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~Editor's Note~

Dear Readers & Contributors,

As we glide into our 15th year of publishing this fills my heart with amazement at the journey that we have begun and undertook. It had its ups and downs but what we never had was boredom. Editing the issues has always been the best time of each quarter.

This issue has three young writers who have turned their avid reading into writing 'Book Reviews'. The papers are all very interesting to read with Arab Revolution to Tagore's Geetanjali, from unique narrative innovation through Oulipo to K Pop band BTS. English Language Teaching section has two interesting articles on 'Multiliteracies' to 'Critical Pedagogy'.

If you have a suggestion for us, kindly mail it to dr.mrudulalakkaraju@gmail.com.

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Happy Reading and Happy Sharing!

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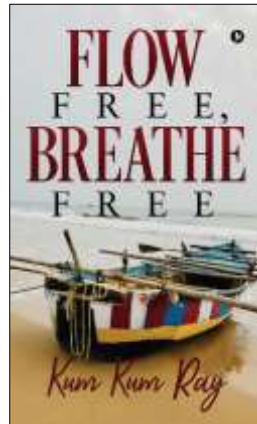
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~Creative Writing in English~

Book Review: *Flow Free, Breathe Free*

Beulah Bangari



Ray. Kum Kum, Flow Free Breathe Free. Notions Press. 2018

Flow Free, Breathe Free is inspired by her love for literature and Poetry through which she recorded her personal experiences on Life, Identity, Spirituality and Truth. Kum Kum Ray's inspired verses embody in passionate lyrical terms this hunger which lies at the heart of all mankind. The front cover of the book consists of the title "Flow Free, Breathe Free" is displayed in large, bold letters across the top half of the cover. The author's name, is written in a stylized script at the bottom of the cover. The background image on the cover depicts a small, colorful boat resting on a sandy shore, with calm water visible behind it. The scene suggests a tranquil, open environment.

The Foreword of this book is given by Prof. Amitava Roy, President of Shakespeare Society of Eastern Indian. Followed by the Preface by the Author introducing her love for the Poetry, calling it "an act of Freedom and Reconstruction.

The collection of poems is categorized into 4 sections as follows:

1. Autobiographical (16)
2. Emotions (9)
3. Identities & Social Issues (12)
4. Literary Introspections / Interpretation (9)

In the first section Autobiographical, the poet shares her personal segment on religion, passion, friendships, glorious hometown, loss, children. Her diction is both deliberate and evocative- each word chosen not just for meaning, but for emotional texture. The author emphasizes the deep connection to her ancestors and the village, despite not having lived there for long. The poet writes to her daughter about the role of a pain manager in alleviating suffering. She

illustrates her pain on losing her father, claiming that she can feel him in her wakeful hours. The poet also talks about the “Moksha” reflecting her thoughts on the death and after life.

In the second section Emotions, the poem explores themes of connection and self-discovery through another’s gaze. It explores unspoken emotions, possibly reflecting personal experiences or philosophical perspectives on human connection and feeling of longing. The poet describes Women as the root, providing the essential foundation for the family. Men as the branches, supporting the family’s structure, while the children are the fruit, representing the family’s offspring. The poet explains the way of life using vivid imagery.

The third section Identities& Social issues, the poet backlashes at the hypocracies in the Hindu culture. The poet highlights how the society labels a female from the new born baby till a wife. She reflects her ideas through a sense of realization to the readers. She goes back to the history questioning “Is Eve born to mother earth to perceive pain?” The poem talks about the transgender community highlighting the traditional role of “Eunuchs” in blessing auspicious occasions like weddings and newborn celebrations in India. The poem acknowledges that the transgender community is often misunderstood and addressed by various names like ‘kothi’, ‘panthi’, ‘transman’, ‘transwomen’, ‘hijra’. The poet addresses that they need to be treated equally as human beings. The poems include digital life, marginalization, awakening of soul and also a son’s plea to his mother about his newly wed wife.

The fourth section Literary Introspections/Interpretation incudes an ode or tribute to Allen Ginsberg, a prominent figure of the Beat generation. The poem touches the themes of spiritual seeking and the enduring legacy of an artist. The poem prominently features Varanasi, India, specifically mentioning the “Ganges Ghats burning and “Moksh Dham” which are significant sites in Hindu cremation. The poet also talks about the work of a Translator and mentions great English writers like W.H Auden, John Donne and praises the great novelist and essayist, F. Scott Fitzgerald as the Chronicler of his age. The poet includes spiritual poetic work about the rise of a Chaitanya Prabhu born to lead a spiritually astray race.

In the last poem, the poet helps readers to realise that we are in a world of “Spontaneous Joy”, which is a harsh truth about the present times. This poem is thought provoking and helped me to focus on our inner well- being.

This book gives a sense of relief and refreshes from all the complexities of life to the readers. The poet truly sang her songs of life, from the album of her memories. This collection of poems is broken free, flow free and breathed free.

In Memory of Harold Pinter

Chittaranjan Misra



Harold Pinter (1930–2008), the Nobel Prize-winning British dramatist, screenwriter, director, and actor, passed away on a dark, cold day in the dead of winter in 2008, at the age of seventy-eight, after surviving surgery for esophageal cancer. His death brings to mind Auden's poignant line in memory of W. B. Yeats: "Now he is scattered among a hundred cities." Indeed, Pinter's presence—through his words, silences, and ideas—resonates across continents. He altered the consciousness of millions through an inimitable dramatic style that developed, as he once said, "a way of being able to look at the world."

As an admirer and translator of his plays, I hold a deep personal connection to his legacy. In 1990, I translated *The Lover* into my native Indian language, Odia, and sent copies to Mr. Pinter through his friend Alastair Niven of the Arts Council of England, who was visiting India. Upon learning of the translation, Pinter graciously responded with a letter and sent me three of his plays: *One for the Road*, *Party Time*, and *Mountain Language*, which I translated into Odia in 1996. In 2000, he went a step further, sending me a computer printout of *Celebration* before it was published.

These later plays, though more overtly political than his earlier ones, are equally aesthetic, sustained by a quintessential Pinterian hallmark: the absence of fixed reference points or detailed character backgrounds. His works bring audiences to the very edge of existence, evoking a sense of imminent peril that prompts a deepened awareness—a raw understanding of power, identity, and speech. In watching a Pinter play, one confronts the unsettling truth about the language of aggression, so often cloaked in civility.

Pinter exposes how freedom is undermined and dissent silenced. His plays distort the mirror of complacency we hold up to ourselves, revealing fractured reflections—monstrous aspects of humanity lurking within and around us. He unveils the primal struggle for power, territory, and control, portraying a societal structure of oppression that remains incomprehensible to the innocent bystander. The powerless citizen suffers punishment without knowing why. In Pinter's universe, the so-called peacekeepers are hangmen whose actions drip with sadism and malice.

Ordinary rooms turn into torture chambers. Unknown strangers barge in—menacing, inscrutable. Whether it is the dark-skinned visitor in *The Room* (1957), Goldberg and McCann in *The Birthday Party*, or Ben and Gus in *The Dumb Waiter*, Pinter's intruders exude both psychological tension and sociopolitical dread. Are they products of subconscious fear? State-sponsored terrorists? Criminals? Pinter never says. Multiple readings—psychological and sociological—coexist in his plays, each partially illuminating the whole without cancelling the other. His stage props are, at once, real-world objects and symbols, rendering interpretation both inevitable and elusive.

Even in his later political works, ambiguity prevails. Identities are veiled. Power operates beneath a polished surface, disguised as righteousness. Tyrants speak as if they were gods. They preach freedom while silencing its voice. In these plays, authority functions through abstract structures, enforced by agents like Nicolas in *One for the Road*, who carry out orders with chilling conviction. Whether their actions stem from the U.S., Russia, or China is never made clear—Pinter's refusal to locate power spatially demands universal interpretation.

Meaning in Pinter's plays remains fluid, echoing Jacques Derrida's deconstructive critique of fixed structures. Tyrants, by virtue of their centrality in the power structure, define what is real and exclude all other interpretations. Their repression extends beyond censorship; it aims to destroy the very cognitive tools that might challenge their truth. *Mountain Language* dramatizes this through the symbolic banning of tribal speech. In *Party Time*, dissent is dismissed as vulgarity:

...we kick them in the balls and chuck them down the stairs with no trouble at all.

In Press Conference, the Minister of Culture cynically instructs:

Critical dissent is acceptable – if it is left at home. My advice is—leave it at home. Keep it under the bed. With the piss pot.

And elaborates:

We are happy for it to remain at home, which means we can pop in at any time and read what is kept under the bed, discuss it with the writer, pat him on the head, shake him by the hand, give him perhaps a minor kick up the arse or in the balls, and set fire to the whole shebang. By this method we keep our society free from infection.

This grotesque satire is echoed by characters like Nicolas in *One for the Road* and the powerful elites in *Celebration*, all of whom claim to serve peace while practicing control and cruelty. In Pinter's world, binary oppositions—good and evil, truth and falsehood—are flattened by authoritarian force. Individual freedom is sacrificed at the altar of centralized power.

A society governed by terror cannot sustain the family as a moral or emotional unit. In *The Homecoming* (1964), the wife abandons her family to become a prostitute. In *The Lover*, the domestic relationship is laced with sexual role-play and ambiguity. Memory plays, like *Moonlight* (1993), offer distorted recollections and fabricated pasts. In *Moonlight*, the father, gravely ill, laments his estranged sons:

What are they now? A sponging parasitical pair of ponces. Sucking the tits of the State.

In Pinter, the social, political, and metaphysical converge. He embeds profound truths in everyday banalities. That which cannot be expressed intellectually must be felt intuitively. Pinter does not merely engage the mind; he unsettles it. He seduces, shocks, and ultimately leaves the audience transformed.

To remember Harold Pinter—recipient of the 2005 Nobel Prize in Literature—is not merely to mark the end of an era. It is to begin anew: to observe how the next generation of writers, directors, and audiences engage with the echoes of his voice, and to reflect on the uncomfortable truths he unearthed with such unsparing brilliance.

Book Review: *Life at Large*

Guna Sai Vani Pochigari

Mohanraj, Jayashree. *Life at Large*. Lajja Publications. 2025

Life at Large is an anthology of poems by Prof. Jayashree Mohanraj. She has ardent passion towards literature. She has translated many works into English and Modern Indian languages. Few of them being, *Bharatiya Bhasha Katalu: A translation into English*, *Sun-stroke*, *Ashtray*, *Uddhaba*, *Sasthi*. *Life at Large* is the result of her passion towards literature through which she illuminates snippets of her personal life experiences. The front cover of the book consists of famous portraits of Mona Lisa, Gautam Buddha and Saint Jerome with veils and masks which showcases the mystery element in the book. It encompasses all aspects of life from birth to death hence the title. This book is published in the year 2024, under Lajja publications, Gujarat, India. Jayashree incorporated Blank verse style of writing prominently used by William Shakespeare and John Milton. She drew her inspiration from G.M Hopkins and William Carlos Williams.

The book unfolds by an epigraph from *The Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. Then it proceeds with a self-portrait and introduction of the poet by the Editor S Mohanraj in which their journey together is highlighted. The Foreword of this book is given by Prof Rajendra Jadeja, it goes on with expert views by Prof Dat Bao. The next section describes about the structure of the book by the editor.

The anthology of 207 poems excluding Haikus are categorized into 9 sections as follows:

1. Amma and others (10 poems)
2. Nature and Time (37 poems)
3. Places (22 poems)
4. Reflections on life (49 poems)

5. People (25 poems)
6. Short poems (31 poems)
7. Haikus
8. COVID poems (11 poems)
9. Kaleidoscope (22 poems)

In the first section Amma and others, the poet describes sacrifices made by mothers and their efforts throughout motherhood. In this section the themes explored are regret, longing, self-identity, love and sacrifices. In this section we get to know about poet's personal life such as her children and her thoughts on embracing motherhood.

The poet in the second section Nature and Time, uses vivid imagery and personification to enhance the readers' experience while reading the book. Here the poet talks about man's exploitation of nature. She also subtly satires on the societal structures. This section analyses the themes of memories and dreams, time and lifecycle, process of life and death, nature's ability in restoring and destroying, exploitation of working class, contrast between perspectives of past and present.

The third section Places, describes different landscapes in Yemen and India. Through her poems I could visualize the scenic places as Taiz, Sabar, Berhampur. The themes include nostalgia, memory, journey of life, nature, identity. In Pink cows, she uses horrid imagery of cows being slaughtered in a butcher shop and agony of cow being separated from calf which is allegorical representation of mothers being distanced with her children. This proves that the poet not only describes the beautiful places but also the sad and cruel reality.

