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## ~Editor's Note~

Dear Readers & Contributors,

Welcome to the July 2022 issue of IJELLS.

This issue has an interesting set of research articles ranging from Interfigural, Dalit experience, application of disability studies to Bollywood films, Saussure to combining Emotion & English Literature Teaching. The Creative section also is thought provoking.

If you have a suggestion for improvement, kindly mail to, [dr.mrudulalakkaraju@gmail.com](mailto:dr.mrudulalakkaraju@gmail.com)

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Happy Reading and Happy Sharing!

Dr. Mrudula Lakkaraju  
Chief Editor

## ~ Chief Editor~

Dr Mrudula Lakkaraju, Department of English, Osmania University is trained from EFLU and a Doctorate from Osmania University. She prefers the designation of a trainer and a writer. She has presented several academic articles to international and national seminars, conferences, journals, and magazines. Casual and creative writing is also her forte. She is a prolific reader and writer. Her areas of interest are Post colonial Literature, Gender Studies, Film Studies, English Language Teaching, Contemporary Literature and Communication Skills. Find her analysis on Film and other media at Facebook page '@thevisualcritique'.

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<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/40884082-patna-blues>

## ~English Creative Section~

### Hope

*Sanjukta C*

Something stirs deep within –  
a piercing sort of pain;  
there's still so much I want to do,  
much still to be gained.

A pain so deep one cannot endure,  
one cannot endure the hurt,  
one cannot shake off the feeling  
of being buried in the dirt.

One cannot keep on quivering  
and withering from within.  
One cannot keep all this hatred  
burning beneath the skin.

If haunting ache could be dulled,  
light brought back to blackened soul,  
if only the stirrings could be stilled,  
brought sparks to ash-ed coal.

One thought leads to another,  
one thought begins to form;  
one thought to make a smile appear  
and make hurt insides warm.

One thought to bring hope again  
to a bruised and broken heart,  
one thought never thought before  
that makes the shadows part.

The broken heart beats again,  
the soul begins to fly!  
Hope renews of one more day  
of soaring in the sky!



## Motion and thereby Life

*Tanushree Choudhary*

There's motion everywhere  
Inside, outside, everywhere  
Some e-motions which are difficult to bear  
Some too defiant to wear!

Motion is life, motion is breath  
Without motion there wouldn't be succour  
Without life there wouldn't be vigour  
What is there's no life after death?

It's a circle, one which is vicious  
There's life and there's death  
Life is counted in steps of breath  
Life is ended in hiccups of breath

Trees are swaying outside  
Bodies are swinging inside  
Leaves move and fall to the side  
Faces smile and straighten quickly, side by side

There's a need to move, and move on in life  
Even though it may be termed as strife  
There's a need to make an impact, as if striking with a knife  
And then sing boldly "This is life!"

Eyes meet and smiles passed  
In between words, in between phrases, fast  
Without saying anything, with unblinking masks  
Great is the power of expressions which last

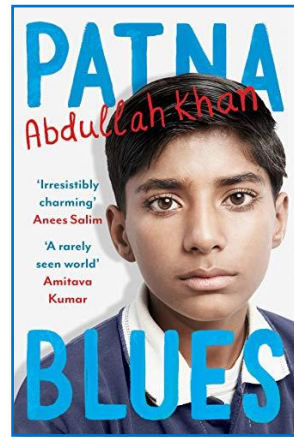
From eyes to hands  
Pass expressions like magic wands  
Put letters, words, phrases into un-meaningful hands  
And thereby, move to magic of the fairy lands!

From hands to the entire body  
Emotions spiral up to the mind, lips, eyes  
No hiding, there possibly is Almighty!  
Of the gusto of life, of a life full of glee.



## Book Review of *Patna Blues*

Dr Hasibuddin



Khan. Abdullah, *Patna Blues*. Juggernaut. 2022

It is a work of fiction by Abdullah Khan and dedicated to his daadi (paternal grandmother), Late Amirunnisa, and Amma (mother) Late Shaheeda Khatoon, from whom he inherited the art of storytelling. His art of storytelling is in itself tough, creative and sincere. Most of us who were born in twentieth century might have some remembrance of our grandparents, be it daada (paternal grandfather); daadi (paternal grandmother); naana (maternal grandfather); naani (maternal grandmother), who used to tell stories before going to bed. A number of noted authors and established online and print media personalities have rated this book as an exceptional piece of work. The author has started with the couplet of Faiz Ahmad Faiz, where 'love' is established as the crux.

The fiction is divided into three sections, viz.

1. Dream- Chapters, 1-13
2. Grief- Chapters, 14-19
3. Destiny- Chapters, 20-22

The author has very beautifully and artistically presented the situation of a lower middle class family living in Patna, the capital of Bihar. Patna was earlier known as Patliputra during the reign of Gupta Dynasty.

The head of the family, Abdul Rashid is an inspector in Bihar Military Police. He is an honest police inspector. The author has also emphasized on the importance of honesty prevailing in the society. It was very hard for him to maintain the day-to-day expenditure of the family consisting of eight members. He has two sons, Arif and Zakir and three daughters, Rabiya, Nazneen and Huma.

The beginning of the fiction starts with an event happening in the family. Since they are living in Patna, most of the relatives stay at their place when a member of the family is hospitalized. Mr Abdullah Khan has also talked about the traditions being adopted in the society. How people used to welcome their guests even when it is a burden financially. Their priority was always the guest saying, “Atithi Devo Bhava”. That is, Guest is like a God.

Three types of dreams have been discussed in the dream section of the work:

1. Celestial Dreams ( Khwaab-e-Rahmaani)- which give insight into future events.
2. Satanic Dreams (Khwaab-e-Shaitani)- are dirty dreams and nightmares
3. Psychological Dreams (Khwab-e-Zehani)- reflection of what one thinks about deeply when one is awake.

Moving onto the other chapters, the central character of the fiction, Arif is a civil services aspirant. He is attracted to a married woman named Sumitra. This is a type of natural infatuation of most of the boys of Arif's age. The author has very precisely presented the situations, scenes and contexts of dreams in these chapters. The second son Zakir is interested in playing different characters at stage. If one compares Arif, the older son and Zakir, the younger son, the younger son is more mentally mature. Through this comparison one can predict that it's not necessary that maturity is a quality that comes through experience. Sometimes a younger person can be the practical and mature one. After learning his attraction towards Sumitra, Zakir requests his older brother Arif to remain in limits and think about the family's reputation and his sisters.

Dreams can be a reality, if it is destined. If the dreams are not fulfilled, naturally there will be a grief. And this Grief is the second section of the fiction, where both the brothers as well as the sisters face difficult situations. So, instead of lamenting and scolding the people and situations, they think positively and try to fill the gap so that the dream can be turned to reality. With the aid of a political scenario, the author has nicely presented the happenings.

The final section is devoted to Destiny. Although Arif was preparing for Indian Administrative Services Examination, but his destiny turned him to qualify the Allied State Services Exam and at the end he was selected as a translator. This work is undoubtedly interesting, and I would rate it as an outstanding one.



## ~English Literature~

### Portrayal of Gender Politics in Martin Crimp's *The Country*

Divya Gehlotra & Dr JK Nair

#### Abstract

Martin Crimp is one of the most significant playwrights to emerge on the British theatrical scenario after the 1980s. The representation of female figures in the plays of Martin Crimp leads us to see his writing within a feminist perspective. His female characters challenge the patriarchal discourse and take a stand against the 'female condition'. Gender, over the years, came to be recognized as an important sphere for exploring the "politics" behind sexual difference that societies continuously try to uphold in their pursuit of consolidating and perpetuating patriarchal norms. And, gender politics defines a society's stance on sexual difference and gender. Martin Crimp's *The Country* focuses on how women are unjustly treated and overpowered within patriarchal societies simply because of their sexual difference with men, and thereby calls for a debate or criticism of the same such that better space for women can be secured within societies. The present paper tries to explore gender politics in Martin Crimp's *The Country* from the lens of a feminist standpoint.

**Keywords:** Martin Crimp, Gender Politics, Patriarchy, Subjectivity.

Gender Politics is a very important aspect of the play *The Country* written by Martin Crimp. The play presents a kind of love triangle between Richard, Corinne and Rebecca. The role of Rebecca is very significant in disrupting the relationship between husband and wife, and appears for the chief force driving the play forward. In this play, the man/woman dichotomy is investigated through the presentation of a couple in crisis.

In general the women in the play, Rebecca and Corinne, tend to talk more, and by doing so they govern the play. At the beginning it is Corinne who tries to impose her language by talking more forcefully than Richard and by using more words than him. In the first scene, there is a confrontation between the two. Corinne offers her husband a glass of water asking what it tastes of. She demands that he accepts her definition of the taste and

even though Richard resists her definition, he still accepts the full glass of water. Corinne continues on the attack, focussing more directly on the infidelity she suspects:

Well, that's just it; you were standing there with this girl in your arms,  
smiling.

And I thought oh look, he's lost his sense of humour.

He's finally lost his famous sense / of humour.

But in fact you were wrong.

In fact I was wrong.

In fact my famous sense of humour survives intact.

In fact your famous sense of humour does-yes- survive / intact.

*(The Country 296)*

Rebecca uses language even more confidently than Corinne. Her familiarity with Virgil's poetry and the pastoral, for example, make her the more 'cultivated' and self assured speaker. Her use of this 'cultivated' language seems an attempt to possess language, to use man-made language against men. When she confronts Richard in scene four, insisting that she wants to take a shower in his home, she is rebellious and challenging. Later on, she gives advice on how Richard could change his accommodation, in such a forceful way that it seems as though she is taking possession of it. Towards the end of the scene she confronts Richard again. She describes her first meeting with him as a doctor, making use of the third person pronoun and employing the image of being read like a map to suggest his seduction of her. To some extent, the language she uses paints a clear picture of Richard's abuse of her own body as well as functioning as a rejection of Richard's treatment:

He asked her to undress. And when she'd undressed, he said: I see now how  
very sick you are — you need some medicine. . . . The treatment was wild. .  
. . It could take place at any time of the day and night. In any part of the city.  
In any part of her body. Her body. .. became the city. The doctor learned how  
to unfold her - like a map. *(The Country 342)*

It is an image that resonates with Foucault's view of 18th century women and of the female body as "a medical object par excellence" (Foucault 115).

At first glance, one could argue that Crimp gives his female characters the upper-hand in *The Country* so that they use language confidently and are able to threaten the composure of the male character. In the second scene for example, Corinne attempts to unnerve Richard with Rebecca's wristwatch:

Corinne, alone, has a small object pressed to her ear. Richard appears, doing up his shirt, watching her. She dangles the object- a wristwatch- by its thing old bracelet, and smiles to herself. As he gets close and reaches for the watch, she snaps it back in her fist. She slowly opens her fist. He comes closer, he takes the watch, she grips his hand, the phone rings. They don't move.

*(The Country 306-307)*

Corinne and Rebecca seem able to use the language that is the product of the heterosexual matrix and thus disrupt it from within. However, this dynamic changes in the last scene. Richard gives Corinne a pair of heeled shoes, a cultural trope of femininity, which in the context of this play seemingly represents Corinne's complaisance towards Richard. This is suggested by the fact that Corinne does not accept the gift reluctantly, as she expresses amusement about it in a telephone conversation to Sophie, while Richard kissing her neck uses the word 'decadent' to describe his gift. By doing so, Richard seems to impose his definition on his gift; Corinne's complaisance suggests that she both accepts the gift and Richard's definition.

This act of repossessing the scene/space doesn't occur suddenly but we could say that Richard appears continually to be attempting to re-possess his space and his patriarchal role throughout the play and that earlier scenes lead towards this conclusion. However, if we are now going to question what appeared to be women's dominance in the play, it is important to review the way in which the events of the play unfold.

If on the one hand, we accept that Corinne's dominance relates to the way in which she uses speech aggressively against Richard, on the other, we should not forget that she is reacting to Richard's cheating, which in itself is an act of defiance towards her and women in general. Richard makes use of both Rebecca and Corinne. Richard also demonstrates his power over his wife by the very fact of bringing his lover into the house without explanation. Further confirmation that Richard is regaining his 'patriarchal role' can be found in the tone of his words that communicate a growing intensity and implicit command as the play progresses.

