woman, a woman of substance,  
inspired and liberated  
competent, confident and always  
committed.  
I have my own choices, goals and plans  
If you can help, hold my hand and come  
along.

I have the rage of Kannaki, who burnt  
Madurai.  
Like her, wish I emerge as the symbol of  
justice  
and my unleashed fury daze everything in  
my way.  
Trust me, Kannaki has not died. ■

### Foot Note:

*Draupadi, Urmila, Gandhari, Vaidehi, Ahalya and Kannaki are all female characters from Indian epics. Dussahasana is the one who dragged Draupadi into the assembly of Kauravas with an intention to disrobe her, as per the epic.*

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✉ kp\_bharagavrag@yahoo.co.in

## Let us Be ..

Ambuj Bihari Satpathy

Deep green forest  
just awaiting our arrival  
to take us to its shelter,  
unbiased unconditional  
a most loving abode forever .  
we are no more to be there,  
our destiny was not that sure.  
we are for the mystery of love  
to hide deeper into the jungle  
of emotion far.  
No more irrational, no more complaining,



Just to trust the challenge  
Our continuity never to suffer.  
The most beautiful sketch we ever paint  
on the roof canvas above our castle,  
All time dazzling never  
to fade colours it prevail.  
flowing of emotion from the beating part ,  
nay not the tune of death but  
the life melody it's craze,  
May it be petals of rose or its thorn  
on edge .  
The words we coined to cheers or tear.  
the spontaneous overflow of our  
gracious gesture we ever see oh! dear. ■

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✉ ambujbihariS@gmail.com

## The Rose will Never Tell You....

**Charan Singh Kedarkhandi**

The rose will never tell you  
that  
who loved it most :  
the rover, the sower, the lover or  
the loafer !

the whining rose will never reveal  
to you ,  
who hurt him during numbness and  
dejection's height,  
who scattered the petals and stole the  
adour  
with brazen blight  
in broad daylight...  
the blushful rose will never tell you  
how it feels  
when,  
patels enfranchised by some wayward  
blast

prance and dance around the lose  
feeble rose  
and chase butterflies  
and cheer with bees infatuated with  
fragrance.  
the reticent rose will never tell you  
who really dies  
when,  
some reckless handler tramples the garden  
and squanders  
the treasured fragrance  
on some fetid corpse of a dying Dream  
Or  
holding the rose in hand,  
a besotted boy pampers his girl friend  
who's watered by whims and frivolity.  
The rose is not meant for thrills and frills !  
who will understand that  
the rose regurgites fury in  
glory-drunk palaces,  
refuses to play in the hands of puerile  
princes, petty politicians and vainglorious  
façades ?  
Nobody will tell you anything about the  
ruse, rage, rancour and rapacity faced by  
the rose  
but  
the perished garden  
will surely tell you :  
'You'll never understand the rose  
until you become one'. ■

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✉ charansinghuknd@gmail.com

## Pahalgam

Sampath Kumar

It was their honeymoon,  
both agreed in unison—  
*Kashmir it will be,*  
the heaven on earth.  
The day was bright, beautiful:  
snow-laden mountains cloaking  
greenery all around.  
*Life could not be better.*  
Then—suddenly—they emerge,  
fire in their eyes,  
lethal weapons in hand.  
*They are not friendly.*  
They doubt her husband,  
yank his trousers down.  
*“He is not one of us,”* one says.  
The sentence is swift.  
Now her husband lies  
lifeless, limp.  
The heaven on earth  
has turned to hell. ■

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✉ samppathkiyengar@gmail.com

## The Smoke Trap

Bandana Sahoo

Can you take me?  
To heaven,  
Can you fly me?  
In the floating clouds,  
Can you drown it?  
I meditate in that flowing water.  
I will survive  
I'll see you later.  
I will never get lost  
in your web of illusion.  
From afar, you are dark.  
Near the edge of the water.

Just like me.  
I want to draw on a pencil.  
I myself,  
To your touch,  
Decorated with a hint of sparkle  
To those two drops of your tears.  
Shall we break your silence?  
The invisible obstacle on the road  
Something inside you  
Something inside me  
This story will be half-baked.  
I want to walk.  
I want to drown again.  
At the end of the road,  
In that foggy forest  
In the smoke trap.  
I want to die naked.  
On that golden carpet  
In your heart. ■

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☎ 7205550713

## Foundation

Gajanan Mishra

Let fear not  
Control my life.  
Let my entire  
Focus on  
Living purposefully.  
Let all know  
My purpose is to  
Make the world  
Better and better.  
The very foundation of  
Life lies on universal  
Joy, prosperity  
And well-being and  
For this I am living. ■