The fourth section Reflections on life, is the longest section among all. Here, the poet describes her thoughts on various aspects of life to which many of us can relate. The themes explored in this section are identity-crisis, strong will to live, legacy, growth, contrast between thoughts and feelings, religion and poverty, traffic awareness, belongingness, agony, reality of freedom, detachment, retrospect, journey of life. In one of the poems the poet applies math analogy to make us understand that one should not focus on what is lost rather on what can be done. By the end of this section the poet concludes with a poem which helps us in comprehending that one must lead their lives in such a way that even after their death, their constant reminders will make people smile.

The fifth section People, is a compilation of views on different kinds of people the poet has met during her journey. The themes explored in this section are identity of women, gender roles, patriarchal society, marginalization of women, suppression of women, submission to men, female oppression and their unheard voices, contrast between man and divine, mystery, exploitation of nature, detachment. The poet presents the hard reality of girls' lives who are forced into prostitution near Yadadri, hardships of Arab women working under purdah. The poet here questions "who actually is a woman?"

The sixth section Short poems, includes numerous themes poems such as: passage of time, nature, distance, violence, dreams and memories, silence, complexities of love. The nature of Karma is highlighted in this section through a poem in reference to Nature seeking innocent retribution from children for the sins of their fathers.

The seventh section comprises of Haikus. It a traditional form of Japanese poetry with a 5-7-5 syllable structure, often focusing on nature and capturing a moment in time. A traditional Japanese haiku is a three-line poem with seventeen syllables. The poet incorporated the traditional form of Haiku in this book. It explains about birth, life, growing old, death, footsteps and nature.

The eighth section is all about COVID poems. It elaborates how the perception of “positive” has been changed into something dreadful and has a negative effect. This section showcases the condition of people during the pandemic. It explores themes such as unexpected death, dear departed, fright and fight for life, masked lives, divine intervention and inevitable nature of death. The poet also explains the notion of “Sambhavami Yughe Yughe” (God is born in every age).

The final section of the book Kaleidoscope analyses the themes of identity-crisis, selfish nature of mankind, reminiscing, absurdity of war, atrocities all over the world, fragile nature of life, acceptance, soul of silence, passage of time, living in the moment, cosmic energy and cosmic truth. The poet describes if love, affection and care are not absorbed then, they are nothing but the thing that is flushed down.

The overall book gives us a glimpse about various aspects of life. My personal favourite from the book is titled “Of Men and Women (I & II) under fifth section. Here, the poet includes examples from the past of great leaders and rulers where they treat women inferior to men. It also talks about how men have the freedom to achieve anything and everything ‘for a cause’ but women are not entitled to the same freedom and are not allowed to do anything without their men.

This book serves as a window for everyone who possesses a love towards poetry as it is in conversational language yet embedded with poetic devices and deep impact. In the end the book doesn’t just offer poems but it offers spectrum of perspectives which helps us in our life. With its rich imagery, personification and emotional depth, this collection is a statement of poet’s voice and a boon to the readers. Ultimately, this collection stands as a great contribution to contemporary poetic discourse with its rich themes.

Book Review: *Before I Could Tell Her*

Namala Rachana



Boddula. Vasisht, *Before I Could Tell Her: A story of silence, and the love left unspoken*. Notion Press. 2025.

Vasisht Boddula's *Before I Could Tell Her*, A Story of silence, and the love left unspoken, which resonates with universal human experience. This Emotion-driven novel is set during pandemic. it tells a touching story of unspoken love, grief and the consequences of leaving emotions unsaid.

Vasisht Boddula is a new Indian author who writes Stories that feel real and emotional. He is a Computer Science and prompt Engineering graduate. His first book is *Before I Could Tell Her: A Story of Silence, and the love left unspoken*. He published this book through Notion Press in 2025. The Author writes about real-life experiences, quiet emotional struggles people go through, in this book. Vasisht is part of a new group of Indian writers who talk about the personal side of big events, like the pandemic, making his work relatable and meaningful to modern readers.

The novel revolves around Nithin, an 18-years-old boy, and his mother Kavitha. While Kavitha expresses love through actions, Nithin is still learning about himself and struggles to express his feelings towards his mother. The story explores how silence grows louder over time, and how regret builds when heartfelt words are left unsaid.

The Author uses a calm and emotionally honest Writing style. He avoids exaggerated drama, instead choosing subtle expressions of emotion that feels real and relatable. The Simplicity of the language makes the message more powerful to focus on the emotional Core. The story telling is slow-paced, but it carries a quiet intensity that gradually builds emotional weight. The narrative is deeply emotional making readers reflect on life, relationships, and the weight of silence in human Connections.

The strengths of the novel are it has relatable and realistic setting. The characters develop organically and effectively throughout the story. The authentic tone based on true events makes it more relatable for the readers to connect.

Before I Could Tell Her is a touching, emotionally powerful and impactful novel that leaves a lasting impression. It captures the pain of unspoken feelings and teaches the importance of expressing love before it's too late. The pandemic setting makes it relevant to today's world, while the simple, heartfelt writing style ensures that the message stays with the reader long after finishing the book.

If you're someone who has ever loved silently, hesitated to express your feelings, or wondered 'What if'? *Before I Could Tell Her* is a must-read.

Thief

S J Ravi Prakash



A Thief entered the poet's house to loot
The Poet died fourteen years ago
At present his daughter is living in that house

Thief stolen the TV and other things,
When she was out of the house
He returned, unable to resist his desire to loot again
There, casually, he saw the photo of the poet on the wall
Saw the several mementos and shields of the poet
The thief was shocked that it was a poet's house
That too, his favorite poet's

Next day the thief returned with the things he had stolen
Replaced all the stolen goods, and
By leaving, he pasted a letter of apology on the wall

In fact, the poet is the big thief
Because he had stolen the hearts of the readers with his poetry

Dedicated to the Popular Marathi Poet, Late. Narayana Surve. Translated from Telugu "Donga" by Dr N Gopi. Translated into English: S J Ravi Prakash, Lecturer in English, Silver Jubilee Govt. College, Kurnool.

Decision of the Judge

Vishnu Prabhakar



Several passengers had entered in our second class coach of the train when the dawn broke. They were all very silent when the train departed from the station; but, during the journey, known naught from which ways and sources the dialogue amongst the passengers commenced. After crossing Bihata railway station, a mature gentleman whose eyebrows spread and prevailed over his glittering eyes like projections of some roof-terrace said abruptly,

“Once an awfully serious train accident had occurred here. It will remain unparalleled for several reasons in the whole history of the journey by train. In that, more than a hundred passengers had lost their lives, and even more than that had been injured.”

Hereupon the discussion absolutely changed its way like a river changing its course. Although none of the passengers among us had been a witness of that accident, yet some of us had seen such other similar accidents. They so nervously quivered while describing those accidents as if they were happening live before them right then.

Absolutely stunned, we were taken aghast and kept gazing at him as if looted all over when a hale and hearty young muscular man as he narrated two most terribly thrilling, and most sensational tragic incidents of his life that had befallen to himself.

He was an engineer by profession as he narrated. He told us, once he fell under the moving train. Although his mangled body was full of wounds and bruises, yet, as he said, his life was saved. He himself didn't know how his life was saved, he said.

He told us when he fell, he just felt that the train was entering the station. It was constantly slowing down and slackening its pace. He said, he tightly clutched the stairs for boarding the railway carriage. He just recalled that much of the first incident; but, the other incident was quite horrendous as he narrated it.

He stated that while going back to Kotdwar from Pawdigadhwal, his bus fell in a 250 feet deep gorge. Ten passengers died there and then itself and five lost their lives in the hospital where they were admitted; but, he had been saved with just some bruises, he said.

When asked as to how he was saved, he said, "oh, I was saved just like that, and now, just see that I am sitting right before you all."

We were thrilled and sensationalized to hear the story of that youth. We congratulated him profusely, but he notoriously smiled and said, "Friends! It's not that I have vanquished demise, but I have also claimed, recovered and received compensation from the insurance companies." On this, we burst into peals of full throated laughter, and when he silenced himself, that seasoned gentleman, who was also a retired judge of the court, and who had ignited the conversation of the train accident, he further began to narrate, "I never got opportunity to conquer death like my engineer friend, but yes, I have certainly done justice in a very peculiar case pertaining to that train accident."

One of the fellow passengers suddenly asked as taken aghast,

"Do you mean that Bihata rail accident?"

"Yes, Yes." The judge retorted.

"Perhaps certain perverts and conspirators were involved in causing that accident. Now-a-days, it has become a fashion to play with and take away the lives of hundreds of innocent persons for gaining political positions in the ruling dispensation."

The judge seriously shrugged his neck and proceeded ahead to speak:

"Friends! That matter is neither concerned with any kind of politics, nor it pertains to any of the causes of that train accident."

A fellow passenger intervened, "Then?"

The judge replied, "It pertains to human character."

On this the engineer surmised, "On such occasions, some notorious elements never fail to serve their vested interest. When some good and magnanimous passengers begin to run in hurly-burly being scared, the other certain notorious elements are looting them all over in the name of providing them succor in crisis."

"Well, you are saying rightly."

The third fellow passenger endorsed him, "they don't fail to pickpocket even the injured and dead."

After this, the fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh which meant every passenger of the coach utilized the fertile power of his creative imagination; but the judge nodded in no, which vindicated them all very wrong and erroneous in their discernments.

Eventually, when everyone's coffer of surmise was emptied, then his Lordship, the judge began to further narrate thus:

"There was also a woman among those several passengers travelling in the train in that fateful night of the fatal accident. That unparalleled beauty! Albeit five years had passed since that woman had been married, still she was looking a new-wed bride full of fine-fine freshness, loveliness and charm, still panting and still young, captivating and blushing as ever before! She was a paragon of beauty with her big thin blue glittering eyes, slim nose, lovely tender face, with thick black hair, that dainty darling of beauty and charm could satiate the hunger of forever panting lover! That dainty darling of beauty seemed to have been one of those ancient paragon of beauties on whose mere gaze, lotus bloomed, on whose slightest sweet smile the blossoms laughed and blushed!"

He continued

"The only difference that these five years had brought in her behavior was that by now she had grown somewhat naughty and slightly mischievous; but because of all these reasons, she had become rather more dear to her hubby. Her husband was with her in that train. He was with the blushing bud, he was with that paragon of blooming beauty, and hence, all other passengers had vacated a full berth for them in the coach of the train because all the passengers had wrongly suspected the couple to be just coming back as newly wedded! Anyway, their life was like a new scale full of variegated colors and fragrance which was soothing not only them, but it was also dampening and perfuming with their fragrance the people all around. The couple was fully living those moments of their soothing love, the memories of which are life-giving force and sustenance of everyone's life, and the train was running, no, no, it was almost in the air, now the train was flying, yelling, whistling, hooting, bellowing, vomiting out smoke, stabbing the chest of darkness with its light! "

The passengers were somewhat shocked with the mention of stab metaphor; but the narrator's keen sense wrapped them all in silence, and his Lordship the judge peered out for a while and then again began to narrate while he reclined his one elbow on the edge of the side window, his thick lips coiled as when a frog swallowing serpent coils before assailing its prey. The snake has teeth but no venom in them. His Lordship the judge further proceeded with his narration thus:

"The night had fallen, and the train was running at its full tilt. Almost all the passengers were dozing, but then that couple lost in each other's sweet embrace was still busy in love making, that making of love which fills hearts with sweet and shrill delight! Many times, that dainty darling of his wife said to him, "Please sleep now." The husband smiled and replied, "I know naught why tonight the sleep is also very keen to talk to you." Then the wife profusely

laughed and said, "I am sleeping now. I will talk to her in the dreams." The husband said, "Whatever we have now, is it in anyway different than the dreams? You are yourself a dream." The wife laughed and said, "the dream is a feeling, but I am truth and reality. I am sitting right with you. You can touch me."

"And thus, the chats continued."

"The meaningless chatting of the lovers, beginning and the endless chatting that filled life with fertile energy and sweet soothing fragrance of titillating sensations. Be whatsoever may be, but who knows power of the time? Eventually, their eyelashes became heavy, those dozy drowsy eyelashes rather began to fill the palpitating hearts of those two panting lovers even with more intoxication, throbbing with absolute restlessness for that last exquisite pleasure, so euphoric, in a state of ecstatic joy, with a little murmur, and soft sweet whisperings of each one's fills and feels, arms in arms, they were so enparadised that they had so lost themselves in each other's sweet soothing embrace that they felt to have been transported into seven heavens to filch celestial joy..... But right then, all of a sudden, it heavily jerked, the couple was terribly jolted and far flung as if the train tumbled and toppled upside down"

"Shadachhoo-shadachhoo" the rising sounds of the words of that flying train was abruptly transformed into an awful yelling and howling with such a horrible collision that it seemed as if at that fateful juncture some appalling strife ensued between time and tilt of the flying train!