Looking more closely at the character of Richard contextualised within the play as a whole provides another way of viewing the gender dynamics. It might seem sometimes, for example, that Richard corresponds to a negative portrayal of men according to a 'womanist' fashion. Womanism or "feminine vulgate" as defined by Rosalind Coward is a type of feminist attitude that easily and superficially blames "men as natural oppressors of women's condition" (Coward 86). Crimp seems sometimes to adopt this position in his playing with stereotypes that put Richard in a bad light. Richard appears generally to be hiding a secret, hardly revealing anything of him and protecting himself from women who, in contrast, actually take the risk of disclosing their own emotions to him. Moreover, at the end of the play, Richard's personal situation seems substantially unchanged: in spite of his affair with Rebecca, he is still married to Corinne, who has accepted both his affair and his professional misconduct as a doctor. It seems that Corinne has given into him by compromising, perhaps even by helping him kill his lover.

The relationship between Rebecca and Corinne is very revealing in terms of Crimp's feminism as it shows how he combines old and new stereotypes of women. Rebecca comes across as a stronger character than Corinne. It is Rebecca's decision to go to the country and Richard simply follows her. In her relationship with him, overcoming his seduction she is the one who had apparently decided to break with him. Even though she portrays herself as a victim in her dialogue with Richard, she still retains some control. In the dialogue between Rebecca and Corinne, the differences strongly emerge. Corinne still tries to cover up for Richard, where as Rebecca tries to persuade Corinne that she should rebel against Richard. Complicity between the two women is never carried through. Rebecca's advice is not followed as Corinne decides to return to Richard after temporarily leaving him. Even though at the beginning both women seem to have a similar capacity to use language and be empowered by it, Rebecca is more cultivated and is more effective because she had greater familiarity with the masculine traditions which have defined 'cultivation' in the past.

In simplistic terms Corinne represents a modern woman who still cannot make use of her empowerment and opts for compromise with her male counterpart; by accepting the countryside and Richard's shoes, she accepts a degree of male dominance. Rebecca, who makes a stand against Richard, retains her independence. In feminist terms we could say that Corinne fits and accepts the traditional role as imposed by a patriarchal system, Rebecca that of liberated woman. If we think of Corinne and Rebecca as parts of the same woman, Corinne and Rebecca would represent the two conflicting aspects of contemporary women struggling between their traditional roles and 'modern' needs.

However, Crimp's use of old and new stereotypes is more complex than this. Rebecca's seduction and abduction still make her a victim of male dominance. Her passion for Virgil and use of Latin associate her with Morris, who also likes Virgil and uses Latin when speaking to Corinne. To some extent, even though, as said above, she seems to use language more confidently than Corinne, her interest in Virgil affirms her involvement with a male dominated culture. Her mysterious disappearance suggests that being a feminist or an emancipated woman can be dangerous. There is a suggestion that rebelling against Richard and expressing her will to leave him leads to her own demise, with Corinne becoming Richard's accomplice rather than showing solidarity with her as a woman. The depiction of the characters and the unfolding of the events also show that new stereotypical practices may work against women, who by talking confidently, for example, reveal too much of themselves and are weakened in the face of men's dishonesty.

In this sense, the message of this play seems, once again, to be about the dominance of patriarchal systems and the affirmation of them as almost absolute, while the idea of women re-possessing language or using it to disturb the heterosexual matrix seems now to be illusory. Echoing Dale Spender, a feminist, one can argue that the language women use is manmade. Both Morris and Virgil seem to own the language Rebecca uses. In this sense as argued before, Crimp might seem to be adopting a womanist approach, simply blaming men for women's compliance with female stereotypes. However, as already suggested, it is important to look at how old and new stereotypes conflict with each other, with the new sometimes ironically confirming old ones. One needs to take into account Zimmermann's claim that Crimp addresses an underlying criticism of feminism and demonstrates how feminism has failed to 'liberate' women. In this sense the pessimism of this play seems to reproduce concerns of early Second Wave feminists, such as Dale Spencer, and it also expresses a 'post feminism perspective' that blames feminism for its failure to 'liberate' woman.

Crimp represents through this play emasculation of masculinity taking place using a post-feminist dialectic that condemns previous trends of feminism for becoming an authoritative force against men, in the same way as the patriarchal discourse against women. This gender representation shows clearly the protagonist's emasculation sending a strong message about the effects of feminism.

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## Exploration of Dalit Experience and Diversion of Dalit Consciousness – A Study of the Selected ‘Gandhian’ Novels

D Ramakrishna

### Abstract:

This paper explores the Dalit experiences and analyses how Dalit consciousness in the three Gandhian novels: *Untouchable* (1935) by Mulk Raj Anand, *Kanthapura* (1938) by Raja Rao and *Waiting for Mahatma* (1955) by R. K. Narayan. The protagonist Bakha and his sister Sohini in *Untouchable* experience humiliation from Hindus. The belief of inferiority that is instilled among Dalits does not permit them to fight against the discrimination and for their rights in this novel. In *Kanthapura*, the Dalits are not permitted to enter the temple and they are marginalized. The visit of Moorthy to their colony compels them to participate in Indian freedom struggle and they are diverted from their agony of humiliation by the upper Caste Hindus. In *Waiting for Mahatma*, not only the orthodox Granny but his grandson, Sriram insults scavengers and they put them at a greater distance. Incorporating the Dalits into the Hindu fold in order to curb down the Dalit consciousness can be seen in the novel. In all the three novels, Gandhi is presented as the savior of Dalits whereas, surprisingly Ambedkar is completely absent. There is a need to explore the literature in which Dalit consciousness is significant and Ambedkar’s ideology is adopted.

**Keywords:** Dalit, Dalit consciousness, Dalit experience, Gandhian novels, Ambedkar

Dalit is a word used to refer ‘oppressed’ but now it is used mainly to denote Scheduled Caste (SC) community. The word ‘Dalit’ has been taken from the Sanskrit ‘dalita’ meaning ‘divided and split’. It is unique to the Indian context as the Caste system is very much predominant and inseparable in the lives of the people. The word was first used by Jyothi Bha Pule and it was popularized by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar.

Dalits are out of Chaturvarna system and the four varnas are Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vysya, and Shudra. The people who have no place in these varnas are Dalits. The holy scriptures were written to authenticate the above system. The scriptures say that the karma

one did in the previous birth can make to be born in higher caste or as a Dalit. In order to be born in a higher caste, a Dalit has to do good karma and follow his own dharma (work).

The works in the society are divided among the four varnas and the scavenging of latrines is given to dalits. Due to their work of scavenging both dead animals and human waste, the dalits were subjected to heinous humiliation. They were not permitted to live among the Hindus and they had to live in the outskirts of the village. They had to depend on Hindus to get the water from the well as they did not have a chance to draw the water themselves. In schools, they had to sit outside of the classroom to listen the classes.

There was a valid remark from the British at the time of freedom movement when the Hindus asked for freedom from the slavery of the British, they questioned about the same of dalits. In this context, the words of Munshi Prem Chand, noted Hindi writer are note worthy: "while our hearts are still plunged in the darkness of caste distinctions". "Who does not know", he asked. "That caste distinctions and nationhood are opposed to each other like poison and nectar?" (Prashad, 551) In order to arrest further division among the Hindus and to diminish Dalit worst experiences, Mahatma Gandhi had requested the Indians to call the dalits as 'harijans' (the people of Lord Krishna). The term itself shows that Gandhi wanted to incorporate them into the Hindu fold.

Nevertheless, the real help had come from Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. He tried to ignite the Dalit consciousness and insisted the need of political struggle for the Dalit cause. The work of Ambedkar showed its impact upon the society. His erudite scholarship helped them to have reservations in the education and employment. The work of Ambedkar for Dalit cause and freedom struggle had taken place at the same time. The greater appeal for freedom struggle submerged the Dalit consciousness at its embryonic stage.

The discourse of Dalit experience and Dalit consciousness had not taken place only in the political arena but the literature of the time also portrayed them in the guise of fiction. The earlier fiction on these Dalit issues can be traced back to the three prominent Gandhian novels - *Untouchable* (1935) by Mulk Raj Anand, *Kanthapura* (1938) by Raja Rao and *Waiting for Mahatma* (1955) by R. K. Narayan. These novels are studied in this paper to explore the Dalit experience and analyses the Dalit consciousness of the times.

A personal incident in Mulk Raj Anand's life compelled him to write the novel, *Untouchable*. It is recounted in his article by Prashad:

A scavenger named Uka, an 'untouchable', used to attend our house for cleaning latrines. Often I would ask my mother why I was wrong to touch him.



If I accidentally touched Uka, I was asked to perform ablutions, and though I naturally obeyed, it was not without smilingly protesting that it should be so. I was a dutiful and obedient child, and so far as it was consistent with respect for parents, I often had tussles with them on this matter. I told my mother that she was entirely wrong in considering contact with Uka as sinful. (552)

In this novel, Bakha is an untouchable and the protagonist. The story is about what happened in the life of Bakha in one day. His day begins and ends with humiliation and the scar of untouchability is present all the time. The first incident is when he touches a Brahmin in the market accidentally. The Brahmin was so furious and started abusing Bakha. He expressed his apology but no one was ready to listen to his apology. The condition of Bakha is pathetic:

His first impulse was to run, just to shoot across the throng, away, away, and far away from the torment. But then he realised that he was surrounded by a barrier, not a physical barrier, because one push from his hefty shoulders would have been enough to unbalance the skeleton-like bodies of the Hindu merchants, but a moral one. He knew that contact with him, if he pushed through, would defile a great many more of these men (48).

Sohini's experience with Kali Nath presents the hypocrisy of the Hindu religiosity. She, as an untouchable, is not permitted to enter the temple. But, Kali Nath tries to molest her when she protests his advances; he abuses her by saying that she has polluted him. When she informs it to Bakha, he is outrageous but he understands his low position which does not allow him to raise a voice against his sister's molestation.

Dalit consciousness in those times is crippled by the conditioning of many centuries. In this novel, when Bakha reports it to his father, he reasons faultily and supports the Hindus. He says, "the caste Hindus are really kind but we must realize that it is their religion which prevents them from, touching us" (83). It can be seen even in Bakha. He constantly tells himself that he is an untouchable in the event of touching a Brahmin:

A shock of which this was the name had passed through his perceptions, previously numb and torpid, and had sent a quiver into his being, stirred his nerves of sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste, all into a quickening. 'I am an Untouchable!' he said to himself, an Untouchable!' He repeated the words in

his mind, for it was still a bit hazy and he felt afraid it might be immersed in the darkness again. Then, aware of his position, he began to shout aloud the warning word with which he used to announce his approach: "Posh, posh, sweeper coming.' The undertone, 'Untouchable, Untouchable,' was in his heart; the warning shout, 'Posh, posh, sweeper coming!' was in his mouth. (52)

Bakha's naïve belief that flushing machines can change the fate of Dalit is presented at the end of the novel. The mesmerizing words of Gandhiji create hope in Bakha and his consciousness is surrendered to the words of Gandhi.

Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* is predominantly a Brahmanical text and it presents Gandhi is the only savior of the dalits. The way for the emancipation of dalits is to follow Gandhi. In this novel, Moorthy is a staunch follower of Gandhi and his mission is to make the villagers to participate in freedom struggle.

It presents that the regular meeting of upper caste Hindus with Dalits is polluting them. Satamma in this novel worries about it, "That is horrible . . . it is the Kalyuga floods, and as the sastras say, there will be the confusion of castes and the pollution of progeny. We can't help it, perhaps" (39). There are severe punishments in order to arrest the meeting of Brahmins and Dalits. The Brahmins who interact with dalits are ex-communicated. It is ordered from the gurus of the religious sect:

Seetharamu: I want your help, Bhattare.

Bhattare: What can I do for you?