---

✉ gajananmishra60@gmail.com

## Celebrating Colours

Bidyut Prabha Gantayat

Lots of Hue,  
Royal red Universal green  
And ocean blue  
Endless shades  
Likewise the moods  
Some light, some deep  
Some broken and in between,  
They rejuvenate  
They inspire and emote  
Can I imagine nature  
All in Black and White?  
Even in my woe and despair  
They are in the Hues  
Of my agony and plight  
Intricate feelings open up  
Like petals in a memory bud  
I can touch and feel colour,  
I can hold and hug colour.  
The brush, the canvas  
The creative mind my dear  
Sing to us something  
Very passionate and near  
Alone in a virgin beach  
I talk to someone  
In a nostalgic spree  
It's the companion  
None other but the colour Thee!  
The planet is at stake  
Substantiate with VIBGYOR  
Rejoice the subtle beauty!  
Celebrate colour! ■

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✉ bidyutprabha2000@gmail.com

## The 'Bullet-Poet'

(A tribute to Raj Babu Gandham)

Bipul Kalita

You were in your world of desire,  
vaguely visible in two liners  
That strangely adaptive evening  
With lips, licking juice of energy  
When I happened to shake your hands,  
Shaking a quite magically  
busy poetic mind that I could adore!  
I called you 'the bullet-poet', you smiled,  
Shining our first evening;  
I shared your room in a circuit house  
at Bhubaneswar  
And you called me 'younger brother'  
in our musing castle;  
We talked less, but mused a lot  
to be strangely familiar!  
We shared our feelings, thoughts  
and emotions  
In poetry conclaves  
In many literary groups  
Choosing our ways  
and means of words-crafts!  
How can I forget our meeting  
in Hyderabad?  
O' dear bullet-poet!  
Your courtesy was poetic! ■

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✉ bipulkalita074@gmail.com

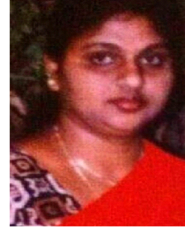
## In Silence

Archana Acharya

There is silence  
prevailed in the entire room.  
But suddenly I heard  
the sobbing sound  
know not where it came from  
that told me something in whisper  
though difficult to guess !!  
There is silence everywhere amidst it  
I stood searching the way  
to come out of it  
I struggled, wriggled again and again  
It dragged me frequently like a cobweb  
know not where to go  
I stood there mistaken in bewilderment!  
Oh God!  
In disguise you came near me  
Yes! I found you  
in deep darkness and in silence  
I heard you spoke to me indistinctly  
and crying bitterly  
Don't say no  
because I heard the sound  
definitely it is You  
in my despair  
came to console my heart!!  
I extend my hand to wipe out the tears  
from your eyes  
But in vain  
found no one else  
there except myself alone in the room.  
With a ray of light  
came from the street lamp post  
playing hide and seek  
far and near ..... ■

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☎ 8917200804



## Poet of this Quarter

Latha Vinola was born on 2nd September 1963 in Salem, Tamil Nadu. She is a bi-lingual poet of aesthetic taste. Her poems are published in many journals including Rock Pebbles (India), Eternal Melodies (London) and other anthologies. She has been teaching English language and literature for last 37 years and once upon a time, she was the colleague of noted Indian English poet-cum-Academic Prof. Dr. P. Raja. She is also a certificate holder of Yoga and Meditation. At present, she is working as Asst. Professor of English in Tagore Govt. Arts and Science College, Lawspet, Puducherry.

### (i) Gear Up

Why dismay  
When life is in thy hands?  
When expectations are more,  
Thy disappointments soar.  
And so why don't thou delete?  
Avast verbiage and make a better thou.  
Wear off thy shocks and  
Nurse not sorrow but thy faith,  
Enliven thy face  
To enlighten thy life  
Broken – Spirited never be  
But brave thro' oppositions.  
Gear up ambitious,  
Do not bottle up mental agitation,  
But embolden thyself.  
And lend an auspicious glow  
to everything  
To be always a pleasant "THOU". ■

(ii)  
Hues of Memory

A faculty of recollection.  
Recalling to mind,  
The sweet and the bitter  
Some worthy of remembrance  
Some remarkable  
Some to be cherished  
Some to be replayed  
Some to be fast forwarded  
Some to be deleted  
A rejuvenator on whole  
To the bereaved to live long  
To live with the past in the present  
Tinged by the hues of memories  
Long-live 'Memories' ■

(iii)  
Ode to Woman

What nectar is to be  
Churned out of the  
Muddled ocean of misery  
and anguish in her?  
Never can 'she' be a 'self-styled' Queen,  
Cause, she the monarch's vassal  
And 'the mother of sorrows'  
What is freedom to her?  
To live in fear, to do nothing  
what she wills,  
But with petit expectations  
and grand disappointments,  
And never in harmony,  
An embodiment of sacrifice,  
She becomes the commodity he trades in,  
Her chastity, her love,  
Her passion her emotions, her health,

Her loyalty, her time, her freedom,  
Her labour, her youth, her motherhood,  
Exploited she writes her finest line  
'Break the Rules'. ■

(iv)  
Entry and Exit

Safe from the snuggy chamber  
She eases out  
into the indifferent world!  
Pries baffled and cries,  
"Where am I?  
Why am I here?  
To grow into a beardless Socrates  
or crash into the kingdom  
of a self-styled monarch,  
to be his vassal forever?"