With the horrendously gurgling and thudding sounds, everything was transformed into hurly-burly of an awful atmosphere. The passengers lost in slumbers of the night were far flung out of their berths before they could wake up and yell out any words for their safety and security. In no time, the whole environment was full of endless roaring, moaning and groaning for succor. The thick darkness of the nocturnal environment rather augmented the tragedy of that calamitous juncture. That couple abruptly being flung called each other for the last time and then they were engulfed and lost in that howling gurgling ferocious sound of cataclysm.

We, the passengers were so shocked and at the same thrilled that we felt as if that train accident was happening right then before our eyes; our hearts groaned and throbbed with a peculiar restlessness of sensational exhaustion but very fortunately, by then, it was daylight."

The engineer mustered courage and asked, "Then did the train derail and that couple died in the accident?"

"I just told you that more than one hundred passengers had lost their lives in that train accident; but then, that couple wasn't among them."

"What?" The engineer asked being shocked with a sense of keen consternation, "Was the couple saved?"

"Yes, both of them were rescued. The woman's husband sustained many wounds and injuries on his body, but amazingly all quite minor and very ordinary; on the other hand, his beautiful wife got several wounds, each one of the injuries seemed more serious and extraordinary than the other. What to describe and how..... The bone of her right leg was broken. On the right side of her face, from her temple to her chin, it seemed as if a long wedge was cut across her face.....Two days after this serious train accident, when her husband was allowed by the medical doctors to sit and stand, he then first of all said – "I want to see my wife."

He was aware of her being alive and was taken to the big hospital of the concerned district; but the doctors told him "My friend! You shouldn't hasten like this. Her condition is not stable so far."

The husband asked "Is she conscious?"

The doctor replied "Yes! Now, she has regained her consciousness."

The last sentence he rather whispered very softly. "Then take me there. I want to see her. She is my wife."

The doctor controlled himself as far as possible and said "I know my friend! I also know that she would recover and get well, but....."

"But what?" The husband yelled and asked--

"Has she got severe injuries?"

The doctor replied, "So should you understand, but she would recover and get well. She would certainly be alright."

The control over his patience snapped as he heard it all and began to sob very bitterly.

The doctor consoled him in all possible manners, but he couldn't gain any peace of mind.

Eventually, the doctor said "The bandages of her face can still not be removed for many days. What will you do to see her?"

He muttered in tears, "Doctor! Not her face, I want to see her, her....." and he again began to sob and call his wife's name again and again.

Ultimately, the doctor was also a human being. He tried his best and got the husband transferred to the same district hospital in which his wife had been admitted but on the condition that he could visit his wife but wouldn't speak to her. His wife was told that her husband was not fit to sit by now.

You can imagine in what miserable plight the man might have been when he would have seen his wife.

His heart was palpitating at the pace of a terrible storm. He quivered repeatedly like a patient stricken with an awful cold. He saw smoke rising before his eyes. One of his wife's legs was amputated. The whole of her face and head were bandaged. So she couldn't see. Very steadily, he reached her, very slowly as if it took him an age to complete just a few yards' distance from the doors to her bedstead. He stood for a long while which seemed as long as an age for him and then he desired to call, "Vimla!"

Vimla was his wife's name but he couldn't call. All of a sudden, he felt giddy, his head circled around and he collapsed over there and then. The people quickly shifted him from there. His wife knew nothing of it, she also couldn't know of it. Whenever she regained her consciousness in between, she whispered, "call him, just call him please, where is he? Where is he?" Her voice was quite frail and feeble and her struggle often without any pace in it.

The next day, her husband, who had grown old just within a night, asked the doctor, "Will my wife recover and get well? Please tell me clearly."

In a choked throat, the doctor said compassionately, "My friend! Your wife's life would be saved, but, I am very sorry, one of her legs and eyes would be lost. Her face would also get somewhat disfigured and crooked."

"Face disfigured and crooked!" He softly whispered.

"Very sorry my friend, I am very sorry. Just four days ago, your wife might have been a paragon of unparalleled beauty, but now.....Now you should have patience and courage." The doctor said this to him and went away.

For a few moments, with concerted eyes, he kept gazing at the doctor going away.

The man continued muttering, "Paragon of unparalleled beauty, patience, disfigured and crooked face, one leg, one eye, paragon of unparalleled beauty! She....."

For many hours, his plight was the same.

He muttered and chuckled again and again like a tipsy man –

"Paragon of unparalleled beauty, one eye, one leg, disfigured and crooked face, paragon of unparalleled beauty! She....." Then he began to sob again. It had become a big problem for the doctors. Hence, they discussed and decided to discharge him from the hospital. When the senior doctor came to him to communicate this decision, there was no end to his amazement; The senior doctor found he was absolutely silent. He welcomed the decision of the doctors. He expressed his desire to see his wife only once before leaving, and this time, when he

appeared before his wife, neither his heart throbbed, nor he collapsed. On the contrary to this all, he boldly went and firmly stood closed to her.

Then, all of a sudden, he raised his hands, the nurse disallowed him strictly. He paused for a while, but for the second time, he again raised his hand and then pulled it down. For the third time, he raised both his hands. The nurse promptly gestured at him to stop, but this time, he did not stop, rather he quickly advanced ahead, pounced at and both his hands clutched his injured wife's throat and.....

Within a few moments, the world of that patients' room absolutely toppled upside down, the nurses running helter and skelter, awfully gripped with fright and yelling out like mad men, with his grinding teeth, strangulating of his wife with his demonic force, horrendous cries of his wife and.....and after that.....

And after that, he kissed his dead wife for a prolonged while, and then gasping for breath, and perspiring all over, he said to the crowd of the employees and authorities of the hospital, "Now, I am ready to go anywhere."

Having arrived at this point, his Lordship, the judge was absolutely quiet. His big face was damp with tears and sweat, but we were as if woken up from a nightmare. Our hearts were throbbing with fright and the train was entering the station. This time too, the engineer mustered courage.

He released a long sigh and said, "So this was the matter that you had to decide?" "Yes," the judge replied and hastily got up from his seat. He had to alight the train at the same station. A gentle man, who was young as expected and his eyes filled with tears, he said, "You might have acquitted him undoubtedly as he was.... he....."

He couldn't proceed, his throat was choked as he tried to utter.

The judge looked at him and asked, "What would you have done had you yourself been a jury in that case?"

"Of course, acquitted him, undoubtedly," we all retorted in unison.

A strange smile radiated on his face when he said, "Even the jury of that day too, said this, but friends, I couldn't do injustice with him. I know very well that I have done injustice in many other cases, but I will be always proud of this case. I had sentenced him to death."

"Sentenced!" we yelled out taken aghast.

Alighting the train, the judge said this much more, "Keeping him alive would have been a dishonor to his sacred emotions and sentiments."

And then, he was lost and disappeared somewhere in the crowd of the train passengers.



(Translated from Hindi with Courtesy of Mr Mahabir Prasad Yadav)

~English Literature~

Tagore's *Geetanjali*: A Theo-Critical Text

Bhavneet D Souza & Vinod Asudani

Abstract

Geetanjali: A Theo-Critical Text offers a nuanced exploration of Rabindranath Tagore's *Geetanjali* through a Theo-critical lens, analysing its spiritual and theological dimensions within the broader framework of literary and religious studies. This work investigates how Tagore's poetry navigates the divine-human relationship, revealing an intricate tapestry of devotion, longing, surrender, and transcendence. Moving beyond conventional literary critique, the text engages with *Geetanjali* as a form of poetic theology, where metaphysical themes and mystical experiences are rendered through lyrical expression. The study situates Tagore's vision within the crosscurrents of Eastern and Western religious thought, highlighting influences from the Upanishadic tradition and the mysticism of the Bhakti movement, while also acknowledging resonances with Christian and Sufi mysticism. Emphasizing the universal spiritual ethos embedded in *Geetanjali*, the analysis uncovers how Tagore's concept of God evolves from a formless, immanent presence to a deeply personal and experiential reality. The Theo-critical approach allows for a richer understanding of the sacred aesthetics in the text, positioning *Geetanjali* as both a literary masterpiece and a spiritual testament. This interdisciplinary reading aims to deepen the appreciation of Tagore's devotional poetics and expand the scope of theological inquiry in literary discourse.

Keywords: Theo-criticism, Rabindranath Tagore, *Geetanjali*, Mysticism, Devotional poetics

Introduction

A good piece of literature is an open-ended text. It lends itself to a multitude of interpretations. It is natural as literature reflects life, which is a complex affair. Various theories in the field of criticism equip readers to interpret, understand and appropriately appreciate literature. In recent times, new theoretical interpretative approaches are being developed for a better understanding of creative literature. One of the contemporary scholars, Dr. V H Asudani (one of the co-authors of this paper) has devoted himself to developing a new theoretical interpretative approach namely "Theo- Criticism" to explore the theological concerns in each literary work.

Literary theory and literary criticism are interpretive tools that help us think more deeply and insightfully about the literature that we read. Right from the inception of the human race, God or considerations of Divine (explained in several ways by the different religions of the world) have dominated human thought. Therefore, it is reasonable to presume that every individual including creative writers hold their distinct point of view about the rule and function of divine power in human affairs. This belief is bound to influence creative efforts. This study

aims at applying the Theo-Critical approach to understand and interpret “Geetanjali” by Rabindranath Tagore.

Methodology

Critical interpretation using the inductive method.

Discussion: Theo-critical Interpretation of *Geetanjali*

One hundred and three lyrics included in the English version of *Geetanjali* implicitly or explicitly are concerned with the creator and its creation. Thus, *Geetanjali* lends itself to Theo-Critical interpretation. It is to be noted that Theo-criticism is not an attempt to label any creative writer or her work as theist or atheist, but it is a detached endeavour to understand and explore the theological beliefs that consciously or unconsciously find reflection in the literary work. Even a cursory reading of *Geetanjali* is enough to say that the poet has unshakable faith in the Almighty. He devotes himself unquestionably to the will of God. The poet also has put his faith in Hindu doctrines such as transmigration and immortality of the soul.

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life. 1 (p15)

The poet believes in the religious doctrine of humility and surrender. He sings at the will of God and for God. He regards human existence as impure, which can be purified by the touch and mercy of God. Here, he confirms the traditional religious belief that belittles human existence and subordinates it to divine existence.

I shall ever try to keep all untruths out of my thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind. 2 (p16)

Being a true devotee of God, many lyrics in *Geetanjali* give poetic and artistic expression to humility. The poet wants to be as humble as a flute and a reed. In the true tradition of the Bhakti cult, he calls God a burden-bearer and tells himself that there is no need to care or worry as he, the poet, is a child of God. Tagore has been praised for his human concerns in *Geetanjali*. He firmly believes - man service is service to God. He is concerned for the well-being of the poorest and the lowliest in society. It is to be borne in mind that this human concern is not the result of his critical rational thinking, which is the product of modern enlightenment, but his humanism is the extension of his motto of serving to God. In other words, like many religious people, poet wants to render yeoman service as he believes that God would be happy if deprived people are served. Like popular religious doctrine, he believes every human being to be the image of God.

Pride can never approach where thou walk in the clothes of the humble among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

My heart can never find its way to where thou keenest company with the companionless among the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost. 3 (p19)

Geetanjali is an example of progressive thoughts within the confines of religion. The poet does not believe in orthodox ceremonies and rituals. He says we cannot please God by chanting mantras or offering sacrifices. The path to God lies through the service of downtrodden and exploited people.

Leave this chanting and singing, and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely, dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones. He is with them in the sun and in the shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil! 4 (p20)

The poet is a true devotee. He believes that suffering has a purifying effect on him. When God denies the fulfilment of his worldly desires, he believes that it is for the benefit and uplift of the poet.

My desires are many and my cry is pitiful, but ever didst thou save me by hard refusals; and this strong mercy has been wrought into my life through and through.

Day by day thou art making me worthy of the simple, great gifts that thou gravest to me unasked--- this sky and the light, this body and the life and the mind--- saving me from perils of overmuch desire. 5 (p22)

The poet imagines himself to be in relation to the divine in several ways. Poet is His devotee, servant, friend, and lover. The poet believes that the sole purpose of human existence is to feel, experience, worship, admire, and, in the last, get united with the divine. He wants to shed off every such thing that is not taking him nearer to his God.

Let only that little be left of me whereby I may name thee my all.

Let only that little be left of my will whereby I may feel thee on every side, and come to thee in everything, and offer to thee my love every moment.

Let only that little be left of me whereby I may never hide thee.