Seetharamu: The Swami is worried over this pariah movement, and he wants to crush it in its seed, before its cactus roots have spread far and wide. You are a Bhatta and your voice is not a sparrow voice in your village, and you should speak to your people and organize a Brahmin party. Otherwise Brahmanism is as good as kitchen ashes. The Mahatma is a good man and a simple man. But he is making too much of these carcass-eating pariahs. Today it will be the pariahs, tomorrow it will be the Mohomedan, and the day after the Europeans .....We must stop this. The Swami says, he will outcaste every Brahmin who has touched a pariah that is the right way to begin. Bhattare, we need your help.

Bhattare: Well Seetharamu, this Bhatta who has been a pontifical Brahmin cannot be on the side of the pariahs. And I know that in our good village there

is no Brahmin who has drunk of our holy Himavathy's water and wants caste pollutions. I shall speak to our people. And that is why I have come to see you.  
(67)

To make the fears of Bhattare and Seetharamu, Moorthy of Kanthapura ambitiously visits the pariah (Dalit) colony to motivate them to follow Gandhi for India's freedom. The mind is influenced by Gandhi but his heart has years of Brahmanical practices. The latter one makes him to touch his sacred thread when he takes water in a Dalit house.

The incident of Moorthy visiting their colony makes the Dalit positive about the future change in their untouchable status. They willingly participate in Gandhi's struggle. They are unable to recognize that the Hindus are fighting against their slavery under the British but the Hindus in Kanthapura are still exploiting them. Thus, Dalit consciousness is neutralized with one or two positive incidents in their lives.

Unlike Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand, the writings of RK Narayan rarely present the political turmoil in India. His forte of writing is middle class Indian families filled with melodrama and humour. However, he writes about the dalits and Gandhi's work for them in his novel *Waiting for Mahatma*. Gandhi is more present and is a character in this novel in comparison to the earlier mentioned two novels as their physical presence is very minimal in them.

The changes in attitude of Sriram, the protagonist of this novel, take place when he becomes the Gandhian follower. Prior to that, he participates in bullying the dalits who visits their home for scavenging work. Narayan portrays how Sriram and his grandmother are insensitive towards dalits:

Granny was so orthodox that she would not let the scavenger approach nearer than ten yards, and habitually adopted a bullying tone while addressing him. Sriram also took a devilish pleasure in joining the baiting and finding fault with the scavenger's work, although he never paid the slightest attention to their comments. He simply went about his business, driving his broom vigorously and interrupting himself only to ask, 'When will master give me an old shirt he promised so long ago?' (n. pag)

Gandhi, in this novel, visits Malgudi and stays in a Dalit colony which typically "lays on the outskirts . . . and the ugliness, the squalor and the misery ... lay within it" (Anand 9). His stay

among the dalits, as Moorthy's visit in *Kanthapura*, creates some confidence and the dalits become the follower of Gandhi. They are oblivious to their pathetic condition.

Historically, the merge of the marginalized into Hindu fold is a recurrent practice and the filthy works were handed over to those communities. In that way, their identity and uniqueness are erased completely. In the above presented three novels, Gandhi as an image and Gandhi as a person tries to bring the dalits into Hindu religion. But he could not realise that "the higher caste Hindus have deliberately prevented the lower castes who are within the pale of Hinduism from rising to the cultural level of the higher castes" (Rodrigues 269). The Dalit question that was debated and expanded by Ambedkar was neglected thoroughly in these novels.

The more nuances of Dalit experience and Dalit consciousness can be brought forward by the study of post independent Dalit literature in the framework of Ambedkar's ideology. It is not untrue when a poet screams, "Give us Ambedkar back! Ghettoes are still around" (Deo 54).

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## Saussure's Theory of Sign and Signification

Munir Khan

### Abstract

This paper attempts to present an overview of Saussure's theory of language. Setting aside the etymological, historical, and comparative study of language, he offers a systematic and scientific study of language known as structural linguistics. In this paper, I have tried to show that his main concern is with the functional aspect of language as to how it works and produces meaning (signification) in the text. He leaves the traditional path of understanding language i. e. the analytic tradition of the nineteenth century language philosophers. Saussure offers an entirely new theory of language i.e. the theory of sign. He holds that sign is not a list of words, but psychological entities. I have tried to examine the core study of Saussure about language dealing with four dichotomies—langue and parole, synchronic and diachronic, signifier and signified, and syntagmatic and paradigmatic.

**Key-Words:** Atomism, Langue, Parole, Sign, Signifier, and Signified.

### Introduction

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a signature in the modern western intellectual discourse, heralds a huge revolution in the field of linguistics, giving a new direction to the understanding of the world, society, and culture. Gifted with the scientific and analytical mind, he offers an entirely new theory of language known as structural linguistics. He sets aside the traditional or historical study of language—its origin, evolution, comparison, and history, as his predecessors would do. Saussure changes the track of such types of linguistic studies, and makes a fresh and systematic examination of the general nature of language, neither of particular language, nor of particular aspect of language. He develops a new outlook to the study of language and critically raises a question as to how language works and produces its meaning in the linguistic system. In other words, he mainly discusses its functional aspect.

Prior to the discussion of Saussure's vision towards language, I would like to explain the existing linguistic condition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, so that we could

understand and appreciate his principles of language in a better way. Broadly speaking, Saussure was not happy with the linguistic system of his time and the approaches adopted by his predecessors were not acceptable to him. He, therefore, expresses his deep dissatisfaction with the traditional studies of linguistics, which was naïve, immature, and rather unscientific. Saussure writes: “Linguistics never attempted to determine the nature of object it was studying, and without this elementary operation a science can’t develop an appropriate method.” Saussure’s approach is quite different from other linguists, because he wants to know what language is and how it functions and produces meaning in the text.

The traditional linguists were concerned with the nature of human thought and the mind, not of language. At that time it was believed that it was essential to know first thought to study language. They studied the mechanism of the mind in language and searched for the primitive roots of the words. A root was a basic name, a basic representation of the word. This etymological project assumed that the words of our language were not arbitrary signs but had a rational basis and were motivated by resemblance to a primitive sign. In this approach, the relationship between language and mind conceived atomistically. It was investigated as a philosophic etymological problem rather than historical in the eighteenth century. We can understand Saussure’s theory of language, if we have a basic knowledge of the contemporary language philosophers such as Moore, Russell, and Wittgenstein. These philosophers are also called of analytic tradition. They try to reduce language to its elements, breaking it into smallest parts atomistically. They regard language only a list of words, corresponding to the thing it names.

Saussure rejected the study of language from the study of mind—the atomism of eighteenth century linguistics. In his view, the study of language reveals that mind is not a set of primitive conceptions or natural ideas but the general structuring and diffracting. He also criticized the comparative grammarians because they could not also develop the significance of relationship in a system. Saussure rightly observes that it is towards the end of 1870 linguists began to lay its foundation for a proper study and analysis of language. In this connection, he has a high regard for William Dwight Whitney who raises the question of sign. Whitney argues: “Language is in fact, an institution founded on social conventions; a treasure of words and forms” each of which is an ‘arbitrary and conventional sign.’ Whitney for the first time, underlines the conventional and institutional nature of language. Saussure makes an observation about his (Whitney’s) approach towards language:

To emphasise the fact that language is a genuine institution, Whitney quite justly insisted upon the arbitrary nature of signs; and by so doing, he placed linguistics on its true axis. But he did not follow through and see that the arbitrariness of language radically separates it from all other institutions. This is apparent from the way in which language evolves... (76).

Though Whitney talks about the conventional and arbitrary nature of language, he could not extend this new perspective further. He gives much importance to the historical aspect of language and pays a little attention to the synchronic aspect. However, the insights of Whitney inspire Saussure to think about the nature and problem of sign in a new direction. Even Bertrand Russell and G. E Moore also hold that a word signifies a particular thing as its meaning, but Saussure's concept of sign is basically different from the analytical tradition. And he offers three objections to this view: (1) it assumes that ready-made ideas exist before words; (2) it fails to tell us whether a name is vocal or psychological in nature; and (3) finally, it assumes that the linking of a name and thing is a simple operation. Saussure addresses the important connection between thought and language. Prior to language, he suggests, our thought is "a shapeless and indistinct mass" and we would be unable to make a clear-cut, consistent distinction between two ideas." There are no ideas, he insists, before words.

The second important point is that Saussure holds that language is social phenomenon, a social fact, and a social institution. It is something acquired, conventional, and an organized system. Saussure contends that "practically everything we do that is specifically human is expressed in language." Language is not divine; language is not mysterious; and language is not natural. It is "a social product of the collective mind of a linguistic community." It does not have an organic system growing according to its own accord. Saussure is of the view that we can think, know, and perceive through language, and, therefore, our perceptions of reality are formed and determined by language. He further goes to say that we do not speak language; it is language that speaks us. We see only what language allows us. It is language that structures our experiences. All this explains how speakers of different languages tend to have different views of the world. They see the world through different structures of different languages (Staton 141-142). Saussure wants to clear the doubt that our use of language is nature's gift, but the system of language is acquired and conventional.

According to Saussure, all reality of the world is constructed and understood through the medium of language. We cannot know anything of the external world without language, because we do not have any other medium or alternative except language. All reality, therefore, is linguistically constructed. Reality is itself textual; it is through words. Text is made of words. Thus, all knowledge and reality is textual. Jim Powell observes: “Poststructuralists tend to see all knowledge—history, anthropology, literature, and psychology etc. as textual. This means knowledge is not composed of concepts, but of words” (20). This view of language challenges the established assumption of reality as somehow independent of language and exists outside the system of language.

Saussure argues that reality does not exist without language. Truth, knowledge, meaning, our perception and understanding—they all are constructed by language. Nothing in this world escape from language, because everything what we see, think, feel, experience, is intervened by language. After all language is the only medium, the only tool to convey our thoughts, perception, understanding and ideas. That is why Derrida says: “There is nothing out-side text.” Text means language; text is made of words. Thus, there is no way but to bank upon language or words in language. In other words, our knowledge of the world is shaped and conditioned by the language that serves to represent it. Reality does not endow language with any meaning. It is rather by the system of our language that we make sense of the world. Therefore, Sudarsan Sahoo writes:

There is no escaping from language. We are formed by language. We are created through language. We exist in the language we are born into it. Language is used for stretching or distending for our various purposes. The way we understand the world, the way we see ourselves are governed by the language. Our experiences in the world are mediated by language (34).

Prior to Saussure, it was conventionally known that a word refers to an object or thing. Traditional linguists hold that language is only a tool—an instrument. In this regard, previously language was considered

...simply as system of naming an objective reality which was presumed to exist before, and outside language itself. Within this way of thinking, the real world clearly already there, while language simply came along to label it in all its specificities (Malpas and Wake 4).



Hans Bertens also explains that pre-Saussurian linguists think that language is

something that makes it possible for us to do something, to express ourselves.... we only use it (language) to express something *prior* to language : something that exists in our minds before we resort to language to give it shape in words. We know beforehand what we want to say and then choose the words we want to say it with (122-123).

But both Derrida and Saussure reject this presumption and presupposition. Reality does not exist or come into being prior to language. It is language that gives birth to objective reality. Reality is not already ready-made construction existing in the mind. The world presents itself to us not neatly divided into categories and it is through language that we make categories of the world. Saussure's contention is that "language provides a foundational structure for the world around us by organizing it into tangible entities that we can, as an effect of that language, then describe and discuss"(104).

Saussure turned the concept of language as held by the traditional and the nineteenth century linguists. He does not believe that language is a mirror or reflection of thoughts and things. He rejects the traditional correspondence theory of meaning where language was viewed as naming process. He also repudiates that language is based on universal logic—on some kind of intrinsic link between the name and its object. He denies that there is somehow a natural relationship between words and things. Hence, language is not merely a "name-giving system." In other words, Saussure opposes the rationalist approach that language is essentially naming process, attaching words to things. Such a perspective assumes that language is essentially a nomenclature: a collection of names for objects and ideas. Saussure does not accept that the essential bond in language is between words and things. Thus, the nomenclaturist position becomes an entirely inadequate basis for linguistics and the traditional assumptions about language are not acceptable.