The blazing fire  
of her ambitious self —  
unfuelled and untapped —  
only burns away  
the blossoms of her soul,  
at last reducing her mortal  
into a debris of desire

To arrest an exit of this sort  
She ever should be alert and untired  
To usher in a glorious dawn. ■

(v)  
Royal Elegance

Why portray negative shades,  
Shun it off,  
Be known for self righteous roles.  
Maintain decorum and follow etiquettes.  
Praise and be of all praises.

Be not torn between pain and passion  
Shape your thoughts and outlook,  
Lend an ear for music, solace gives.  
Practice meditation and gel with 'Nature'.  
Extend profound inspiration and move  
forward,  
We travel everyday in 'Hope'.  
for Hope is the best rejuvenator,  
which fetches one good a solution.  
Be a happy melodist loved by all  
to be just a warm 'Human'. ■

(vi)

## Mother – An Epitome of Sacrifice

O Mother! O Mother!  
The first room I dwelled in is thy 'Womb',  
The first breath I begot is from thee.  
The first moon I sighted is thy beautiful face,  
The first voice I heard at the entry is thine.

Thou is the first woman I loved.  
Love incarnate, a symbol of sacrifice  
wert thee,  
When in distress thou wert my solace.  
When I sobbed, was thy smile  
that made me gear up,  
Thou tamed me to rise up to occasion,  
and face 'the challenges of life',  
Thou remainst tuned to,  
all calls in the family,  
When I broke down, rejuvenated my cells.  
Melted a candle for lifetime,  
Painted thy life in different hues,  
battled ailments though,  
An untiring workaholic,  
an eminent Tamil Writer  
roles different played.  
Thy face I search, vanished away

in Heavenly Abode,  
Leaving me in trillions of welled up tears,  
and untold grief,  
An unfair gesture to have made me  
bid 'adieu' to  
an 'Angelic Woman', of love and care,  
An epitome of sacrifice, a Beauty always,  
Reduces into a debris of ashes,  
is unpalatable.  
O Mother! I love you forever  
Thou wert everything to me.  
O how I wish thou had travelled  
to the end of my journey. ■

(vii)

## Tattoos of Anguish

'O' how the frail  
and fragile heart frets,  
The umpteen un-godly vices  
of MAN,  
'the self-styled monarch',  
the green-eyed monster,  
the cheat, the liar,  
the tattler, the tease,  
'Ego incarnate',  
with well-versed ways  
of the guile and the wile.  
'O' The quaked heart' quails,  
sinking the seared soul  
tattooed with anguish  
down into the bottomless bottom.  
O! The pecked and sick  
The brittle and beaten,  
Battered and tattered,  
Mauled and maimed,  
orphaned heart longs,  
to rest,  
rest forever! ■

## Book Review

### *Whispering Ashes* (An Anthology of Poems)

Author : Saroj K Padhi

Reviewer : Pankajam Kottarath, Chennai

Printed by : Authorspress, New Delhi

pp. 119/Rs.295

Saroj K Padhi is a retired English Professor from Govt. of Odisha and a writer by passion. He is well known in Indian English Literature and has published 2 books of criticism and 16 collections of poems. The book under review is *Whispering Ashes* published by Authorspress in 2025 containing 41 poems and excerpts of prose from the book 'A Survey of Indian English Poetry' by Dr Prof. Satish Kumar. This review is limited to the first part of poems and I'm taking a few of them for analysis here.

The title poem *Ashes Whisper* talks about environmental concerns of the poet caused by burning jungles and other human acts causing degradation of nature and he is worried about our future generations, who have an equal right to enjoy the fineness of nature. His concern is deeply reflected in the following lines:

Beneath hectares of jungle burning  
crying piteously for thousands of species  
that died out and are still dying  
their sad shadows trailing  
the graveyard of humanity warning

He goes on talking about our so-called sane society that is caught up in a mad race with its conscience dumped into dustbin with a cry to the society to save the world from the jaws of these sharks. He concludes the poem thus:

Alas! Our lord sneers at false smiles  
as the world sinks still deeper  
into lust for bucks and more of guiles. (Ashes Whisper)

Poem titled *Black Pagoda at Night* is one of the best poems in this collection, which deals with so many evils in the society like acts of violence, horror and blood shed, the plight of



farmers betrayed by failing crops and debt traps, who take to the extreme step of killing themselves with poisonous insecticides, atrocious acts of ragging and brutal homicide, facts about the misdirected lost youths and much more. The poem is a must read and I'm not killing the anxiety of readers to read it, by quoting from the poem extensively. The beautiful rhyming in this poem is not to be missed.