Let only that little of my fetters be left whereby I am bound with thy will, and thy purpose is carried out in my life---and that is the fetter of thy love.

The intensity of the yearning of poet for the reunion with God is expressed in several lyrics. At times, this yearning has the erotic overtones of the lover to be united with his beloved. Poet has been admired for his artistic expression of his longing for a reunion with God. Here, *Geetanjali* assumes the character of a religious text.

That I want thee, only thee---let my heart repeat without end. All desires that distract me, day and night, are false and empty to the core.

As the night keeps hidden in its gloom the petition for light, even thus in the depth of my unconsciousness rings the cry---'I want thee, only thee'.
As the storm still seeks its end in peace when it strikes against peace with all its might, even thus my rebellion strikes against thy love and still its cry is--
-'I want thee, only thee'6 (p32)

All major religions of the world believe in mysticism. They consider this world to be unsubstantial. They believe that our existence on the earth is a passing phenomenon and finally we must go back to our original abode. Poet expresses this mysticism to go across the ocean to his original home. All religions emphasize detachment with worldly things. They criticize the world as Maya (entrapment) that holds a human being back from his real purpose, that is, salvation. Poet unquestionably accepts these religious values. Tagore being a great poet has expressed these beliefs poetically and artistically. Otherwise, there is no intellectual contribution so far as the question of understanding of human life is concerned.

Early in the day it was whispered that we should sail in a boat, only thou and I,
and never a soul in the world would know of this our pilgrimage to no country
and to no end.
In that shoreless ocean, at thy silently listening smile my songs would swell in
melodies, free as waves, free from all bondage of words. 7 (p34)

Like a true mystic, Tagore believes in oneness of God man and nature. One single spirit runs through all of them. The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless
blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers. 8 (p50)

Being a staunch believer, poet says that God is always ready to come to human beings to rescue us from all sorts of sorrows and sufferings. For a theist, it may be alright to say that whatever comforts one has in life are bestowed by God. Poet expresses this simplistic, childlike feeling where he assumes that no harm will be done if we truly believe in God.

Have you not heard his silent steps? He comes, comes, ever comes.
Every moment and every age, every day and every night he comes, comes, ever
comes9 (p35)

Here, it can be argued that Tagore who was well educated and, in all probability, was aware of scientific developments that were taking place in his time. In such a situation, how he does not apply his critical understanding to explain the misery and suffering of human life? At nowhere in *Geetanjali*, he says that human beings with their own efforts and intellectual power can transform their condition. Even when he speaks to make this world a better and happier place, he wants to do so by evoking the mercy and kindness of God.

Poet's obsession with God continues through many lyrics. He goes on admiring beauty and grandeur of God. He believes that all the astronomical objects like the sun, stars, clouds including the earth are nothing but the manifestation of beauty of God. He looks upon everything with a sense of wonderment. Beautiful is thy wristlet, decked with stars and cunningly wrought in myriad-colored jewels. But more beautiful to me thy sword with its curve of lightning like the outspread wings of the divine bird of Vishnu, perfectly poised in the angry red light of the sunset.¹⁰ (p41)

Geetanjali touches high water mark of humanism in lyric sixty-four. Here speaker persuades a woman who is going to offer a lamp to a river as a ritual? He tells her that his house is dark and lonesome. She should instead of uselessly allowing the lamp to burn like many others; she can lend light to him. Symbolically poet asks all those affluent people who instead of helping the underprivileged, indulge in a lot of wastage of resources. The poet who otherwise unquestionably accepts the will of God, here sides with the humanists to oppose the useless rituals which have defiled the purity of religion.

In the moonless gloom of midnight, I ask her,
'Maiden, what is your quest, holding the lamp near your heart? My house is all dark and lonesome--- lend me your light'. She stopped for a minute and thought and gazed at my face in the dark. 'I have brought my light,' she said, 'to join the carnival of lamps.' I stood and watched her little lamp uselessly lost among lights.¹¹ (p46)

More than a dozen poems in *Geetanjali* deal with the theme of death. Poet refers to death metaphorically believing it to be a gateway that would lead him to the kingdom of God. As a truly religious man, he is not afraid of death, rather he gladly welcomes it.

On the day when death will knock at thy door what wilt thou offer to him?
Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel of my life---I will never let him go with empty hands.

All the sweet vintage of all my autumn days and summer nights, all the earnings and gleanings of my busy life will I place before him at the close of my days when death will knock at my door¹² (p59)

Conclusion

The above discussion clearly shows that *Geetanjali* is a Theo-critical text. It deals with many concerns that are recurrent in major religions of the world. Some of them are unshakable faith in Almighty; transmigration and immortality of the soul; death as a gateway leading to the kingdom of God; the world as the manifestation of God's beauty and grandeur; considering human beings to be the image of God; realizing God through yeomen service; recognizing the one spirit that runs through God, men and nature; believing this world to be Maya; recognition that ultimate aim of life is to get united with the divine, etc.

In *Geetanjali*, the poet has not transcended the traditional beliefs of religion. He has indeed shown concern for human welfare, but that is part of his service to man to understand God. He has not rationally interpreted the causes of human suffering. He does not evoke the help of science to alleviate human suffering. The poet affirms his faith in secularism as there is nothing that goes against any religion. He is not superstitious as he rejects useless ceremonies and rituals.

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Why Didn't They Snatch and Eat? : A Thematic Exploration of Manjima Chatterjee's *The Mountain of Bones*

Diksha Bharti & Supriya

Abstract

This paper critically examines Manjima Chatterjee's *The Mountain of Bones* as a notable example of contemporary, non-commercial Indian theatre by women dramatists. Set against the historical backdrop of the 1943 Bengal Famine, Chatterjee's play addresses persistent societal issues through themes of hunger, moral degeneration, entitlement failures, and socio-economic inequalities emerging from misadministration and manipulation of food resources. The playwright employs eclectic theatrical methods, including non-linear narratives, absurdist elements, and symbolic stagecraft. By analyzing the play's characterization, thematic motifs, and performative elements, the paper explores how Chatterjee's work critiques both historical and contemporary socio-political systems. The study highlights Chatterjee's innovative artistic vision and her significant contribution to contemporary Indian theatrical discourse.

Keywords: Bengal Famine (1943), Food Politics, Entitlement Failures, Indian Women Playwrights, Contemporary Indian Theatre, Literary-performative Theatre, Hunger and Moral Degeneration

Authorship as a constituent element of Indian drama is a critical but dynamic activity, involving constant transformation via adaptation of various influences and tradition. In India, the importance of playwriting to theatre is broadly governed by social and commercial needs of the theatre. For instance, when modern Indian playwriting began in the colonial era playwriting was either a tool for cultural revival and social reforms via the print medium, or a collection of substandard material for commercial urban performances. The binary between the 'literary' and the 'performative' is clearly visible in this phase. In the post-independence era in place of this binary, an intermediary category of 'literary-performative' emerged such that the best of the plays was exalted in literary qualities like the plays of Tagore, as well as successful on stage like those of Girish Chandra Ghosh (Dharwadker liv-lix).

According to Aparna Dharwadker, this intermediary category of 'literary-performative' took a new turn in the hands of women theatre practitioners in the 1980s. They do not belong to the mainstream that is heavily dominated by male authors and most of them engage in non-commercial urban theatre only. Their art involves different modes of textual creation informed by the idea that authorship not only denotes individual creativity, rather it is a result of collaboration, workshop experimentation, improvisation or developing a text for performance from prior sources in fiction, non-fiction, poetry, or some other genre. Dharwadker notes that directors like, Shanta Gandhi who has revised Bhasa's *Madhyam Vyoag* (The Middle One), Vijaya Mehta who has revived Kalidasa's *Shakuntala*; Usha Ganguly who has adapted Mahasweta Devi's *Rudali* for the stage by collaborating with the original author; or A Mangai and Tripurari Sharma for whom activism and print articulation go hand-in-hand, are some

women artists who will represent this contemporary category of 'literary-performative' in Indian theatre. The process of playwriting is of a distinct kind amongst this category. They do not necessarily write 'plays' rather they develop performance texts using a variety of oral, written/printed, and visual materials (xciii-xciv).

The theatre practiced by Manjima Chatterjee imbibes several of the above discussed characteristics of the 'literary-performative' category. As 'performance texts' her plays also have several antecedent sources but no prior existence in the form in which it is brought upon the stage. She makes use of history, myth, music and poetry from diverse sources in her plays. She also uses a wide range of forms for self-expression, for introspection, speculation, polemic and rhetorical communication with the audience.

As literature, Chatterjee's plays aim at consciousness-raising through an avant-gardist, process-oriented playwriting. She defines drama as that artistic medium that 'enables the participant to see the possibilities that lie within any situation—from emotional stress to mathematics—to go with the investigation of 'what happens when...?', rather than the limiting TV series format question: 'what happens next?'" ("Drama for Democracy: Material Theatre" 99). Her plays are therefore broadly characterized by non-linearity, anti-realism and resistance. However, discussions around the literary qualities of contemporary non-commercial plays are very limited and their mention remains either cursory or referential. Recognizing this as an understudied area of research, the present paper attempts to critically examine the literary qualities of Manjima Chatterjee's play, *The Mountain of Bones*. The paper analyses the major themes of the play to highlight the literariness of an acclaimed 'performance text'. The perspectives are substantiated by existing literature/reference material wherever possible. The study at large relies on interviews given by the playwright on various occasions wherein she discusses different aspects of her play; a wide-ranging study of the referential material related to various sources acknowledged by the author herself; and other relevant critical works.

The Mountain of Bones is Chatterjee's most critically acclaimed work. It is a satirical play written in the backdrop of 1943 Bengal Famine. The play explores the socio-political situation of the time by focusing on themes like hunger and politics of food. It is a character-driven play without a linear plot structure or a defined narrative line. At best its plot construction can be defined as episodic expressions of the lived reality of a period of crisis, change and upheavals. It incorporates several elements of the absurdist theatre, like enigmatic characters with unintelligible motives and actions; passive, puppet-like characters at the mercy of meaningless circumstance; arbitrary storyline with circular repetition of stereotyped phrases; and farcical treatment of sombre and bitter subject matter. Taking cue from the study of experts like Amartya Sen who have carried out intensive studies of the Bengal famine as an anthropogenic phenomenon, the playwright uses her creative space to discuss various such factors that led to this man-made crisis and its varied consequences on a series of distinctly positioned members of the Bengal society. Adjacent to its intended design, it also explores Bengali traditions of folklore, myths, songs, and storytelling in a rather non-conventional set-up. For *Mountain of Bones*, Chatterjee won the Hindu MetroPlus Playwright Award in 2013. Talking about the central theme of the play in an interview given to Shirley Huston-Findley, Chatterjee declares:

My play essentially is about food. Not just hunger. My play is about the politics of food. My play is about people who experience the need for food and people who manipulate that need to serve their own purposes. People who manipulate food as a weapon for other uses. (04)

Thus, hunger and the politics that were played around the people's dire need for food become the core thematic concerns of the play.

It is estimated that the Bengal famine of 1943 resulted in the deaths of about four million people out of a population of about sixty million. The Famine Commission of India reported that the main cause of famine was "a serious shortage in the total supply of rice available for consumption in Bengal" (Sen 441). Cyclone of October 1942 in some districts, Japanese invasion of Burma disrupting the supply of rice from Burma into India, and the strategic removal of rice from coastal areas of Bengal by the British army in order to hamper food supply of oncoming Japanese army, were among cited reasons for the shortage of rice supply. However, this 'FAD (Food-Availability Decline)' explanation for famine is countered by the welfare economist Amartya Sen. Discussing the more plausible reasons Sen points out that in 1943 "availability of food grains [in Bengal] was at least 11 percent higher than in 1941, when there was nothing remotely like a famine" (442). However, the situation of death by starvation still arose and it was mostly a rural phenomenon. The most affected rural occupation groups were those of fishermen, transporters and agricultural labourers. This was not due to shortage of supplies but due to lack of entitlements or entitlement failures. According to Amartya Sen, entitlement can be understood as collections of goods and services (including food) available to an individual as options to choose from. The lack, or availability of entitlement or, rise or fall in entitlement depends to a great extent, on any society's legal, political, economic and social characteristics and an individual's position in that society (435). Entitlement failures may result due to several factors like war-induced inflation, discriminatory or mismanaged government policies and market manipulation in the buying and selling of food. The play *Mountain of Bones* precisely raises these issues. It dramatically presents the legal, political, economic, and social characteristics of 20th century Bengal. It highlights the questionable policies of the British government during that period; the impact of the on-going Second World War on the markets of Bengal; and the shortage of food supplies due to reported incidents of market manipulation and black-marketing.