In the hands of Saussure the concept of 'words' or language undergoes a radical change. He observes that a word is not a symbol that represents a thing or object outside it. Language has its own world, its own system, its own structural system, and its own reality to the external world around us. It is nothing to do with the external reality. "Language is self-defining....It is self-regulating" (Hawkes 26). Language is an organizing system, which develops with the evolution of civilization. It is not natural, but socially constructed. Saussure argues that in linguistics nothing is given in advance. We cannot start from a word assuming

that a meaning is given to that word before the set-up of the linguistic system. Presumption of a prior affirmation meaning or knowledge or reality is mistaken, as Derrida also says. The structure of language itself produces meaning. To be more precise, “it is language which enables the world to be constituted to us as intelligible” (6). It is language, not the world external to us, which mediates reality. Saussure’s structural linguistics is a “linguistic version of Kantianism, holding that language is a self-contained, no-referential system...” (Hicks 43).

Saussure’s, *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), a must for any linguistic bookshelf, offers his novel, original, and radical principles of language, dismantling its orthodox views. They leave enormous and lasting influence on the twentieth century new linguistics, which significantly steers the course of human science and literary studies. This revolutionary work of Saussure is published after his death in 1916. Originally written in French, it is, in fact, not written and published by Saussure himself but is constructed on the basis of student notes on his lectures during three series at the University of Geneva from 1906 to 1911. Later, the notes are restructured by his two colleagues—Charles Bally and Robert Sechehaye, who bring it in book form, and Wad Baskin translated it into English, in which the terms sign, signifier, and signified are introduced into literary criticism in the precise way.

### **Langue and Parole**

The core study of Saussure’s structural linguistics pivots on the four dichotomies—langue-parole, diachronic-synchronic, the signifier-the signified, and paradigmatic-syntagmatic—discussed in the *Course of General Linguistics*, which proves to be the most dynamic of linguistic concepts. He makes a study of language to understand in the light of its aim of communication. First and foremost, Saussure demonstrates that language is always made up of two aspects—(i) *langue* and (ii) *parole*. These two characteristics of language are to be explained very seriously to understand Saussurian theory of language, because these two terms have been extended to other disciplines, too, vary widely. The first aspect of language, *langue*, denotes its abstract systematic principles. In other words, *langue* is the establishment of entire system of language—its rules, grammar, spelling, syntax, semantics, and pronunciation etc. On the other hand, the other aspect of language is *parole*, which designates individual concrete utterances, physiological mechanism such as speech organs, statements, and writing. *Langue* deals with the formal underlying system of language, whereas *parole* with the concrete speech acts i. e. how language actually brings into action or practice for

communicative purposes. *Parole* is the concrete physical manifestation of the abstract *langue* that exists in the mind.

<b>Langue</b>	<b>Parole</b>
Producing system An abstract system of language (its grammar, syntax, spelling etc.)	produced speech, writing, or concrete utterances etc.
The sum of these two aspects is language: <b>Langue + parole = language (langage)</b>	

One has to be very careful to know that the meaning of *langue*, a French word, is also language, but it is used here in technical sense by Saussure. It is quite different from English word language, used in general sense. The meaning of *langue* is rather the entire system or paraphernalia of language, not language itself, as the dictionary meaning denotes.

*Langue* stands for all the rules regarding the combinations of sounds, formation of words, phrases and sentences, pronunciation, and meaning. All these tools constitute *langue*. It is the product of social agreement, social conventions, and social beliefs shared by the particular society. These particular stable conventions passively acquired from the society exist in the mind of the speaker, who belongs to that society that has created *langue*. If we hear someone speaking a language that we do not know; we can hear only the sounds. The sentences i.e. *parole*, are unintelligible. We cannot understand the language, because we do not share *langue* behind the individual sentences and sounds. Thus, without *langue*, *parole* would never be understood and could not serve the purpose of communication. *Langue* evolves with the passage of time; it cannot be changed easily by any individual.

In his linguistic study, Saussure's main focus is on *langue*, not on *parole*. *Parole* is the practical application of *langue*, and every person makes use of *parole* in his or her own ways. *Parole*, therefore, is heterogeneous, unpredictable, and mass of speech acts, variable, inventive, and whimsical. Experienced in everyday use, it is subject to mutability and manipulation by a number of causes, for example, time, social groups, and age of users. It is messy and, therefore, extremely difficult to capture it in any scientific investigation. In this way, *parole* of one speaker may change from that of another, while *langue* is universal, systematic, and includes the rules in its entirety, and is the same for every person. *Langue* is understood by a social group, rarely thought of in everyday life. Saussure further clarifies the

difference between *langue* and *parole* through the example of the game of chess. He points out that the function of language is like all the possible moves within the rules that could be made in the game, whereas *parole* is the choice of moves that is made in the game from player to player. Different players can play the game in different ways, but the rules of the game remain the same while playing. The rules remain fixed and are understood by all the players, but each game is different and depends on the individual performances and talent, which differ from player to player. Similarly, *langue* is the same for every speaker and does not change with each individual, while *parole* changes from one speaker to another, producing sentence after sentence in his own way infinitely. According to Eagleton “What people actually utter or write is not as important as the structure which allows them to do so.” Saussure considers *langue* as legislative side of language; *parole* the executive side of language for its individual ends. Saussure’s *langue* and *parole* pair is somewhat similar to Noam Chomsky’s linguistic *competence* and *performance*, A. G. Greimas’s *system* and *process*, and Roman Jakobson’s *code* and *message*.

### **Diachronic and Synchronic**

In his scientific study of language, Saussure introduces two other terms—diachronic and synchronic—the two different approaches to language study. Prior to Saussure, the traditional method of the study of language was based on the historical development and change over time. It studied its evolutionary process through different time periods in the development of lingual elements as well as a whole. For example, the record of changes and development of English through the Old English and the Middle English to the twentieth century could be described in phonological, grammatical, semantic, and spelling terms. It is called historical, or comparative, or diachronic study of language. Diachronic literally means across time, and it studies the changes of sound, words, an examination of language, its birth, and various stages of development it undergoes in phonology and semantics, within and between languages or group of languages. Hans Bretens argues that diachronic approach also studies “the origin of individual words (modern English ‘way,’ for instance, derives from the Old English ‘weg’) and they tried to formulate the laws that apparently govern processes of linguistic change” (55). Diachronic study identifies the fact that language is a continuously changing phenomenon. For example, the study of the development of modern Italian from Latin and that of Modern English from Old English are examples of diachronic study of language. It is similar to evolutionary biology, which maps the shifts and transformations of

various historical stages. It is thus the study of language in terms of how it visibly changes in usage.

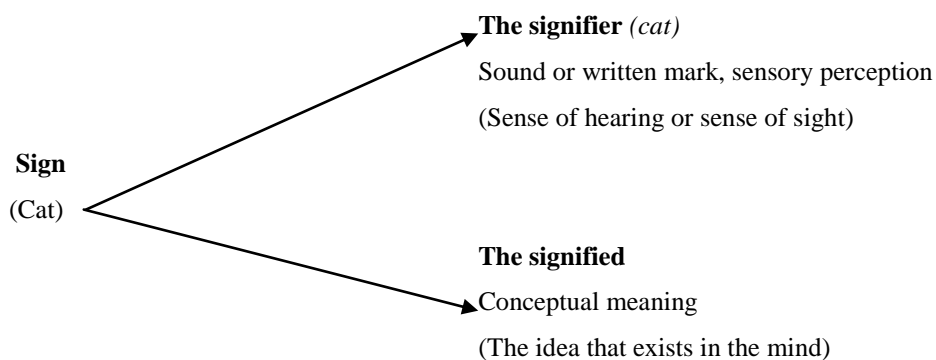
Saussure adopts “a completely different angle” (Bertens 56), and makes a marked departure from the historical study of language. He dwells upon the synchronic aspect of language. Synchronic approach to language does not study its historical development, but restricts and focuses on the role of language at a particular given or frozen point of time without any reference to time periods. It describes language as a complete system at a specific stage of its development. Synchronic linguistics makes an analysis of living language in a particular state without any reference to etymology. For example, a study of English language in England on present day in 2022 is a synchronic study, disregarding whatever changes might have taken place in the past. Saussure, therefore, rejects the diachronic aspect of language and views the synchronic aspect of language, which is a far more abstract approach, and raises a more basic question of how language actually works, not how it develops, in order to formulate general insights that would be applicable and valid for all ages.

In structural linguistics, it is the play of the elements and their relations produces meanings, not the historical change over the periods of time. Peter Barry rightly observes: “Saussure concentrated instead on the patterns and functions of language in use today” (41). In other words, it can be said that synchronic study of language is a total system of language (langue) at a particular time. It is a condition of language with fixed notion in current practice. It studies a chain of linear forward flow of interrelated words in a particular language usually in the present. It is important to mention here that Saussure never denies the validity of historical explanation. He believes that these two different modes of linguistic analysis are complementary with each other. He simply argues that a linguist should be concerned not only with diachronic study prevalent in the nineteenth century but also with synchronic study. The differentiation between synchronic and diachronic study of language is also a prominent contribution by Saussure in the field of linguistics. Saussure’s effective dichotomy of diachronic and synchronic can be understood through the two axes—vertical and horizontal. The vertical axis denotes diachronic study and the horizontal one synchronic. In the present moment of understanding the meaning of language, there is no additional benefit of knowing the historical change or development of language.

## Sign, Signifier, and Signified

While laying emphasis on synchronic mode of linguistic study, Saussure categorically holds that language is not an indiscriminate collection of words, but a careful structural system of relationship—an organization of linguistic elements to yield the meaning it has. He, therefore, makes a scientific investigation of language and propounds the theory of sign. He states that every word is a sign and language is a system of signs, which play a very vital role in the linguistic system. Charles Sanders Peirce also contends that “we only think in signs. Signs take the form of words, images, sounds, colours, flavours, acts, gestures, objects etc.; but things have no meanings in themselves unless or until we invest meanings.” Before Saussure, the linguists would hold that every sign is a word; it is a single entity. Here entity means word; word is a sound-image. As we study Saussure’s science of sign, we discover that sign has four basic attributes: (i) every sign has two aspects: the signifier and the signified (ii) sign is arbitrary (iii) the meaning of sign depends on the differential relation with other signs paradigmatically and (iv) sign is organized in a linear way syntagmatically in a sentence.

First, sign has a relationship between the signifier and the signified. Both are inseparably interrelated like two sides of a piece of paper. Saussure insists that each requires the other. They cannot exist apart but are rather created together. The signifier is a sensory perception (a spoken word has an aspect we can hear; and a written word has an aspect we can see). The signifier is the material or physical form of the sign, whereas the signified is a conceptual meaning or mental idea. In other words, the signifier may be a meaningful sound or a written mark such as a letter *c* or a sequence of letters *c a t* making up a word, cat. The signified is a concept located in the mind. Through illustration, it can be precisely comprehended:



*The signifier + The signified = **signification (meaning)***

In the system of linguistic study, Saussure argues, there is no role of the *referent*, the actual *cat*, because it is outside the system of language and lies beyond the linguistic purview. Saussure writes: “The linguistic sign writes not a thing and a name but a concept and sound image” (Richard70). Habib also says that Saussure “attacks the conventional correspondence theory of meaning whereby language is viewed as a naming process, each word corresponding to the thing it names” (634). Before Saussure, the traditional linguists of the time generally conceived of language as a way of denoting things and actions. Word would be a nomenclature, but it is a very simple operation. It lets us assume that anything is but true. Saussure rejects their view that “words are symbols standing for objects in the world” and argues that they are not things, but our concepts of things, actions, and ideas that are part of our language.

Secondly, for Saussure, the nature of the sign is arbitrary, which is the first principle of his theory of language. The relationship between the signifier and the signified is ‘unmotivated’ and has no direct relationship with the meaning. There is no inevitable or natural link between the signified and the signifier. It cannot be explained logically. It is not fixed, nor essential. This arbitrary relation is based on social conventions rather than on natural necessity. Saussure writes in part one of the *Course in General Linguistics*:

The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. Since I mean by sign the whole that results from the associating of the signifier with the signified, I can simply say: the linguistic sign is arbitrary... (67).