(Black Pagoda at Night)

'Thorny' is a sonnet, again with lovely rhyming, dealing with roses. This poem has layers of meanings to it and a rereading of the poem will reveal that to the readers. I am quoting the concluding six lines for their poetic appeal:

roses blossom but to bleed alone  
stuck by own thorns after lovers' sweet meet  
besotted by the wine overflown  
to a dark corner with clots in heart to retreat

love like roses has many thorns to sting  
of burns, bruises and lost causes to sing.

(Thorny)

Mother is a poem, a tribute by the poet to his mother, who left him long back after fighting squabbles in the joint family system. Those brought up in a joint family system can immediately step into the shoes of the poet. Mother is not simply a relationship. It's a bond for life, an emotion stuck deep to the walls of our hearts. This poem would be relatable to many readers, who have similar secret pains and memories, as I experienced and one is sure to instantly feel the depth of pain, mother's demise leaves upon him/her.

Anyhow you left  
claimed by a deadly disease  
to a fire of redemption  
silently you slipped  
leaving us to  
wonder about death  
a sweetness recoiling  
early to earth.

(Mother)

Next poem taken up here is titled 'December Smell', It's the last month, a month coming after rains carrying in it the smell of earth and always I have felt a melancholic appeal to it, perhaps being the last month of the year. I am quoting the concluding lines of this poem:

December smells  
like knotted grey hair  
done up with stale flowers  
with their stench in the air.

Thoughtful usage of words like knotted grey hair, stale flowers and stench in the air bring a gloomy mood to this poem.

(‘December Smell’)

Poem “I Loved Her” is an intimate poem expressing the speaker’s love for his beloved, who left him like Spring yielding to Winter.

she broke a beautiful heart  
but at the same time  
created a tragi-comic poet  
causing pain of loss  
to wings of emotional  
flutter.

According to me, this stanza stands apart imparting a lesson to the readers how to transform one’s failures into achievements, or pains into pleasures.

(I Loved Her)

The lines quoted below are from the poem titled “Fall”, a beautiful poem and its imageries are so vivid, though it explains the barrenness in winter.

Like a drop of tear  
from a bereaved mother’s eye  
the leaf falls  
by a thrash from the autumn wind  
echoing the eternal elegy  
of love in every heart  
that is always wet and kind  
chanting the end of every  
romance of earthly kind.

(Fall)

In the current day global scenario sanity fails to resolve wars in spite of our ancient sages showing us a million doors to live away from chaos. In poem “Shadows”, the poet points his fingers to this sad reality. Each one can do their mite to mitigate the miseries of the world half-lost to wars, homicide and self-annihilation. He brilliantly suggests that no leaf is inferior as long as it forms the tree’s bower.

(Shadows)

“You Can” is a wonderful poem that tells us what we are capable of. The entire poem is worth quoting here, but I abstain from it, nudging the readers’ anxiety to read the poem.

(You Can)

“Poetry Writing”, is a poem explaining it as ‘a passion, an obsession, a compulsive craving, a propulsion, a way to express the inner self with its ambiguity, complexity, irony

and contradiction.’ He further says that it is madness, but of a unique kind, among many others.

(Poetry Writing)

Poem titled “Bonded Labourers” makes one ponder upon the ugly realities of unequal distribution of income, affluence on one side and poverty on the other, and the sad plight of the bonded labourers of Odia identity, the sorrow lines on whose faces are a mockery of so-called prosperity. It is the same everywhere I must say and not one exclusive to the Odia identity. Perhaps the poet is saddened to see people from his native state ‘leaving their homeland in quest of food, they are but a poor raving band’.

(Bonded Labourers)

There are many poems in this collection like ‘Black Storm’, ‘Lions Gate’ “It’s That Time’ ‘Life Says’ ‘Packaging Culture’ ‘On Taking Risks In Life’ “Deep States’, which I want to quote, but here I’m stopping with this for the sake of brevity.

As far as this collection of poems are concerned, poet Saroj K Padhi displays abundantly his love for nature, environmental degradation, a call for maintaining global peace, the beauty of relationships, marginalization of the poor, the unequal distribution of wealth and resultant poverty paving the way for despair and unrest, misguided youth and much more, all in a convincing and commendable way. This book is of high poetic standards and I wish the poet all the very best. ■



In the lap of Nature in Kalahandi..... with a Man of Nature