The play is divided, not into scenes but three sections namely, Morning, Afternoon, and Night. In each of these sections there are three settings on the stage; the Old Woman's Village (OWV), the Flooded Tree Area (FTA), and the Central Performance Zone (CPZ). These settings represent different times and spaces and are occupied by different sets of characters. The characters can be roughly grouped into three categories; the Old Woman and Girl occupy the OWV; characters like the Hungry Crowd, Babu, Jogi Dakat, Communist, administrators, Leader, newsman, Scientist are found in CPZ; while Man, and Boy exchange dialogues in FTA. There are frequent shifts from one setting to another such that the reader is at once made part of three different worlds which do not overlap but always remain connected in the backdrop of the Bengal famine.

The main action of the play takes place in the 'Central Performance Zone'. This setting is occupied by characters named; the Hungry Crowd, Babu, Jogi Dakat, the Communist, and

the administrators. These characters represent different sections of the society, and the play portrays the grimness of the Bengal famine through each of their perspectives.

As already mentioned, the play-texts that are developed by contemporary women dramatists draw their material from various oral and written pre-existing sources. In the case of *The Mountain of Bones*, the themes as well as the characterization is greatly influenced from the stories of Manik Bandopadhyay, the eminent 20th century Bengali short story writer. Bandopadhyay's stories '...show famine, black marketeering, the helplessness of the destitute due to extreme poverty, malnutrition, disease and epidemics, economic exploitation, class differentiation, and moral breakdown (60)', remarks Ghosh. Interestingly, an identical trajectory of representations and concerns is observed in the play under discussion. Like the theme, Manik Bandopadhyay's stories also inform the characterization in this play, particularly the presentation of social types in this setting. Talking about characterization in Manik Bandopadhyay's stories, Aparna Mehta remarks that Bandopadhyay's characters are 'starving peasants hit by man-made famine, impoverished craftsmen and decaying feudal types of claustrophobic lower middle-class life and polyglot workers in a growing metropolis' (295). If the character of the Hungry Crowd is a prototype of the "starving peasants", Babu becomes a representative of the "claustrophobic lower middle class", and the Communist, the administrators, the Newsman, and Jogi Dakat widely cover the type of "polyglot workers in a growing metropolis". The action in the Central Performance Zone revolves around the interactions amongst these characters and portray them as either the victim or the oppressor. Events such as war-time efforts of the imperial government, market manipulation, sheer exploitation of man force and a general moral degeneration amongst all groups of people are some of the tropes that the dialogues of these characters, reveal.

The character of the Hungry Crowd is the playwright's strongest asset to underscore the theme of prolonged and non-ending hunger. Hunger, whether literal or metaphorical, is always present as the underlying motif of the play. The portrayal of the Hungry Crowd materializes the most agonizing form of hunger, that is--- hunger as a physical experience. The Hungry Crowd is a mass of near-death labourers who have been hired by the war administrators to work on the construction of war machines. They act for thousands of people from rural Bengal who had come to Calcutta in search of food and work during the famine. Their presence animates the title *The Mountain of Bones*. Throughout the play they are shown walking in a huddle with a uniform, mechanized moan on their lips sounding more like an animal crying than crowd sounds. They are always hungry and often appear lined up for the barely sufficient gruel being served by people like Jogi Dakat. Their moaning increases or decreases on Jogi's command, but never ceases. They bring to life hunger experienced in its physical form, and the kind of deprivation it entails.

Related to physical hunger is the theme of moral degeneration. The presence of hunger does not simply mean absence of food, it also means absence of one's will to fight, to snatch and eat. While discussing this aspect of hunger in an interview, Manjima Chatterjee posits an insightful question, "What kind of misery can keep people in exactly the same situation year after year?" (Nimkar 51:36-51:38). She answers that, to be angry, to protest, or, to snatch and eat there must be a level of prosperity. Hunger does not simply mean lack of food it also signifies moral degeneration. In the last section of the play, the character of Jogi sums up this gruesome reality of hunger as follows:

JOGI: I tried to rouse them; you know. I did. With just a little food in their bellies, they were aroused. They wanted to protest, to claim their right, to snatch what was their right. But once the hunger overtook them, they couldn't hear me anymore.

There was food in the fields, babu. There were fruits on the trees. Why didn't they snatch it and eat? Because they really believed in their society babu. In you and me. And by the time they realized that no help was coming, their hungry bodies were eating themselves. When the body eats itself babu, the mind goes first, and with it, the will to survive. In the end, all that remains is dust. (TMOB 43-44)

The Hungry Crowd never speak yet their ceaseless moaning makes a statement about the level of moral degeneration that a food crisis can set in. They are left too weak physically and morally to fight their own hunger leave alone a gigantic and oppressive system.

On one hand, the character of the Hungry Crowd highlights the theme of hunger and moral degeneration, on the other hand, their state points towards another major theme of the play- an arbitrarily functioning administration. The play exposes how mismanaged government policies became the major cause of entitlement failures during the Famine. The British government's sustenance policies are exposed to be a sham and the middle class becomes major victim of this mismanagement. It is represented in the play by the character of Babu. Babu is a prototype of that middle-class that is neither affluent enough to sustain themselves amidst the inflation, nor poor enough to procure government's sustenance policies meant for the poor. The middle class remains as usual, the cog in the wheel. Babu cannot afford rice at the market prices whereas the subsidies are only for the poor who cannot afford it at the subsidized rates as well. The play mocks this arrangement.

Another major trope of the play is to show how the situation of famine created opportunities for black marketeers (represented by the character of Jogi Dakat). Jogi Dakat represents the class of opportunists and manipulators amidst a crisis. He is a Machiavellian character for whom the end justifies the means. Apparently, he is a supporter of the communist ideology who has given up his old profession of looting and is serving his people in times of dire need. However, in the garb of communism, he intends on looting the seths by agitating the Hungry Crowd against them. He's also a black marketeer who sells rice meant for the poor to middle class people.

When Babu approaches Jogi Dakat to buy rice, which the rich do not need and the poor cannot afford, Jogi Dakat frames him as a 'hoarder'. The dacoit-turned-Communist chides Babu. He calls him greedy and insensitive towards the hungry population for hoarding their food supplies. Fully aware that the British-Indian government of the time held hoarders greatly responsible for shortage of food supplies, the cunning communist threatens Babu that if he doesn't start a community kitchen for feeding the hungry crowds, he would tell the authorities that Babu has been stealing the stocks. Through the character of Jogi Dakat, the playwright, thus, highlights the theme of economic exploitation and class inequalities that the less privileged Indians suffered at the hands of their fellow Indians. Kaur in her scholarly article 'The vexed question of peasant passivity: Nationalist discourse and the debate on peasant

resistance in literary representations of the Bengal famine of 1943' argues that many Bengal famine texts overlook this aspect of the crisis and focus only on its anti-colonial nature (269). The characters of the Hungry Crowd, Babu and Jogi Dakat show how the common men were scuffling over food, manipulating, exploiting and depriving each other.

Some are hungry for food while others are hungry for economic gains. The character of "administrators" showcases a completely contrasting side to the event of food crisis. They are hungry too, but for glory. These are high-spirited men devoted to the government's war-time efforts. Almost in an automated fashion, just as the machines they are building, they sing songs about the "lovely war". They sing of the upcoming glory, the trophy, the celebrations, and the civilized sophistication (11). Through these characters, the play brings forth the theme of the parochial colonial policies of the British government in of its most affluent presidencies in India. These men are facilitators of a widely discriminatory governing system whose entire focus is on war-related activities at a time when common people are out there fighting hunger, starvation, inflation and floods. The reader is never told which War it is that the administrators are preparing for, but they are made aware that it is the War in which food supplies are sourced from villages at insanely high prices by the administrators with the help of characters like Seth. Although the streets are full of the Hungry Crowd, the reports go into media that there is no shortage of resources. The administrators dismiss media reports of the deepening situation of famine as some war-induced scarcity. On the question of relief measures for the dying crowds, the character of the Scientist introduces grass chops as a healthy and fulfilling alternative to rice, heightening the sense of pathos. The entire system is ridiculed, the government's heightened insensitivity exposed:

NEWSMAN: Sir, there are people dying of cholera in the countryside. They're all flocking to the city to reach the fair price shops and the soup kitchens. I've been to the country, sir. It's falling apart.

AD 2: Then let grass be the glue! (Chatterjee 37)

The madness around the War is such that no other form of crisis, big or small, draws the attention of the government. The crisis under the setting of the Flooded Tree Area is another instance of the apathetic attitude of the British-Indian government towards the Indians and their daily-life struggles. In this setting, two characters, the Man and the Boy, are stuck on a tree during flood for several days waiting for their rescue. From the beginning till the end of the play these men do nothing except wait. Whenever they are centre stage they remind of the classic characters of Estragon and Vladimir, waiting for the arrival of a certain Mr. Godot whom they have never met or seen and who never really arrives. Likewise, no help arrives for the Man and the Boy. The Man consoles the crying Boy that someone will certainly come to their rescue since they don't live in the jungle. They live in a society where people look after each other. However, nothing of the sort happens and the play ends on a rather abrupt note with the two men still stuck on a tree waiting to be rescued. Their never-ending wait for rescue also adds onto the thread of the never-ending hunger of the Hungry Crowd and augments the sense of pathos within the play.

In fact, apart from themes of hunger and the politics of food, a third common trope that ties together the various plotlines within the play, is the theme of waiting. In Central Performance

Zone, the Hungry Crowd ceaselessly waits to be fed. In Flooded Tree Area, the Man and the Boy endlessly wait to be rescued. And, in Old Woman's Village, the Girl tirelessly waits for her father to return. She keeps asking the Old Woman about the whereabouts of her father. Towards the resolution of the play, it is revealed that the little girl's father is perhaps one among the Hungry Crowd '[s]tanding in a line at a soup kitchen somewhere, begging for some gruel, some kanji, some fan. Trying to figure out a way to survive the night (49)'. Perhaps, he is never going to return. It leaves the reader pondering about the significance of one's existence if one's life becomes all about waiting with no elevation of one's circumstances ever.

The structuring of the play is such that the actions of the 'Central Performance Zone' and the 'Flooded Tree Area' are identifiable as real time events. In contrast, the scenes of the section titled the 'Old Woman's Village' stands identified as mythical. The central character of this setting is the Old Woman who has a dreadful and capricious tint to her personality. She narrates a mythical story to a little girl about a prince named Dalim Kumar. Her fragmented story interspersed within the main plot carries a significant symbolic weightage. In the story, the prince and his brothers are sent by their mother to Pashanpuri (quite literally, the land of the Stone people), which specializes in carving kings, rulers and administrators who have hearts of stones. The mother of the princes believes that stone people make much better rulers than human beings. On their way to Pashanpuri, the princes encounter a mountain of bones so high that it is impossible even for their "Pakshiraj horses" (the flying horses) to fly over it. So, they decide to trample it down with the help of their horses and soon enough the insurmountable mountain is reduced to a heap. However, the stench remains. It is the stench of the dead, who the Old Woman describes as 'the failures of Pashanpuri. The subjects who would not turn stone. Their life was sucked out of them, and they were left to rot in this place'(39). But their bodies were left so dry that no juice was left to break their bones, 'so the bones piled up dry as sticks into a mountain higher than the sky' (39-40). When read in connection to the rest of the motifs that the play expounds, the Old Woman's mythical tale becomes an allegory for the horrendous event of the Bengal famine which ensued innumerable deaths by starvation and famine-incurred epidemics. Dalim Kumar could very easily be representing the 'bhadralok', the new class of highly westernized gentlefolk, which arose during the British rule in India and majority of whom were supporters and facilitators of the tyrannical colonial policies of the British. Pashanpuri could very well mean Britain or Britain controlled Calcutta and the hotspot of British industrial and warfare activities. The reference to the flying horses instantly reminds of the figure of Pegasus from Greek mythology which was known to help gods and heroes in achieving great victories and symbolizes power of a high order. The act of trampling over the mountain of bones with the help of the horses becomes a metaphor for the furtive efforts of the British Indian government to sweep reports of famine related losses under the carpet.