It is merely out of habit. When one uses the word *cat* to refer to an individual cat, there is nothing in the word itself that reveals the reality of that cat or one’s specific impression or characteristics of it. One calls it a cat because one’s society has taught oneself to do so. In the same way, an individual comes to recognize himself by the name he has been given. He identifies himself as subject through the codes and conventions that are passed to him in the language of the society to which he belongs. Since different languages have different signs to suggest the same things or concepts, the arbitrariness becomes even much clearer. There is no essential reason why a particular sign is used to express a given signifier. The relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary, which means there are no fixed universal concept or fixed universal signifiers. Both signifier and signified are purely relational and differential entities. We look things differently, and with the help of language we name things that we perceive and need to classify according to our view. In the words of Saussure: “...if words

stood for pre-existing entities they would all have exact equivalents in meaning from one language to another, but that is not true.” Thus, the principle of linguistic sign is completely arbitrary, unnatural, and illogical, yet it is impossible for anyone to change it. Because language resists change; it is inherited, and tradition is conservative. Though a sign is arbitrary, yet it is not entirely left to the choice of the individual. He has no power to change a sign in any way once it has become established in the linguistic system. In other words, the relationship between a word and a concept is arbitrary in terms of its origin but not in terms of its use. In the end, Saussure never offers a method for investigation how language as a system relates to the world of material objects that lie outside language. This was to have a far-reaching effect. He states that language and meaning is experienced in the mind. Saussure is of opinion that almost all of signs are arbitrary. But there is an exception in the case of certain onomatopoeic words whose signifiers are not always arbitrary, because their sounds convey the meaning such as ‘cuckoo,’ ‘hiss,’ ‘mew’ etc. Saussure then examines the nature of the interjection, which is closely related to onomatopoeia, and concludes that “onomatopoeic formations and interjections are of secondary importance, and their symbolic origin is in part open to dispute” (70).

Thirdly, Saussure’s most interesting aspect of sign is that there is always a play of word or sign with other signs in the system of signs. Meaning does not lie in signs or things but between signs or between things. The meanings of signs are relational, and can only be understood in relation to other signs. “That is to say, no word can be defined in isolation from other words” (Barry 42). In other words, an individual sign has no separate meaning and only gives ‘value’ or meaning in relation to other signs in a related sets. For example, ‘a poodle dog’ has no meaning unless or until we relate to other types of dogs, which make difference. Similarly, we know the meaning of ‘a spoon’ because we can differentiate it from a ‘knife,’ ‘fork’ and ‘ladle.’ Signs are often understood in terms of binary opposites such as tall-small, man-woman, white-black, and presence-absence. Signs acquire their meanings from their relationships and contrasts with other signs. On the level of sound-image, Saussure’s structural linguistics also depends on the concept of phoneme—a unit of meaningful sound. It is defined purely by its differences from other phonemes rather than any inherent features. Therefore, the meaning of the part is not as important as the relationship between the parts. More precisely, we see that there exists a vast and complex formal system of interrelated signs of that particular context, which derive meaning based on their differences from and relation to one another. Saussure’s ideas are that the meanings of something are created in a complex linguistic structure of relation and difference. He states that a language consists of



signs, but in order to produce meaning the signs have to be organized in “a system of difference.” Saussure writes: “In a language there are only differences, without positive terms.”

### **Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic**

Saussure further clarifies that in a sentence the signs have different kinds of relationship among themselves and these relationships give language the various qualities that it possesses. Saussure identifies two types of relationships between various signs. The linear relationship between the signs present within a given sentence is called a syntagmatic relationship. The syntagmatic relationship is how linguistic elements can be sequenced, it forms a syntactic structure where signs occur in sequence and operate together to create meaning, governed by strict rules such as grammar. For example: “She will meet me,” have a syntagmatic relationship with one another. This relationship could also be defined in an abstract way—pronoun + auxiliary verb + verb + pronoun. However, a language is inclusive of other kind of relationship as well that is called paradigmatic relationship. It is a relationship between a sign present in a sentence with some signs that are not present in the sentence but are parts of language on the whole. The relationship is based on the ability of these signs to play similar role in different structures. The following examples clarify the difference between syntagmatic and paradigmatic relationships:

She	will	meet	her.
They	are	teaching	us.
He	will	love	her.
We	have	helped	him.

Each of the signs or words can be replaced without changing the basic syntactic arrangement. Each item of the sentences has a paradigmatic relationship with other item which can be substituted for it. This relationship is substitution and defines the function of individual bits of language, where each sign is a lexicon. Each sign is a value generated by its difference from all the other signs with which it coexists on an associative (paradigmatic) axis. Relationship between linguistic signs are both syntagmatic i.e., linear and paradigmatic i. e. associative. The system of language has its own world. It has a grid system that has a little

reference to the outer world. Thus, Saussure studies language as a pure formal structure—a network of signs, and a system of language, which produces meaning independent of the external world. *Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy* writes: “At the extreme, a structuralist theory of language would omit the relation to entities outside the system, and stress coherence rather than correspondence” (501). Therefore, the main idea of Saussure’s structural linguistic theory is that linguistic signs acquire their meanings not from the objects, entities, occurrences etc., but from their relationships to other signs in the language, and from their position within the linguistic system. This has been shown above through the grid system.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, Saussure’s theory of sign, producing signification (meaning) has deeply influenced the modern and postmodern thought in the west. His principles of the arbitrary nature of the sign, considered to be a perpetual source of all poststructuralist thinking, gives a new dimension to thinking, and inaugurates a new world of reality. Saussure argues that the world is made up of relationship rather than the things, and any objective reality is possible within the fold of language. He rejects the relation to entities outside the system and rules out the traditional theory of correspondence. In other words, signs signified by the linguistic convention are an illusion; meaning is always obtained in the coherence of signs, through compare and contrast, through difference, and the position of the signs in the linguistic system. This system is arbitrary and conventional, not natural or transcendental as the western philosophers hold right from the beginning. To put it more concretely, the crux of his linguistic principles is the “belief that things cannot be understood in isolation”—they have to be understood in the context of the larger structure they are of it. With his new concept of language and reality, Saussure shakes the very foundation of the concept of epistemology, changing the views of a host of philosophers, thinkers, and theorists. Hence, he opens a new perspective to look at reality, which is supposed to be more reliable than ever. However, Saussure’s principles, as it always happens, suffer from a lot of criticism at the hands of poststructuralists, who deny his reductionist approach. Despite all comments and commendations, it cannot be denied that Saussure forced us to think the world, truth, reality, and meaning in a different way.

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## Unifying "Characters": A Study of Interfiguralty in Wilson Harris Novels

Samuel Mundru

### Abstract:

This paper uses a psychoanalytical approach ‘breakdown and breakthrough’ by Hena Maes-Jelinekis as a benchmark to understand Wilson Harris novels. With her studies she shows that “when Harris evokes a configuration which can be recognized as a particular society he does so only to show that it must be broken down and a new vision created.” (Jelinek) With this approach she categorizes Harris novels in to two parts: earlier novels exemplifying breakdown (*Palace of the Peacock*, *Secret Ladder*, and *Whole Armour*) and the later ones, breakthrough (*Companions of the Day and Night*, *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness*, *Genesis of the Clowns*, and *The Tree of the Sun*). This paper aims to apply “Interfiguralty” a post structural critical theory which provides unifying links to create wholeness in this divide with the idea of “quest for the resurrection of self” (Harris) by establishing the interrelations in the pretext (characters) to subsequent text (characters).

**Keywords:** Unifying, Wilson Harris, Interfiguralty, Imagination, Cross Culture, Collective Unconsciousness, Life Journey, Characters, Breakdown, Breakthrough.

### Introduction to Wilson Harris style of writing

My novels are archetypal elements of man’s psyche - Wilson Harris

Wilson Harris, the Guyanese novelist, poet, and critic, is one of the most controversial authors in Caribbean history; was born at New Amsterdam, British Guiana in 1921. Harris possessed a mixture of Amerindian, African, and European ancestry. He attended Queen’s College in Georgetown, British Guyana, where he studied ‘Land Surveying’ from 1939 to 1942. He led many survey parties into Guyana's rainforests after qualifying for practice, where he conducted mapping and geo-morphological studies. His writing career began in 1959 when he moved to London. In the novel, Harris creates new forms while advocating racial and ethnic reconciliation. *From The Palace of the Peacock* (1960) to *The Mask of the*

*Beggar* (2003), Harris's commitment to the search for a renewed human community formed the basis for his creation of plays with characters that incorporate several of the elements into a single, multifaceted character.

Harris' style is so peculiar that his characters appear and disappear, become entangled in intricate patterns of social and family relationships, and experience a breakdown of time and an explosion of space. The flashback or childhood tale can leap forward into the future but may return in a later novel or another. It links fragmented elements of man and landscape in a symbolic and imaginative manner to illustrate the collective consciousness of the average Caribbean.

Time, place and Characters are often interwoven in Harris novels, to make his subjects free themselves from the stereotypes of culture and history he advocates a maturity of what he calls “collective unconsciousness” throughout his novels. This unifying maturity also includes European culture (which made him radical in Caribbean literary history). His characters and themes will evolve in the course of his novels to acquire that maturity through unifying imagination, but to analyze Harris' works a categorizing method “breakdown and break through”, is being employed, so this paper tries to reconsider that idea of interpretation with the critical approach called “Interfiguralty.”

## **Literature Review**

The commitment of Harris to the search for a renewed human community through imaginative methods rather than through political means, his constantly evolving style, and his positive views of the world provided a fertile ground for researchers and critics to pitch in their research that led to his novels receiving critical acclaim. The brief literature review below will attempt to provide insight into the major work that has been done on Wilson Harris novels, the major source for this is Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC), University of the West Indies (UWI), Shodhganga : a reservoir of Indian theses @ INFLIBNET, Research Gate.

- **History as myth in Harris works**

Caribbean writing has been so fragmented that Harris emerged as a writer with a new understanding of going back to the fragmented past and bringing reconciliation among races and nations. A writer should not ignore the past, but accept it instead, as doing so will only increase the chances of returning to it in the future. The Caribbean has experienced many

generations of historical stasis, and Harris believed writing against this is essential. Historiography is a form for Harris, not only because of the official records, but also because it contains suppressed memories of the past, or what Harris called "the underground imagination," which can be transformed through myths. Harris believes that myths are more universal because they preserve the main ideas without limiting interpretation.

- **Role of imagination and creativity**

A distinct vision, and the means he employs to achieve that vision, are the hallmarks of Wilson Harris' work. Harris shares the vision of Blake and Yeats of the creative imagination as a force of liberating transformation in a world that is dangerously trapped by rigid patterns of thought and behavior. He finds it difficult to be creative in art or criticism. Naipaul's novels or Conrad's novels portray a world of accepted or static values, which makes creative expression increasingly challenging. It disrupts already existing subjective platforms by its very nature. The artist who wants to build a new world structure, whether in fiction or in reality, must undergo an intense effort to revive man's vision by demonstrating those factors which, when the right ones are combined, produce a new, unified, and more positive world structure. In a combination of materials and immaterial, using a truly creative imagination in conjunction with hidden and obvious elements.

- **Epic Hero's and three major ideas Wilson Harris**

"Epic stratagem" is Harris' method of confronting the social and ecological challenges Guyana is facing on the eve of independence. Throughout the text, the novel imagines a critical reorientation towards capitalism and alterity through the creolization and multiple manifestations of heroic figures. Wilson Harris's re-visionary strategy is based on Synchronicity, Shamanism and on the Eye of the Scarecrow.

- **Time, History, and Philosophy in the Works of Wilson Harris**

In his study, Gianluca Delfino assumes that Wilson Harris' writings (as a whole) exhibit a remarkable unity of thought rooted in their author's imaginative scope. An attempt to reconstruct a unifying frame around Harris' body of work through an examination of "The Infinite Rehearsal," "Jonestown," and "The Dark Jester" proves to be an invaluable contribution to Caribbean Literature and Philosophy.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Michael Gilkes Alchemist approach**

The belief of Gilkes is that rather than regard the divided consciousness as a hopeless state, Harris advocates the development of a "fresh state of consciousness" that allows a heightened sensibility to be created through the interweaving of cultures, races, and victims (including European cultures). The juxtapositions and marriage of opposites Harris uses to achieve unity are viewed by Gilkes as an expression of his interest in alchemy.