The themes of the play are advanced not only through dialogues, characterization and allegories, as discussed so far, but also through props and stagecraft. For instance, the manner in which the playwright describes the working of the War Machine on stage is a reflection upon the hazardous development model of India. At one point of narrative shift, in the section titled, 'Morning', the War Machine is described as follows:

Newsman leaves with Administrators. The War Machine is now ready, and starts to function as an assembly line unit with entry paths leading from right

and left into a giant mouth at upstage centre. Bags are loaded on to the entry paths and taken upstage into its mouth. This action is repeated continuously. One of the carriers falls in with a bag and a faint scream is emitted from the mouth of the Machine. Everyone stops work, staring at the Machine until the scream fades away. Then they go back to work, moaning. (15)

The War Machine appears like a hungry giant which engulfs the workers along with the bags that they carry. It becomes a symbolic prop on stage signifying the giant political machinery which people build themselves and ends up being eaten by it. Quite certainly it was in relation to this pressing idea of the play, that the jury of the Metro Plus Award in one its citations commented that “[t]he Mountain of Bones is a troubling portrait of India’s new development model and the tyranny of the neo-liberal agenda” (“Manjima Chatterjee Wins the Hindu MetroPlus Playwright Award 2013”). India, which aspires to be a global force, claims that no major famine has happened in its post-independence era. But the grim truth is that, then and now, while experts argue over definitions, debating what counts as a famine, chronic hunger is a harsh reality for millions of India's poor.

The Bengal Famine of 1943, which occurred during a crucial time for India's historical trajectory, reveals starkly the contradictions and conflicts among class, caste and gender identities. This unfortunate occurrence and its ugly social reality had undermined a nationalist narrative focused on achieving national freedom. Kaur argues that the literary works that were produced in response to the Famine during that time, reflect, both in content and form, these very disruptions and challenge the complexities of progressive politics beyond the usual ethical and aesthetic issues of depicting famine (279). With passing time, the event of the Bengal Famine has become a timelessly relevant symbol of resistance and reality check in literature.

The Mountain of Bones revisits this crisis with contemporary relevance. In her own words, through *The Mountain of Bones*, the aim of the playwright was to represent a value system not a cultural system (Huston-Findley 323) and the backdrop of Bengal Famine becomes its major symbol. Chatterjee structures her play in such a way that instead of relying on outward material for a new look the play looks inward for the newness. It relies on its varied human dimensions to create the ecstasy of experimentation and in this process the playwright and her art becomes an integral part of the whole process of producing a theatre performance. Her craft is such that it not only tells a tale but also omits all possibilities of removing the playwright from the play. It is not simply a storyline that she offers but a performance within her playwriting with minimal props and spectacle.

The Mountain of Bones thus emerges as a highly performable play full of tragic intensity that is communicated through strong characters and multiple points of view. By highlighting themes of hunger, moral degeneration, misadministration and subsequent entitlement failures, the play leaves the reader with a sense of poignancy related to poverty, suffering, the everyday struggles and the unattainable respite that had come to characterize the rural households of Bengal in the 1940s. It has politics, opinions, historical analysis, folklore adaptations and a pressing question relevant to all times; “What kind of misery can keep people in exactly the same situation year after year?” (Nimkar 51:36-51:38).

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Language as Action: Reassessing Performative Utterances in the Arab Revolution

TS Kavitha

Abstract

This paper delves into the function of performative poetry, specifically slam poetry and rap in the Arab uprisings. Drawing on J.L. Austin's theory of performative language, it argues that these poetic forms served not purely as artistic expressions but also as powerful devices for mobilization and collective transformation under oppressive regimes. The paper explores the key features of performative poetry, their orality and social action, and how they aid poetry to transcend representation and bring about change in the world. It situates slam poetry and rap in the context of the Arab revolutions, where they become a tool for marginalized voices. Through an analysis of certain poems and songs, the paper illustrates how performative poetry stimulated political movements, kindled public discourse, and became the key factor to overthrow of despotic regimes. In conclusion, it ponders over the impact of performative poetry as a memory of struggle in the post-revolutionary Arab world. As a result, the paper illustrates the transformative power of poetry as a mode of action and resistance in times of political turmoil.

Keywords: Performative poetry, Arab Spring, Revolution, Resistance, Oppression, Music.

Introduction

Performance poetry is an approach in which reciting a poem is an act. The poem "does something": it affects the world or others, and not just aesthetically. Performance poetry refers to poetic forms in which the act of speaking becomes an act of doing. Inspired by the theory of performative language developed by J. L. Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), performance poetry does not simply describe or move: it acts, transforms, and directly engages the reader or listener. It often takes place in an oral, staged, or activist context, where the poem comes to life in voice, gesture, body, and social situations.

Austin distinguished constative statements (which describe a fact) from performative statements which accomplish an action by the simple act of being spoken. Applied to poetry, this notion assumes that the poem is not only a representation of reality but also an intervention in it. It does not speak; it does. Although performative poetry is not a new domain or kind of poetry, its function and use today have changed and it has adapted itself in different circumstances. It functions as an umbrella term for poetic and musical forms such as slam poetry, decolonial poetry, activist and feminist poetry, and rap.

The key features of performative poetry are orality and corporality; the text includes gestures, voice, and breath observed through the poet's body movements. Through these performative actions, interactions between performers and audiences occur, thus making the

poem a collective event. Another important feature of performative poetry is its political and social engagement, where poetry is used to denounce injustice, claim rights, and assert an identity, and, as in the case of the Arab Spring, to overthrow a dictatorial regime.

In societies where public speech is repressed, poetry can become much more than an art form: it becomes a political act, a collective cry, or a means of influencing reality. Performance poetry, by definition, does not simply represent the world; it transforms it. It acquires its full significance in the context of crises, revolutions, or oppression. This is precisely what happened during the Arab Revolution (2010–2012), which is also known as the Arab Spring.

In several countries in the Maghreb and Middle East, Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain, popular movements have emerged to demand social justice, democracy, and an end to corruption. In these uprisings, performance poetry emerged as a tool of resistance, mobilisation, and collective expression, playing a vital role in revolutionary dynamics. The objective here is to see how various forms of performative poetry have been used to fight corruption and overthrow dictatorial regimes in the Middle East and North Africa. First, we begin by understanding the different forms and structures of poetic forms that fall under this category, followed by how these poetic forms have the potential for resistance, revolt, and resilience. Finally, an analysis of certain poems and songs highlights their function as aesthetically motivated and politically charged.

Published posthumously in 1962, John Langshaw Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* is a seminal work on the philosophy of ordinary language. Contrary to classical conceptions of language as a simple means of transmitting information, Austin developed a revolutionary idea that language can be an act in itself. This book thus lays the foundation for the notion of performativity, which has a major influence on the fields of linguistics, philosophy, literature, and gender studies.

The central thesis is that language serves only to describe reality or state truths or lies. According to him, a large number of statements are neither true nor false but rather actions performed by speech. For example, when we say "I pronounce you husband and wife" or "I promise to come", these sentences do not describe a situation; they perform an action: marry, promise, or name. Austin calls these utterances performative utterances. He emphasised that not all performative utterances were effective. Their success depends on certain conditions, which he calls "felicity conditions." For example, a marriage can only be declared by a recognised authority in an appropriate setting. If these conditions are not met, the act fails—this is what he calls "infelicity."

Thus, performativity is situated: the same utterance can succeed or fail depending on the social context, speaker's position, or recognition of the act. In this book, Austin inaugurates a radical transformation of the philosophy of language. He is considered the father of speech acts, which were later pursued and systematised by John Searle. His pragmatic approach also influences enunciative linguistics and discourse studies.

Butler innovatively adopts the notion of performativity in the field of gender studies, notably in *Gender Trouble* (1990). She shows that gender is also a performance: one "makes" one's gender through repeated acts of language and behaviour. Thus, a speech act becomes a site for reproducing or subverting social norms.

In literary studies, performativity allows us to think of poetry, theatre, and fiction not only as representations, but also as acts: words that transform, engage, or mobilise. This idea is central to contemporary poetic performance, slam poetry, and engaged artistic practices. J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* has profoundly transformed our understanding of language. By revealing the capacity of words to do and not just to say, he paved the way for a new reading of discourses as social and political actions. His notion of performativity has become a major tool for thinking about the powers of language in fields as diverse as philosophy, literature, cultural studies, and political criticisms. Despite certain limitations, Austin remains an essential reference for contemporary reflections on the use of language in real life.

To understand performance poetry through J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (1962), we must first grasp Austin's fundamental idea: language is not only descriptive, it is also active. That is, is to do. This perspective, which revolutionised the philosophy of language, can be applied to poetry to reveal its embodied, engaged, and transformative dimensions, particularly in social or political contexts.

If we apply Austin's theory to poetry, we can say that performance poetry is not simply a poetic text to be read or analysed, but a verbal and bodily act that acts in the world; it uses both the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act, that is, it produces an effect on the listener. Some poems do more than describe them: they engage in a promise, denunciation, call, confession, or invocation. Thus, when the poet says "I love you" in a poem, he does not describe an emotion; he is performing the act of loving, declaring, and exposing himself. The poem is a spoken event. Poetic performances often aim to produce an effect on the audience: to provoke outrage, awaken consciousness, arouse support, or convey an emotional shock. This is precisely what Austin calls a perlocutionary act. For example, in slam poetry, the body, voice, and speech act together to move, shock, and liberate.

For a performative utterance to work, Austin specifies that felicity conditions are necessary: an appropriate context, the legitimacy of the speaker, and the recognition of the act by the audience. This also applies to performance poetry: a poem recited at an event by a recognised or politically engaged poet can have a powerful collective impact. On the other hand, the same poem isolated from a book without an audience can lose its power as an act. Thus, poetic performativity depends on the place, time, voice, and gaze of others. This is linked to social interaction.

During the Arab revolutions, poems recited in public squares, such as those of El Général in Tunisia, mobilised crowds. Here, the poem becomes a revolutionary act, and not just a literary text. The poem spoken in public becomes an act of resistance. Through J. L. Austin's theory of speech acts, performance poetry can be understood as a language that acts: a poetic word that does not simply represent the world, but transforms it. It operates within a contextual, relational, and sometimes ritualistic framework, in which saying is doing. This reading allows us to re-evaluate the function of poetry in contemporary society: it is not a mere ornament, but an active force, a site of symbolic and real action. Several forms of art, such as poetry and songs, possess performative forms, including performative poetry such as slams and rap.

Varieties of performative poetry

Originating in the United States in the 1980s by Marc Smith, Slam poetry is a form of competitive oral poetry in which poets recite their texts in public, often in events called slams, with a panel of judges composed of audience members. He wanted to bring poetry closer to the people and break the elitism of academic poetry. The term slam refers to shock, to impact—poetry that “hits” the audience. As a tool for democratic expression, it is characterised by its focus on orality and stage performance, where no fixed rhythm or music is used, with a tone that is often emotional and even protest-oriented. It is written to be heard and not read, particularly in a working-class environment. This poetic genre is distinguished by its mode of presentation; it is intended to be spoken, performed, and not simply read. Slam poetry is often linked to public poetry competitions where poets perform their texts before an audience who judges them based on the quality of the text, the emotion conveyed, and the stage performance. Slam was the first and foremost art of spoken words. Intonation, rhythm, pauses, gestures, and gaze are as important as words themselves. It does not impose a fixed form (neither meter nor obligatory rhyme) but favours an accessible expressive language that is often close to spoken language. The themes addressed often touch on identity, suffering, politics, love, racism, social inequality, and so on. The audience plays an active role: they react, applaud, and judge. Therefore, a direct relationship is essential.

Slam poetry is considered a form of performance poetry because it transforms the act of speaking into the act of doing. The poet does not simply inform him; he acts through his words. For example, denouncing injustice in slams is already a political action. It engages the body, voice, and space. Unlike written poetry, which is often silent, slams also perform well. The meaning of the poem depends on its performance, venue, audience, and artist's interpretation. It is an ephemeral, unique event that is often difficult to translate solely into paper. It restores the poetry's social function: giving voice to the voiceless, bringing together a community around words lived, felt, and sometimes shouted.

One of the most well-known slam artists is Fabien Marsaud, known as Grand Corps Malade in France, who discovered slam poetry after a spinal injury due to an accident which crippled him. In his poem ‘The Sixth Sense’, he speaks of the power of words to heal and recover after a tragedy. He does not just tell the story; he transforms the experience into a shared poetic act, making the audience a witness and sometimes an accomplice. In short, slam poetry is much more than a poetic style: it is the art of experiencing poetry, a profoundly democratic and vibrant form that makes each performance an action. This is why it is at the heart of contemporary poetry.

The second major form of performative poetry or singing is rap. Rap is a musical genre in which lyrics are rhythmic, sung, or spoken over an instrumental beat. It is part of the hip-hop culture that emerged in the 1970s in the United States. Its rapped recitation set to rhythmic music is used not only on personal or festive occasions, but due to its coded language, it is politically or socially engaged, often linked to urban social realities. Many rap singers use direct discourse in their songs against the government rather than any other form of narration. The meaning of the word rap has changed over time. Initially, this term meant a very forceful "saying" which was also used to command. Today, however, this is simply a form of music. With the arrival of the Arab Spring, this form of music acquired its ancient meaning to denote

"saying", meaning conversation or a rhythmic mode of speech. Rap began in the Maghreb in the 1990s and flourished during the Arab Spring. This form of revolt was used because songs tend to spread very quickly. Rap is seen as reflecting the oppressed in society—those who reside at the bottom of the political, social, and economic hierarchy.

Rap was developed by marginal artists. It is produced by and creates a community. It is a politics of language and, therefore, a source of institutional power that originates from the ranks of progressive activism from which movements such as the Arab Spring originate and accelerate. Rap, which has roles other than aesthetics and artistic, has become a subject of study and research for intellectuals. Understanding how they function in the face of turmoil, resistance, and revolution will elucidate and contextualise the performative aspects of performance poetry. Studying its strategic use in the Arab Revolution is a prime example of applying Austin's theory of language to specific social and political scenarios.

How to Do Things with Words during the Arab Spring

In the Arab world, poetry has always occupied a central role in cultural and political life. Since pre-Islamic times, the poet has been viewed as a public figure, bearer of memory, and truth. Poetry is a narrative, denunciation, praise, or satire—social art. During anti-colonial struggles, poets such as Mahmoud Darwish (Palestine), Nizar Qabbani (Syria), and Ahmed Fouad Negm (Egypt) continued this tradition of engaged poetry, blending lyricism, and revolt.

In the context of the Arab revolutions, this tradition has been revived in a more direct, popular form, often slammed, recited in the streets, in public squares, or disseminated via social media. This poetic speech became performative: it not only reflected the revolution, it brought it into being but also amplified it. The performative function of poetry is vital in the context of enforced silence, media censorship, and political repression. Poetry made it possible to break through fear, to say the unspeakable, and to unite scattered voices. Public spaces are confiscated in authoritarian regimes. Poetry, spoken aloud, on the street or online, reopens this space and is temporarily liberated by poetic speech.

Poetic performance transforms private pain into a shared cry into the energy of mobilisation. The passage from intimate to political is an act of performativity. Creating a living memory of the revolt: These poems, sometimes filmed and widely distributed, constituted archives of resistance. They left a lasting impression and circulated far beyond borders. Reciting a poem in a public square or prison cell creates a moment of communion and solidarity, even in the face of violence or fear.

One of the best-known examples is that of the Tunisian Rapper El Général, whose song "Rais Lebled" (Head of State) directly criticised President Ben Ali. This text, close to slam in its structure, without a refrain, recited urgently, denounced poverty, police repression, and corruption. Posted on Facebook in 2010, the song quickly became viral. El Général was arrested, which amplified his message. This song-poem had an immediate performative force: it mobilised, shocked, and liberated the speech of young Tunisians.

In Egypt, figures such as Amani Yahia and Yosra El Lozy used spoken words to denounce street harassment, political exclusion of women, and structural injustices. Their performances, often filmed and shared on YouTube, have reached hundreds of thousands of viewers. These poems were gestures that affirmed political existence in a patriarchal space. In

Syria, where repression is extremely violent, poetry continues to circulate clandestinely. Improvised performances took place in refugee camps, sometimes filmed and sometimes simply spoken. The simple act of reciting the poem became an act of resistance. Poetic speech, fragile but tenacious, has become the only means of symbolic survival.

In this context, performative poetry is not only what is said but also how it is said. It is an embodied act: the voice trembles or rises, the body moves or freezes, and gestures accompany words. For example, reciting a poem in front of an armoured vehicle, as in Egypt, is not aesthetic; it is a direct confrontation between speech and violence. The performative effect no longer depends on the text alone but on the spoken event, context, and audience. Even after major demonstrations, performative poetry did not disappear. It continues to play a role in the construction of post-revolutionary memories by recalling hopes, betrayals, and forgotten struggles. Spoken-word festivals, activist readings, and poetry performances continue in several countries, keeping the flame of engaged speech alive.

Slam poetry and rap during the Arab Spring

During the popular uprisings known as the "Arab Spring" (2010–2012), which affected several countries in the Arab world, including Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain, slam poetry played a fundamental role as a tool for protest, civic expression, and collective liberation. In a context in which freedom of expression was severely restricted, this poetic form allowed many young people to transform their anger, suffering, and aspirations into vibrant, public, and performative words.

Slam poetry found fertile ground in streets and public squares, such as the famous Tahrir Square in Cairo or Habib Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis, where protesters gathered to demand democratic reforms, an end to corruption, and the fall of authoritarian regimes. Slam poetry is expressed spontaneously, often accompanied by music, percussion, or rap, and sometimes broadcast live on social media.

Slam poetry during the Arab Revolution was not neutral or expressive; it had a performative function: it denounced, mobilised, and raised awareness. In this sense, slam poetry did not just express revolt, but also led to revolt. It conveys messages of solidarity, dignity, and change. In this way, it joined the tradition of committed Arabic poetry while renewing its form.

Tunisian rapper El Général became an iconic figure thanks to his song "Rais Lebled" (Head of State), a text close to slam in its structure and oratorical power. He denounced police repression, poverty, and social injustice. This sung poem went viral on social media and inspired thousands of young Tunisians to take it to the streets. In a context in which the media were muzzled, slam and rap served as media and moral counterforces.

The rap song 'Rais Le Bled' by El Général (Hamada Ben Amor's pen name) which sparked the Arab Revolution in Tunisia, has transformed from a historical position to a legend. One could declare that El Général was one of the most popular hip-hop Tunisian artists among other rappers who had started their careers in this field much before him. The absence of metaphors and simplicity of his songs made the message more accessible and powerful. We can no doubt deny that 'Rais LeBled' became the song of the Tunisian revolution and the Arab Spring in general. There were other songs also which inspired the uprisings amongst

which were Binderman and Armada Bizerta (“I say no”) which equally composed songs that challenged the dictatorial regime.

Music has the potential to mobilise masses. Mark LeVine comments on the music of the Arab Spring, naming it’s style as ‘post-hybrid’ a style that :

Provides local artists with a unique voice to not only ‘speak back’ to Western artists and cultures whose music they are drawing upon, but also to new forms of cultural identity that are only now manifesting themselves with the phenomenon of protesters across the West [...] carrying songs explicitly declaring the influence and inspiration of Tahrir Square and Arab revolutions more broadly upon them. (361)

In spite of using the western tools, the language used, the subject and the progressive attitude of the middle eastern countries during this period of turmoil make this form of art ‘oriental’. Hamada Ben-Amour's Arabic rap translates as follows:

President of the country
Today I address you
In my name and that of the entire people
who live in suffering
In 2011, there are still people dying of hunger
The people want to work to live
But their voice is not heard
Go out into the streets and look around you
People are treated like animals
Look at the cops
With batons, bang,
[...]
Look at the cops
beating veiled women
Would you accept this for your daughter?
What I'm saying is unfortunate
Since you are a father
and you wouldn't wish any harm on your children
Then tell yourself that this message
is addressed to you by one of your children
We live in suffering
like dogs
half the people live in humiliation
and have tasted misery.

This song directly addresses President Ben Ali, and its use of expressions such as "treated like animals", "beating veiled women", and "like dogs", which employ an insolent tone, attracted people's attention in an environment where all means of social communication were censored

and fear of the authorities reigned. As a verse from this song illustrates: "Look at the police with batons, takatak/ [the sound of batons hitting people] they don't care, because there's no one to stop them, nor the law of the constitution that puts them in the water and the woods." El General's song influenced a large number of people and was used in all Arab countries that participated in the revolt, particularly in Tunisia and Egypt. This was named the national anthem of the Arab Spring. It became known even abroad for its linguistic power and rapper's courage.

The Tunisian rapper Weld El 15, along with other musicians, was imprisoned to insult the country's authorities. French-Tunisian Journalist Hinds Meddeb, who encouraged these musicians, was imprisoned for four months. Due to her reputation as a journalist, her imprisonment was shortened, and upon its release, Weld El 15 noted: "Tunisians' favourite topic is now politics: this is already a significant gain in terms of freedom of expression". He continued: "Hinds were surprised by the tone of the songs and themes addressed. This music explored social taboos such as alcohol, forbidden in Islam, and presented political and social commentaries, with bold positions rarely expressed by other artists at the time." This is how the limits of freedom of expression expanded into new spaces of expression. The development of new technologies provides access to a wider audience through the internet. This illustration of the potential of performative poetry highlights the power of words as performative, having even the potential to spark a revolution, kindle an attitude of bravery and strength in the population, and, most importantly, to overthrow a dictatorial regime. Poetry is undoubtedly powerful, transformative, and can serve as a tool with a variety of functions.

Conclusion

Performance poetry blurs the lines between art, life, and political actions. It transforms poetry into a living, embodied act where the word becomes an action. Whether intimate, collective, chanted, or whispered, it renews the link between poetry and reality, making the poem a tool for interpellation, emancipation, and transformation.

In the context of the Arab Revolution, performance poetry has proven to be much more than a simple cultural ornament: it has been an instrument of emancipation, a peaceful weapon, and a place of individual and collective transformation. It has restored poetry to its original power—that of speaking to do, to be, to change. By embodying a free, public, embodied, and often risky form of speech, performance poets reminded us that poetry, even in the darkest times, can open breaches of light. The word is no longer just a symbol—it is an action, and sometimes, it is a revolution.

Slam poetry has allowed many marginalised young people, often from working-class neighbourhoods, to express themselves without censorship in their vernacular language, with their own cultural codes. It has also provided a space for expression for women, ethnic and religious minorities, and all those previously excluded from the official discourse.

After the fall of certain regimes, the slams continued to exist in the form of poetic vigilance. It accompanied the democratic transition processes in Tunisia and elsewhere, serving as a living memory of struggles and a critical voice in the face of post-revolutionary political excesses. Slam poetry during the Arab Revolution was much more than art; it was a poetic

weapon, a collective cry, and an act of resistance. Through its performative power, it transforms individual speech into collective action, restoring its original power to transform the world.

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Narrative Innovation through Self-Imposed Constraint: An OULIPO Study of Selected Works by David Mitchell and Ali Smith

Gangadhari Manjula

Abstract

This research proposes a critical re-evaluation of self-imposed literary constraints as a generative force in contemporary fiction, focusing on two Booker Prize–shortlisted novelists and their major works: David Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and Ali Smith’s *How to Be Both* (2014). While both authors have been widely acclaimed for their thematic complexity, temporal innovation, and postmodern narrative techniques, this study argues that the central structural device underpinning their storytelling—the deliberate use of formal constraints—has received insufficient scholarly attention.

The theoretical foundation of this inquiry is grounded in the work of the European literary group OULIPO (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle), founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais. OULIPO advocated the conscious use of mathematical and combinatorial constraints in literature as a means of pushing the boundaries of language and narrative form. Far from being a mere avant-garde experiment, their work represents a disciplined approach to writing in which limitations become engines of creativity.

Through a close reading of the structural designs employed by Mitchell and Smith—such as the palindromic nesting of narratives in *Cloud Atlas* and the dual narrative sequencing in *How to Be Both*—this study examines how formal constraints function not as decorative features but as essential mechanisms in shaping linguistic texture, thematic resonance, and narrative architecture. These constraints influence not only the process of textual production but also the act of interpretation, inviting readers to engage with the text as a layered puzzle requiring active participation.

By distancing itself from traditional views that associate literary innovation with spontaneous inspiration or surrealist randomness, this research positions constraint as a conscious, aesthetic choice that enables narrative experimentation. It argues that constraints offer a renewed model of literary craft—one that embraces deliberation, form, and structure as tools of artistic liberation. Ultimately, the study contributes to a broader understanding of how constraint, when wielded with intention, opens new pathways for meaning-making in twenty-first-century literature.

Keywords: Literary Constraint, OULIPO, Narrative Experimentation, David Mitchell, Ali Smith, Postmodern Narrative, Palindromic Structure, Dual Narrative, Structural Aesthetics

Introduction to the Narrative Style of David Mitchell and Ali Smith

David Mitchell, born in 1969 in Southport, England, and Ali Smith, born in 1962 in Inverness, Scotland, are among the most critically acclaimed literary figures of the early twenty-first century. Emerging at the cusp of the postmodernist turn toward structural experimentation,

both authors have distinguished themselves not only for their linguistic precision and narrative inventiveness but also for the philosophical and formal risks embedded in their fiction. Mitchell published his debut novel *Ghostwritten* in 1999, a work that already showcased his fascination with interconnectedness and global narrative sprawl, which he later refined in *Cloud Atlas* (2004), his breakout novel and a Booker Prize finalist (Mitchell 2004). Smith entered the literary scene slightly earlier with *Like* (1997), followed by a string of short fiction and novels that culminated in *How to Be Both* (2014), a book that won multiple literary prizes and was also shortlisted for the Booker (Smith 2014).