### **Maes-Jelinek psychoanalytical approach**

She shows that when Harris mentions a configuration that can be recognized as a particular society, he only does so to demonstrate that it must be broken down and a new vision created. The purpose of his writing is to awaken ruen's senses and imagination to the fact that they are embedded in the world. He also teaches them to reject static ways of thinking. The earliest novels (*Palace of the Peacock*, *Secret Ladder*, and *Whole Armour*) trace the breakdown of the character in the course of the novel, whereas the second half of his novels (*Companions of the Day and Night* , *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness* , *Genesis of the Clowns* , and *The Tree of the Sun*) trace the breakthrough of the character in the course of the novel.

In the above studies on the versatile author Wilson Harris, one can see how he explored historical, creative and philosophical concepts as unifying themes throughout his novels. However, the imaginatively designed, multifaceted characters in his novels were overlooked, even though a "Epic hero" character was discovered, but it was only featured in *The Palace of the Peacock*.

Using Interfigural (a completely distinct approach to Harris Novels) we can see even the characters themselves are unifying elements and strong advocates of what Harris calls the "collective unconscious". And also with Interfigural, one may rethink Maes-Jelinek's categorizing study of Harris novels as breakdowns and breakthroughs.

## **Introduction of Interfigural**

Interfigural is a post structural critique that explores the interdependency between characters in multiple works by a single author or from works by different authors. Jonathan Culler states "Modern theorists regard fictional characters as ideological prejudices rather

than a subject of inquiry". Interfigurality then provides a way for such inquiry that is overlooked by modern theorists.

Interfigurality was proposed by Wolfgang G. Müller in "Research in Text Theory" published by Walter de Gruyter in 1991. The book obtained critical acclaim and is now held by the Library of Congress. Wolfgang G. Müller holds an Emeritus Professorship of English Studies at the University of Jena. His books include *Die politische Rede bei Shakespeare* (Narr, 1979), *Topik des Stilbegriffs: Zur Geschichte des Stilverständnisses von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981), *Die englisch-schottische Volksballade* (Francke, 1983) and *William Shakespeare. Hamlet. Einleitung und Kommentar* (Stauffenburg Verlag, 2006). The current focus of his work is the construction of an ethical narrative and the tradition of Cervantes in the English novel.

### **A systematic description of the whole range of Interfigural phenomena**

The topic of Interfigurality is comparative by nature, offering rich theoretical and practical possibilities for comparative literature as a discipline of literary studies.

#### **Name as Interfigural devices: (Unifying theory -1)**

Names are one of the most obvious methods of linking figures in literary works. To a large extent, interfigural relations are internymic, or "another neologism" relations. In another text, a fictional character's name may be altered to become the name of a different figure. Characters in fictional texts often appear in alternate forms, and the name given to them serves as their identifying onomastic label and the alteration involves not only form (surface structure) but also content (deep structure). There is, however, no necessary relationship between signifier and signified in literary names. Names like Emma Woodhouse. (Jane Austen, *Emma*), Lily Briscoe (Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*), hardly tell us anything about the characters they are attached to. Yet there are many ways to give meaning to literary figures' names, and authors have been extraordinarily inventive in doing so. A prominent literary name-giving device is the linking of the name of a literary figure to that of an earlier literary figure. Identical or partially identical names in different literary works are always interfigural elements, even though Interfigurality may manifest itself in very different ways depending on the case. The reappearance of a name from an earlier work may suggest an



affinity. Thus, the figure is invoked.

In the context of Wilson Harris novels: Samuel Richardson's "Pamela" and Henry Fielding's "Pamela": Henry Fielding's Pamela is still compared to Samuel Richardson's "Pamela" so that we can understand how different she is from the pretext.

Internymic characters can be studied between *Palace of the Peacock* (1960) and *Genesis of the Clowns* (1977) though the names are altered "Donne" and "Frank Wellington" the physical and mental journey into the interior of Guyana and into the mind in order to reconcile the parts of a divided self on currents of remote rivers as the major plot and identical characteristics between "Donne" and "Frank Wellington" offers to study the unifying link as Interfigurality proposes.

### **Literary Revenants: Re-Used Figures (Unifying theory- 2)**

An interfigural situation arises when a literary figure is taken out of its original fiction and inserted into a new fiction. In the case of a borrowed figure, there may be an identity between the original character and the character transplanted into a new context (Zilkowski1983). It is however, impossible to have entirely identical characters across works by different authors on the basis of ontology and aesthetics. A fictional character is not simply a combination of qualities. Instead, it is viewed as an integral component of an artistic whole, linked to plot and to a constellation of characters. Thus, Interfigurality proposes that a character cannot reappear in its exact form in another author's work. That is why here the term "re-used figure" is preferred to "figure on loan" or "borrowed figure".

The expression "re-used figures" is used to describe when an author incorporates a figure taken from a work by another author into his own work, incorporating it into the formal and ideological framework of his own work. It may be parody or satire, or it may be a fundamental revaluation or re-exploration of the figure.

In context to study Wilson Harris works: Re-used Figures: Literary Revenants can be viewed in the context of characters like Clive Goodrich and Doppelganger, right from the *Palace of the Peacock* to the *Mask of the Beggar* as these characters frequently appear in Harris novels.

### **Re-used Figures in Autographic Sequels and Series: (Unifying Theory-3)**

When a figure from an earlier work of an author reappears in a later work of the same author, it seems obvious that the figure seems identical. Yet even in the simplest of cases, things may not be as simple as they appear at first glance, even if the subsequent text is written by the same hand as the pre-text. Thus, to mention just a few types, minor figures can become main figures in the subsequent text (Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*), or the antagonist can be turned into the protagonist (John Gardner, *Grendel*). A sequel may present a period in a character's life anterior to that of the pre-text (Gordon Bottomley, *King Lear's Wife* 09151 *Gruach* [1919], the latter dealing with the antecedents of the life of Lady Macbeth) or posterior (Anna L'Estrange, *Return to Wuthering Heights*), or it may fill a gap the pre-text leaves in the representation of a character's history (*Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*)

In the context of Wilson Harris Novels Autographic Sequences can be seen in *The Tree of the Sun* (1978) and *Da Silva da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness* (1977). Besides the above mentioned Interfigurality theories, there are two other unifying links: "literary figures identifying with" and "imitating other literary figures and interfigural combinations and contaminations"

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion to the foregoing, I wish to conclude that Harris's critically designed fictional characters that are representative of his philosophy of "collective consciousness" will simply be seen as typical trauma characters in Caribbean literature without applying the concept of Interfigurality to them. Harris' major philosophy, according to the literature review, is the unification of consciousness, which one can achieve once one realizes all identifying factors around them are stereotypes. He awakened their collective consciousness through the breaking of stereotypes and created a post-structural identity. Furthermore, he redesigned his characters with mature consciousness in the later portions of his novels without referring to them as continuations of his previous works. And this understanding is almost impossible without Interfigurality.

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## Representation of Disability and Sexual Agency in *Margarita with a Straw*

Tejaswini Nandkumar Deo

### Abstract:

My paper examines the refreshing and path-breaking departure from the norm in the representation of disability and sexual agency in the movie *Margarita with a Straw* (2015). The aspect of disability in mainstream Bollywood films is used mainly for a dramatic effect, rather than to familiarize and sensitize the audience about the disability. However, some promising movies have been made in recent years and my argument is *Margarita with A Straw* is one of the most wonderful, liberating and empowering films in its portrayal of disability and sexual agency. I have argued that whereas major texts in disability studies, considered canonical in the field, do not discuss key aspects of sexual culture, often regarding sexuality and disability as incongruent identities, this movie highlights the importance of the vital role played by individual sexual urges in shaping one's personality and the overall sense of emotional wellbeing. The movie talks about accepting and normalising disability. It urges the need for enabling environment and giving space to the disabled person to spread her wings. In India, disabled persons are generally portrayed as pitiable, asexual entities exploited in some way or as inherently wicked, malevolent villains in mainstream movies. This movie desists from portraying pitiable images of dependency. The frank articulation of the evolving sexual identities of three disabled characters, Laila, Khanum and Dhruv subtly challenges the misconstrued perception about the disabled as being asexual or hypersexual.

**Keywords:** Disability, Sexuality, Hindi films, Desire, Body, Representation

The Hindi film industry, or Bollywood as it is commonly known across the world, is the most popular media for entertainment in India. It produces the maximum number of films annually in the world, with billions of people watching them. As the most accessible form of media in India, movies often tend to reflect people's desired version of reality, they can also act as the biggest influencers of the masses. Disabled people have been severely marginalised in Indian society. Though movies depicting disability are periodically made in Hindi, we rarely get to see movies where disability is realistically portrayed.

The portrayal of disability in Bollywood movies has mostly been negative and characters can be seen to conform to popular stereotypes. They are also routinely introduced for comic effect. When lead characters with disabilities are male, they are often shown as engaging in heroic deeds and overcoming disabilities. Women rarely get lead roles and their depiction is often decided by the patriarchal frame of reference. Women with disability are frequently objects of a man's sympathy, and protection and are seen as a liability/ burden for the family. One can say that the aspect of disability in mainstream films is used mainly for a dramatic effect, rather than to familiarize and sensitize the audience about the disability. Against this background, *Margarita with A Straw* (2015) comes across as a wonderful, liberating and empowering film in its portrayal of disability and sexual agency. My paper will examine this refreshing and path-breaking departure from the norm in the representation of disability and sexual agency.

### **Media Representation can make a difference in changing perceptions:**

Disability has been widely misunderstood by Indian society due to constant social marginalization and a lack of sensitization and awareness. Often the crude and insensitive portrayal of disability ignores the simple fact that it affects people differently and the same type of disability can have two very different effects on two different people. Generally, when we think of disability, we think of physical disability of some kind or another. However, not all disabilities can be seen, some are birth-related, while some become apparent in the process of growing up. Mental disability is not easy to see with the naked eye and is not as pronounced so it hardly receives any attention. Given this lack of awareness, Harsh Mahaseth rightly argues that media representation can provide a powerful medium for dissemination. Given the wide reach of the Bollywood industry, it can prove to be an effective tool for changing people's perceptions and uprooting social stereotypes (Mahaseth, 2019). Thus, there have been instances when movies have played an important role in generating awareness. Movies like *Koshish* (1972) *Sparsh* (1980), *Black* (2005), *Iqbal* (2005), *Tare Zameen Par* (2007), *Barfi* (2012), *Margarita with a Straw* (2015), *Hitki* (2018) have seen commercial success and have also helped, to some extent, break the stigma around disabilities in the country. Movies like these have also helped in spreading awareness and enhancing understanding of the problems and challenges faced by disabled people.

## The Unrealistic and Misleading Portrayal of Disability in Bollywood Films

In the Indian context, people often view disability with disgust, suspicion or sympathy. Mythology continues to have a great hold on the masses. Disability is often stigmatised in the narratives surrounding religion and Hindu mythology. For instance, Manthara and Shakuni, and many other differently-abled characters in epics like Mahabharat and Ramayana, have been portrayed as the harbingers of evil — they manoeuvre their sexual jealousies to avenge all those who ridicule their deformity. One can say that in our epics and Puranas, the disabled characters are often shown to be spiteful and malicious or disability is depicted as a punishment for the sins of one's past. This popular perception has influenced the representation of disability in the popular media.

*There is sometimes an attempt to break away from such stereotypes, for instance in the movies like *Koi Mil Gaya* (2003) and *Sadma* (1983). In *Koi Mil Gaya*, the protagonist Rohit, played by Hritik Roshan is an adult who has a brain injury as a result of an accident when he was still in the womb. He is subject to a life of ridicule and torment regularly; until one day he manages to accidentally communicate with aliens. The alien *Jadoo* gives him superpowers that suddenly make him more intelligent and stronger. He suddenly starts behaving like his age and is treated as a hero. Earlier, he would be slighted by his teachers and bullied by peers. The happy ending in the movie is just Rohit getting 'cured' of his illness. Therefore, the movie almost seems to tell us, that until you are 'normal' and behave like the rest of the society, you will not be accepted (Friedner, Ghosh & Palaniappan, 2018). Thus, one can say that such depictions of a disabled protagonist, often enacted by a mainstream superstar, often fail to do much for the disabled community because the depiction of disability in them is simplistic, incorrect, and misleading.*

In Rohit Shetty's *Golmaal* Trilogy, Tushar Kapoor plays Lucky, a mute friend of the protagonist and is introduced mainly for comical effect. There are multiple one-liners making fun of his inability to speak. Another offensive movie in recent times that mocks disability was *Housefull3* (2016). In it, three men pretend to be blind, deaf and wheelchair-bound, just to marry rich girls. Their father had stipulated the condition to marry them off only to disabled men. In *Haider* (2014), disability is shown as worse than death. The protagonist decides not to kill his uncle, who murdered his father, partly because his uncle had his legs amputated. Many other movies use stereotypes for dramatic effect.

The lead (disabled) characters are almost always portrayed by able-bodied actors who receive a disproportionate amount of critical attention and praise for portraying the disabled.

The presence of disabled people is generally used to evoke an emotional reaction from the audience. These characters must overcome or compensate for their disability. They need to be killed or cured before the end of the film. If a disabled character is in the lead role, other characters seem to establish their authority, likability and growth in relation to how they treat characters with disabilities. Our movies need to convey that people with disabilities are not any different from us. They are ordinary individuals with stories to tell about normal emotions of happiness, sadness, achievements and frustrations, with an identity of their own. The conflicts and challenges in their lives could be portrayed with sensitivity as well as humour and wit. Instead of oversimplifying it with stock characters and situations, we need to 'normalise' it, and deal with the complexity and multi-layered human experience on our terms.

### **Representation of Women Characters with Disability**

Women with disability are often depicted as objects of sympathy and protection in Bollywood movies. They are often shown as vulnerable to sexual exploitation, and disabled women characters close to the protagonist are often threatened or sexually abused. "Movies have women characters with different motives. One of such objectives is to highlight the dauntlessness of a male character... thus, caring for or curing a disabled woman becomes the means to re-enforce the heroic character of the male protagonist" (Khetrapal, 2018). Mental illness or intellectual disabilities of women are often portrayed as madness or manifest in childlike behaviour, obsession or violent behaviour in women, as in the movies *Sadma* (1983) and *Barfi* (2012) respectively. Rather than being an act of love, getting married to a disabled woman is presented as an act of social reform. When a disabled woman is shown to be getting married to a 'normal' man as Vidya Balan in *Guru* (2007) or Manisha Koirala in *Mann* (1999), it often valorises the kindness and large-heartedness of the protagonists (Khetrapal, 2018).

Women are often depicted in their relation to men as mothers, sisters or love interests, and never as a single, unattached women and the depiction is meant to evoke sympathy, and pity and to add a dramatic twist at some crucial moment. In negative roles, disabled women are often shown as jealous, resentful and wicked, which only confirms the negative cultural stereotypes. *Koshish* (1973) was one rare movie that presented a deaf woman communicating, participating and taking on responsibilities in everyday life as a wife, and mother. The movie



realistically depicted the life of a deaf, mute couple, and their conflicts and struggles in an insensitive and often hostile world.

Thus, the sympathetic, as well as the negative depiction of disabled women in the Bollywood movies, fail to throw light on what the disabled persons themselves feel about their lives. It is important to know what disability means to people who are negotiating it in everyday life. The very construction of disability in the domain of popular culture as negative or something to be cured is grossly unfair, to say the least. Disables are often portrayed as passive agents. There is no attempt to understand the kind of life they want to live. Accommodating disability is not the same as accepting disability. There is also a need to problematise concepts such as 'oppressed' or 'victim'. As people, we go through good and bad experiences, and multiple experiences in life give way to different kinds of emotions that call for a complex understanding of the lives of disabled people. In this context, movies like *Black* (2005), *Margarita with a Straw* (2015) and *Hitchki* (2018) are very significant for showing how a woman can overcome formidable challenges and lead everyday life well by managing and incorporating disability into one's life.

### ***Margarita with a Straw***

As mentioned above, the early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have witnessed some changes in the portrayal of disability within the narrative structure of Bollywood. Though negative and comic portrayals persist, it has also emerged "as a site for challenging the norms and modes of entertaining the masses by generating awareness about marginalisation in India" (Dudrah 2006). A lot of movies deal with women's issues with female protagonists playing lead roles and the disabilities that had not been talked about much in public became part of the film's narrative. This included disabilities such as progeria, autism, cerebral palsy, Asperger's syndrome, schizophrenia, dyslexia, and many such (Prasad,2013).*Margarita with A Straw* (2015) comes across as a path-breaking movie even in this progressive context because it touches on a hitherto unexplored topic of disabled woman's sexuality in a very sensible manner. It is a rare Bollywood film that comes across as wonderful, liberating and empowering in its portrayal of disability, sexuality and queerness.

It is not as if Bollywood movies have never explored the theme of sexuality of disabled people before. Movies like *Sadma*, *Omkara* (2006), and *Black* (2005), did explore the themes of repressed sexuality but only as one strand in the multi-layered narrative. The moment the disabled person expresses his/ her sexual desires; there is a rupture in the plot.

*Margarita with A Straw* (hereafter referred to as *Margarita*), on the other hand, handles intimacy without any romantic illusions, in the sense that it demonstrates how ‘normal’ desire is, even for the disabled. In this sense, it is a coming-of-age movie that breaks all boundaries of heteronormativity, patriarchy and the ‘normal’.

*Margarita* showcases the life of a wheelchair-bound college girl Laila, who has cerebral palsy. The opening scene which shows the mother driving around the family in an old van and first drops off her husband to work and then her daughter Laila at college very much sets the tone for the rest of the movie. We see an urban, middle-class family where it’s not a big deal for the mother to be the driving force. Often, she’s the one who takes the last call in the family matters. It shows inter-faith marriage where there is no discrimination between their children (a disabled girl child as opposed to an able-bodied son). It is unafraid to break the patriarchal notions of family where the father is content to play a very supportive role. The movie consciously avoids the trap of victimhood, and over-dramatization about the challenges of raising a daughter with cerebral palsy; instead, it chooses to speak about the challenges of cerebral palsy with optimism instead of apologising for it. This, indeed, is a refreshing departure in the Indian context.

Laila is a feisty college-going girl who has learnt to negotiate with disability and is fairly comfortable working and functioning independently without being seen as a burden, given she is provided with proper infrastructure and access. Thus, the only scene where Laila feels uncomfortable is when she has to be carried up the stairs because the lift in her college is not working. Laila is the pivot of her family as she makes them dance together, sings with her mother, and later in the course of the movie also becomes a caregiver to her in the latter’s brave fight with cancer. She doesn’t hesitate to mingle with ‘abled’ people and her friends are also shown as helpful and supportive without any condescending or patronising grandstanding. The ease with which she roams the streets in New York, and commutes by herself as opposed to in her city where she needs to be dropped off only affirms the fact that disabled people can and do function independently if given proper infrastructure and access. She writes lyrics for her college band. She dares to refuse an award and show the middle finger to a patronizing celebrity guest, who implies that the ‘disability’ of the lyricist tilted the decision in their Band’s favour. This condescending attitude is contrasted with her experiences in New York where she beats everyone at chess and is praised for her intelligence and not sympathised with. Thus, here one doesn’t come across a victim wallowing in misery, appealing for acceptance or accommodation. Despite the obvious

limitations on her mobility, Laila wants to live life on her terms, make mistakes, and follow her aspirations. In short, wants to live life to the fullest as any teenager would.

### **Disability and the Notion of Private Space**

Even the so-called ‘progressive’ Bollywood movies that deal with the subject of disability focus on the struggles and aspirations of the protagonists to find identity, self-respect and acceptance in society. *Margarita* indicates how middle-class families in India could be aspirational about their children with disabilities to become financially self-sufficient, yet fail to recognise key aspects of their sexuality and demand for privacy. *Margarita* is not a film about disability alone. It subtly touches upon masturbation and the desire of a woman with a disability. The fact that her sexual urges and relationships aren’t sensationalised is what ultimately stands out.

Laila, the protagonist is largely dependent on her mother as the caregiver. She also shares her crushes and rejections with her. There’s a very intimate bond. The middle-class, modern mother is sensitive to her child’s emotions and allows her to follow her desires. She supports her ambition to study in New York and convinces her father who is worried about her security and limitations on mobility in a far-off land. But Laila’s desire for sexual privacy is simply incomprehensible to her. The film thus exposes the limits of our liberal and progressive ethos that quite willingly accepts independence as far as professional competence and financial security of a disabled daughter is concerned but ignores the importance of emotional well-being and need for companionship. The mental inhibition to address issues pertinent to the sexual culture of the disabled was quite prominent within the narrative. Though the movie closely showcases the mother-daughter duo who is more than friends and confidants, it realistically portrays the inhibitions of her mother concerning sexuality.

One of the most fascinating things about the movie is the boldness with which the notion of private space for a disabled woman is discussed and held forth. This is particularly interesting because, in our culture, there’s nothing unusual about the constant surveillance of unmarried women. The topic of sexuality, the need for personal space, is usually never discussed or even acknowledged. Families are generally quite awkward around this topic. Therefore, “don’t ask, don’t tell”, is considered the safest way to deal with it. The pleasurable aspect of sex in our culture has been largely ignored, vilified, or exploited. The film shows how in contemporary India, the disabled may not always be harassed or exploited at work, but are taken for granted within their private space.

Though close to her mother, Laila feels suffocated by her mother's constant surveillance. Once, Laila's mother comes across porn on her laptop. Instead of empathising with her daughter's anxiety, she expresses her disappointment about her daughter engaging in morally incorrect and disgraceful activities. The shrillness and annoyance in her voice indicate the mother's inhibitions and lopsided perception often mired by stigma. The film allows Laila to assert her independence and adulthood as she gets angry with her mother for invading her privacy by finding her surfing porn. The most remarkable thing about the movie is that it expresses the desires of a differently-abled woman in a way that doesn't feel contrived or over the top. Laila is depicted as a person whose own perception of sexuality undergoes self-reflection.

### **Disabled and Sexual Agency**

The film portrays three disabled individuals, Laila, Khanum and Dhruv. In the main, it focuses on the frank articulation of their evolving sexual identities. Thus, it not only desists from portraying pitiable images of dependency but also challenges the misconstrued perception about the disabled as being asexual or hypersexual. In managing life on her own, Laila discovers herself and her sexuality in New York. It had to happen that way because in India that kind of personal space is hardly available for unmarried women living with their families. At a protest march there, she meets a blind Bangladeshi-Pakistani activist, Khanum. She offers to familiarise Laila with the new country. While accompanying each other everywhere and living together, Laila falls in love with her. Her relationship with Khanum is rather sensual and they both share a deep emotional bond of being viewed as 'abnormal' due to their disability and to some extent also their sexuality. This, an alternative reading of female bonding beyond friendship, and the sensitivity with which it is done, elucidates, "how disability and sexuality are journeys of self-discovery which need not have to be portrayed only as comic-relief characters" (Sinha, 2020).

Laila's interest in exploring her sexuality is neither depraved nor undersexed. Such explorations could be part of the normal curve of growing up for any teenager. It is the general tendency to see disabled people as asexual beings that makes it seem unusual. When Laila has a crush on the lead singer of their band, Nima, a "normal" guy, who doesn't have any romantic feelings for her, she distances herself from her disabled friend Dhruv. This upsets Dhruv, who angrily says, "*Normal logo ke saath dosti karne se tum normal nehi ban jaogi*" (Tr. Befriending normal people does not make you normal). Subsequently, Laila is

unable to identify as a queer and finds her being attracted to heterosexual and able-bodied men. Khanum's friendship makes her assertive and confident after a series of battling rejections to finally approach a heterosexual man she finds attractive. Khanum is unable to fathom this. When Laila shares her afternoon of heterosexual lovemaking with her assistant, she scorns her, "So by fucking you, he made you feel normal!" Laila, is of course, ambiguous about her sexual activity, which makes her character very complex. She wants to have sex with someone who could "see" her. Here we see a woman who has faced discrimination in the past owing to her physical condition is in a position to discriminate against others! This complexity is quite refreshing because generally speaking, disabled people on screen are shown either as pitiable, asexual entities exploited in some way or as inherently wicked, malevolent villains.

In the Indian context, where the audience is used to viewing disability with either disgust or sympathy, it is an achievement to portray it with humour and wit. It makes the audience laugh as well as helps in 'normalising' it without over-simplifying it. When Laila confesses to her mother about being bisexual, "Aai mein bi ban gai hoon" (Tr. I too have become one), her mother's response, "mein bhi bai hoon" (Tr. I have become a house help too), is quite hilarious. It is another matter that Aai is repulsed and disgusted when she discovers Khanum's sexual orientation. She is unable to fathom a relationship involving two "crippled" women who are exercising their sexual agency.

Laila is flirtatious, fun and confident. The film is sensitive to Laila as a woman and her sexual desires and not Laila as a sexless disabled person. She is a young independent woman who doesn't hesitate in buying a vibrator at a local sex shop, make out with her close friend to 'try it out' or while professing her love to another. The movie's aim is not to make the audience strain themselves into sympathising with Laila. It is about giving her a space to grow and spread her wings. Laila, Khanum, and Dhruv, just like anyone of us, make choices that are irrational or arbitrary. Judgements and discriminations are part of the sense of self. The movie subtly suggests that all of us will make choices, sometimes intuitive, sometimes flawed. Love and sexuality are adaptable and not defined by our physical limitations. Whether able-bodied or disabled, we are all worthy of our own beautiful love stories. The movie tells us that like everyone else, love and intimacy matter a lot to those restricted to wheelchairs.

While the movie "was held as a path-breaking attempt to demystify and celebrate the sexuality of women with disabilities, it was also critiqued as an elitist film which glossed

over the real and present dangers of sexual objectification and exploitation of vulnerable women with disabilities” (Vaidya, 142)

To conclude, sexuality as a source of pleasure and as an expression of love is not readily recognized by populations that have been traditionally marginalized in society. Sexual portrayals of people who are mentally or physically disabled, or who just do not fit the targeted market profile have been conspicuously absent in mainstream media. Major texts in disability studies, considered canonical in the field, do not discuss key aspects of sexual culture, often regarding sexuality and disability as incongruent identities. One often chooses to disassociate from discussions pertinent to sexual urges and identity in India and undermine the role it plays in shaping our personality. In this context, *Margarita* raises pertinent questions about the urges and desires of disabled women. It makes one question the denial of sexuality and sexual access to women with disability. Movies like this can't have typically happy Bollywood endings where families are united after their struggles, or lovers 'live happily ever after'. It's a movie about self-discovery where the protagonist experiences joy, fear, disillusionment, and emotional turmoil. Her struggles and aspirations convey the stories of many such women with disability in the different corners of the world who battle psychological, physical and emotional trauma in their everyday interactions.

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## ~English Language Teaching~

### **A Preliminary Study on Combining Emotion and English Literature Teaching in the Perspective of the New Liberal Arts Construction**

Jiang Ling & Wang Yuanze

#### **Abstract:**

The New Liberal Arts is the result of the reorganization of the traditional liberal arts disciplines and the intersection and integration of the liberal arts within the liberal arts and between the liberal arts and natural science disciplines, as proposed by the Chinese Ministry of Education. It is important to explore the role of emotions in the construction and development of literature courses for English majors in Chinese universities under the guidance of the New Liberal Arts concept.

**Key words:** New Liberal Arts Construction; English Literature Teaching; Emotion

In March 2021, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China issued the 'Notice of the General Office of the Ministry of Education on Recommending Research and Reform Practice Projects of New Liberal Arts' (No. 10 [2021] of the Office of the Ministry of Education) to comprehensively promote the construction of new liberal arts and build a liberal arts talent cultivation system of world standard and Chinese characteristics. In this context, how to improve English literature teaching in universities in China is being heatedly debated. Therefore, this study intends to put forward a mode of English literature teaching from the perspective of socio-cultural emotions, which can help to resolve the dilemma faced by English literature teachers in China.

#### **New Liberal Arts Project in China**

The concept of New Liberal Arts was first proposed by Hiram College in 2017, advocating that liberal arts majors should reorganize their majors and integrate new technologies represented by digital technology, computer technology and information technology into



courses such as philosophy, literature and linguistics, in order to break down professional barriers. In April 2019, 13 departments, including the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Science and Technology of the People's Republic of China, jointly launched the Six Excellences and One Excellence Plan 2.0 to promote the construction of new engineering, new medicine, new agriculture and new liberal arts, adding psychology, philosophy, Chinese language, literature, and history for the first time. In this important historical context, how to connect the new liberal arts, which has become a hot topic in higher education in China, with the construction and development of literature courses for English majors in colleges and universities is that the study intends to explore.

### **The Dilemma and Changes of the Existing Teaching Mode of English Literature Courses in Higher Education**

English literature is the cultural repository of the English-speaking people and contains a wide and rich cultural connotation. Therefore, English literature texts are ideal teaching materials for cultivating students' multicultural awareness and improving their humanistic cultivation. As one of the main courses for English majors in China's universities, English and American literature classes occupy a pivotal position in the teaching plans of foreign language faculties in various universities. However, for a long time, English literature teaching in China's colleges and universities has a serious tendency of "emphasizing skills and neglecting humanities" (Yu, 2010). In the teaching process, teachers often take literature works as a model for language application, ignoring the humanities contained in them and turning literature classes into intensive reading classes. Secondly, in terms of teaching methods, most teachers still follow the more traditional teaching mode, i.e., fill-in-the-blank teaching, with little demand for student participation, and follow the procedural teaching method of starting with the background of the period and the biography of the writer, followed by the four-paragraph theory of the ideological content and academic characteristics of the work, which makes the classroom atmosphere dull and disinterested. If students are not interested in English and American literature, no matter how enthusiastic the teacher is, it is difficult to achieve the teaching effect (Cheng, 2015). As Shu Wei (2018) points out: this kind of indoctrination from outside deprives students of the intrinsic motivation to communicate directly with literature, deprives students of their curiosity or aspiration for literature, easily deprives learners of opportunities for participation and self-discovery, and passive knowledge acceptance tends to counteract the potential for dynamic creativity,

ultimately depriving students of the personal meaning and relevance they should have gained due to the characteristics of literature classes themselves and traditional conceptions of teaching and learning. In response to this situation, Fan Yi and Rui Yuping (2005: 150) propose a “dilemma” for the teaching of literature in the English major: a large number of students have turned their enthusiasm to practical courses such as English for Foreign Trade and Business English. It is an inescapable fact that literature courses have been neglected. As Durant and Fabb put it, “many traditional approaches to teaching literature are being questioned and impacted to the extent that old methods and ideas are no longer sustainable.”

In order to reverse this dilemma, the Guidelines for Teaching Foreign Languages and Literature at Undergraduate Level in General Higher Education, published on 25 April 2020, clearly state that “the core competencies to be cultivated in the future are critical thinking and intercultural competence”, which is undoubtedly an important part of humanities education and a hot topic in the new round of foreign language education reform. The key words are Literature courses are a fertile ground for the implementation of the Guidelines: while helping students to enhance their interest in studying English and American literature and to absorb the best of Western culture, they can also encourage them to reflect on their own culture from an intercultural perspective, to think about and judge foreign culture from the standpoint of their own culture, and to develop critical thinking. The fruitfulness of this fertile soil also places new demands on the way in which it is cultivated. As stated in the Guide, The reform of English education and teaching in the new era should fully implement the concept of student-centered education, deepen the reform of the talent training system, innovate teaching content and teaching methods, advocate the construction of a student-centred teaching relationship, and cultivate students’ innovative thinking and abilities. It is an inevitable choice to reform the teaching of English literature courses by exploring and practicing, finding new teaching modes, effectively stimulating students’ enthusiasm for learning English literature, and enhancing students’ thinking and discursive skills, intercultural competence and humanistic literacy.

### **Teaching English Literature in the Context of the New Liberal Arts**

The new liberal arts refer to the liberal arts formed after the reorganization of traditional liberal arts disciplines and the intersection and integration of liberal arts and natural science disciplines. The new liberal arts attempts to break down the barriers between disciplines and majors, cultivate talents whose knowledge structure is cross-compatible, especially between

the arts and sciences, and promote the intersection and integration between disciplines. Since its inception, the study of literature has been interdisciplinary in nature. It is often referred to as sociology, religion, political science, law, ethics, anthropology and other humanities and social sciences are often used as the basis for interpreting literature. In recent years, scholars have begun to use natural science knowledge and theories such as cognitive science, psychology, neuroscience, computer science and data science to analyze the process of understanding literature, such as cognitive stylistics and literary linguistics. It is a new attempt to explore the model of teaching English literature from the perspective of other disciplines such as psychology and sociology in the context of the new liberal arts.

### **Socio-Cultural Theory of Emotion and the Reform of English Literature Teaching Mode in the Context of the New Liberal Arts**

The special attributes of literature and literature teaching: literature is a resource, cultivation, an aesthetic sensitivity, not a systematic knowledge that is obtained purely by indoctrination. Fundamentally, literature is the product of the author's experiences, feelings and reflections on life, and the reader always reads with personal experiences and preconceptions to gain meaning. Critics regard this preparation of the mind as a literary ability that is not innate but is acquired gradually through schooling (literary instruction), through reading experience and accumulation, to understand literary programs and meanings.

Emotion is a collective term for a range of subjective cognitive experiences, a mental and physical state resulting from a combination of feelings, thoughts and actions. The most common and general emotions are joy, anger, sadness, fear, fear and love, but there are also subtle and subtle emotions such as jealousy, shame, humiliation and pride. Emotions often interact with factors such as mood, personality, temperament and purpose, and are also influenced by hormonal and neurological traits. Emotions, whether positive or negative, motivate people to act. The "Affect turn" at the end of the last century has led to an increasing role for emotions in interdisciplinary research, as Boler (2015) explains.

Boler (2015) also argues that emotions signal the emergence and change of cultural constructions and consciousness, signalling anticipatory sensory experiences, relationships with the surrounding, and the body's ability to act, such as engagement, resistance and connection. Emotion thus represents a form of assimilation, a closure and a respect for the person. In any social context (including the literary classroom), emotion is an important

component that constructs the types of interactions people have, the ways in which they position themselves, and the types of discourses they are recognized for.

From a psychological epistemological point of view, a person always feels or senses before they engage in direct thinking and cognition, and there is an emotional element first. Literature touches on issues of deep human concern and need, and the empathic effect of literary works can prompt students to think deeply about universal human and social issues. In contrast to the fill-in-the-blank approach, teachers can focus first on the students' emotional response to the work itself, and then on the various levels of exploration. Teachers should first ask students how they feel when they read the work, rather than how they think about it. Teachers should transform their teaching activities from a closed, one-way impartation activity to an open, variable, multi-directional and multi-level communication activity, providing the conditions that will prompt students to move towards the fountain of knowledge themselves and learn to use their own intelligence to acquire knowledge.

Current research suggests that the correct application of affective rules can play a crucial role in promoting students' critical engagement with learning in the English classroom, but research in this area is still in its infancy abroad, and only one relevant paper has been found in China, and it is only from a theoretical perspective in general terms, with no relevant teaching practice.

Therefore, to examine how emotions can be more actively and effectively integrated into students' learning of English literature from the perspective of the socio-cultural theory of emotions can be inspiring and practical. As the theory argues that emotions are present in the fabric of every classroom environment, manifesting themselves as 'emotional rules' that have a substantial impact on learning. By using a critical discourse analysis approach to construct an analysis, an attempt is made to show how affective rules are perceived, accepted and even transformed in the teaching of English literature. By looking at how certain texts, genres and teaching activities stimulate or inhibit the circulation of various emotions in students, particular attention is paid to how a range of strong feelings of antipathy, disgust, rejection, etc. are grounded in affective rules rather than being attributed solely to students' non-compliance with the teacher's teaching objectives.

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