Mitchell and Smith are often read within the broader framework of contemporary British fiction, yet their stylistic signatures remain distinct. Mitchell's work draws on a rich tradition of speculative fiction, influenced by authors such as Italo Calvino and Haruki Murakami, often employing multiple voices, shifting genres, and layered temporalities. Critics have noted his interest in cyclical histories and narrative mirroring, often comparing his textual design to musical composition (Mullan 2010). Smith's writing, by contrast, aligns more closely with lyrical modernism and the experimental legacies of Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Her fiction is concerned with simultaneity, fragmentation, and the porous boundary between thought and narration. In interviews, she has spoken about the influence of visual art and her admiration for John Berger, particularly in terms of how form can dictate perception: "Structure, if it's right, is never separate from meaning" (Smith, qtd. in Louvel 2019).

What unites both authors is their commitment to literary innovation—not for its own sake, but as a means to reimagine what fiction can do. In various interviews, Mitchell has described his writing process as "solving a puzzle" where each part of the book must justify its inclusion both structurally and thematically (Mitchell 2012). Smith, similarly, sees the act of storytelling as inherently architectural: "Books are buildings," she has stated, "and every choice is a brick in its structure" (Smith 2014). These reflections point to their shared belief that narrative structure is not incidental but integral to the affective and intellectual force of a novel.

While both authors have received sustained academic and critical attention—ranging from postcolonial readings to gender and identity-based analysis—the formal daring of their plot construction remains under examined. This study takes as its point of departure the idea that Mitchell and Smith do not merely inherit modernist and postmodernist forms, but actively reshape them through deliberate, self-imposed challenges that influence not only pacing and narration but the very logic by which their stories unfold.

Methodology: The Oulipian Model: Origins, Intent, and Significance

The Oulipo (Ouvroir de littérature potentielle), or the "Workshop of Potential Literature," was founded in 1960 by Raymond Queneau and François Le Lionnais as a collective of writers and mathematicians seeking to explore how deliberate constraints could inspire creative innovation. Unlike surrealism, which celebrated the unconscious and chance, the Oulipo proposed rigorously defined formal constraints—often mathematical in nature—as a generative force for literature. They emphasized structure over spontaneity, describing their goal as providing "empty structures" that other writers could fill with content. These structures ranged from simple constraints like lipograms (e.g., Georges Perec's *La Disparition*, written entirely without the letter "e") to more complex nested forms and algorithmic compositions.

Oulipian methodology functions as a resistance to the romantic idea of artistic inspiration. Instead of seeing constraints as limitations, the group viewed them as springboards to creativity—tools that force the writer to venture beyond habitual expressions and tap into unexplored linguistic territory. The Oulipo does not prescribe how literature should be; rather, it creates potentialities for what it could become. This model thus challenges the binary between freedom and form, suggesting that self-imposed difficulty can paradoxically liberate the imagination. Their work aligns with a craft-based philosophy, wherein literature becomes an act of skilled engagement with form, a response to what Adorno called the crisis of art's autonomy in an overly rationalized, technologically driven society

Literature Review

David Mitchell and Ali Smith, both prominent voices in 21st-century British literature, have attracted considerable critical attention across diverse theoretical frameworks. Scholars have explored their thematic depth, psychological nuance, and postmodern narrative complexity. However, despite widespread recognition of their structural experimentation, the deliberate use of self-imposed constraints as a formative aesthetic principle remains under-investigated. The following review examines three dominant approaches taken by critics so far, with representative works illustrating the scope and limitations of current scholarship.

Thematic and Psychoanalytic Approaches

Much of the early and sustained criticism of Mitchell's fiction is grounded in thematic and philosophical analysis. For example, John Mullan (2010) interprets *Cloud Atlas* (2004) as an intricate reflection on moral cycles, linking its temporal loops to human ethical evolution. Martin Paul Eve (2018), critics such as Jo Alyson Parker (2010) examine how characters navigate environmental, metaphysical, and social boundaries within apocalyptic worlds.

Ali Smith's work has likewise drawn attention for its gender politics, queer perspectives, and conceptual play. Louvel (2019) studies *How to Be Both* (2014) through the lens of visual theory, noting Smith's homage to John Berger's non-linear art criticism. Similarly, Christine Berberich (2017) explores Smith's interest in temporality and identity across split narratives, while engaging with psychoanalytic interpretations of character fragmentation.

Narratological and Formalist Criticism

Beyond theme, scholars have praised the formal innovation in both authors' works. Eve (2015) discusses *Cloud Atlas* as a "matryoshka doll" structure, layering genre and chronology as a challenge to linear realism. He links this formal design to Mitchell's interest in storytelling as recursion. Alluvium (2021) highlights the Nietzschean undertones of recurrence and eternal return, reading the novel's symmetrical design as reflective of philosophical time loops.

For Smith, critics such as Houser (2024) have emphasized her architectural control over narrative sequencing, focusing on the two distinct versions of *How to Be Both* as an experiment in reader positioning. Anna Snaith (2020) considers Smith's form a reflection of postmodern

indeterminacy, where structure shapes both semantic flow and reader engagement. These analyses gesture toward formal concerns but typically frame them within broader thematic, ethical, or reader-response contexts.

Stylistic and Linguistic Explorations

The lyrical and syntactical idiosyncrasies of both authors have also drawn scholarly attention. Smith's playful manipulation of language, puns, and poetic rhythms have been observed by critics such as Sarah Dillon (2016), who identifies Smith's prose as "stylistically hybrid," merging poetic logic with narrative drive. Mitchell's genre-switching and tonal fluidity have similarly been noted, particularly in relation to his postmodern pastiche.

Stylistic studies often treat these features as surface effects of thematic depth or genre homage, rather than as emerging from constraint-based narrative strategies. Although formal properties are recognized, the mechanisms that generate them—especially the deliberate self-imposed constraints—are rarely treated as central analytical categories.

David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*: The Matryoshka Doll Structure as Constraint

In *Cloud Atlas*, David Mitchell structures the novel using a Matryoshka Doll pattern—like the Russian nesting dolls that sit one inside the other. This is not just a metaphor; it's the actual architecture of the narrative. The novel is composed of six distinct stories, each written in a different genre, time period, and voice:

1. The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing (19th-century travel journal)
2. Letters from Zedelghem (1930s epistolary narrative)
3. Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery (1970s thriller)
4. The Ghastly Ordeal of Timothy Cavendish (modern comic memoir)
5. An Orison of Sonmi~451 (dystopian future interview)
6. Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After (post-apocalyptic oral tale)

In the Chatham Islands, off the coast of New Zealand, Adam Ewing writes in his journal about meeting a strange doctor named Henry Goose. The two become friends. While on the island, Adam learns about the history of the Moriori people, who existed peacefully on the island until the Maori came and attacked them, killing many Moriori and enslaving those who remained. One day, Adam witnesses some villagers whipping a tied-up Moriori man. As Adam leaves aboard the *Prophetess*, he finds a Moriori stowaway in his cabin. The stowaway is Autua—the Moriori man whose whipping Adam witnessed. After some hesitation, Adam agrees to help Autua, and he convinces the captain of the ship to take Autua to Hawaii. While aboard the ship, Adam begins to suffer from severe headaches. Dr. Henry Goose diagnoses him with a brain parasite and offers a cure, but Adam's condition only worsens.

Many years later, in a remote part of Belgium near Bruges, the young composer Robert Frobisher writes letters to Rufus Sixsmith. Robert's father recently disinherited him, and so, in order to win back his father's respect, Robert decides to become the assistant of Vyvyan Ayrs, a famous British composer who is blind and hasn't composed any new work in several years.

While living with Ayrs, Robert discovers and reads the first part of Adam Ewing's journal. Though Ayrs and Robert don't get along at first, Robert ultimately helps Ayrs create some unusual late-career works.

Later, in California in the 1970s, Rufus Sixsmith, an engineer at a nuclear plant located on Swannekke Island, still holds on to Robert's letters. Rufus he warns gossip-column journalist Luisa Rey that Seaboard Power (the company behind the nuclear plant) is trying to cover up the risk of a deadly accident at the plant. Soon after, Robert ends up dead. Though authorities rule his death a suicide, Luisa believes it's murder and investigates the story. In the process, she draws the attention of Seaboard Power, and the company hires an assassin to ram Luisa's car off a bridge, seemingly killing her.

As it turns out, Luisa's whole story is a manuscript that comes across the desk of Timothy Cavendish, the sixty-something owner of a vanity publishing company in London. None of Timothy's books sells well until the day when one of his authors, Dermot Hoggins, throws a famous literary critic off a roof, killing him. This act turns Dermot into a famous murderer, and sales of his memoir, *Knuckle Sandwich*, go through the roof, making Timothy a lot of money. But when Dermot's brothers come to try to extort more money from Timothy, Timothy asks his brother Denholme Cavendish for help. Denholme tricks Timothy into committing himself to a nursing home called Aurora House, located outside London. Soon after he realizes he's trapped in Aurora House, Timothy has a stroke.

The events of Timothy Cavendish's life so far make up the first half of a film that exists in a futuristic version of Korea, where a "fabricant" (synthetically created human clone) named Sonmi-451 awaits execution by the "corpocratic" (hyper-capitalist) government. An interviewer known only as the Archivist asks Sonmi questions about her past. Sonmi tells the Archivist that she used to know practically nothing about the world around her and worked at a restaurant chain called Papa Song's—until a fellow fabricant named Yoona-939 helped Sonmi learn to read and "ascend" to a higher state of intelligence. After Yoona dies during a botched escape attempt, Sonmi becomes a research subject at a university and continues to read and learn more about the world.

Many years after her death, Sonmi survives as a goddess to the Valleysmen people of a remote Pacific Island; the Valleysmen survived a nuclear apocalypse and now live hunter-gatherer lives without advanced technology. But when Valleysman Zachry has a crisis of faith when he meets Meronym, a woman from the technologically advanced Prescient people. Meronym stays with the Valleysmen to observe them. She has an egglike object called an "orison" that contains a recording of Sonmi's interview with the Archivist. Zachry's Pa died at the hands of a rival tribe called the Kona, and just before Meronym leaves the Valleysmen, the Kona attack again, capturing Zachry. Although Meronym initially intends to observe the Valleysmen without interfering in their lives, she breaks her promise to save Zachry. Together, the two of them venture across the island to meet up with one of Meronym's Prescient allies. Zachry tells this story to future generations of Valleysmen, and many of them wonder how much of his story is true. One of Zachry's descendants watches the orison that contains the rest of Sonmi's interview.

At the university, Sonmi gets involved with an anti-government rebel group called the Union. While working with the Union, Sonmi learns that fabricants like her don't get to retire after their 12 years of service but in fact get butchered and turned into food. She writes a

manifesto against the government called Declarations, but shortly after completing it, government agents swoop in to capture her. As she awaits execution, Sonmi wonders whether the Union was a true resistance group or whether it was all part of a government conspiracy to turn people against fabricants. For her last request, Sonmi asks to see the end of Timothy Cavendish's movie.

After slowly recovering from his stroke, Timothy decides he must escape Aurora House. He develops a scheme with fellow nursing home residents Ernie Blacksmith and Veronica Costello, and together they steal a car and escape. Timothy manages to return to his old life in publishing, where the first thing he does is request the end of the manuscript for *Half-Lives: The First Luisa Rey Mystery*.

As it turns out, Luisa Rey manages to survive when her car crashes into the water, but she loses the documents that prove Seaboard Power's dangerous negligence. She continues pursuing the story, even as agents from Seaboard continue to threaten her life. Ultimately, she gets a tip from Megan (Rufus Sixsmith's niece) about how to find a backup copy of her uncle's documents. The story goes to print, finally exposing Seaboard's corruption. Afterward, Megan sends Luisa the remaining letters from Robert that belonged to Rufus.

In Belgium, Robert continues working with Ayrs, but he becomes even more interested in his own work, the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*. When Ayrs attempts to plagiarize Robert's work and pass it off as his own, the two "divorce," and Robert leaves. After completing the *Cloud Atlas Sextet*, Robert mails a final letter to Rufus where he announces that he's about to kill himself. Robert includes the rest of *The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing* in his letter to Rufus.

The narrative returns to Adam Ewing as he sails on the *Prophetsess* toward Hawaii. His condition hasn't improved, and Dr. Henry Goose's supposed "cure" doesn't seem to be working. After overhearing a conversation between Henry and Autua, Adam realizes that Henry is trying to poison him to get his money. Adam tries to confront Henry, but he's too weak and passes out. When Adam regains consciousness, he finds that Autua has saved him, and Henry is gone. Adam decides to devote the rest of his life to fighting against the predatory side of human nature. A later note from Adam's son states that this is the part of the journal where Adam's handwriting stops being intelligible.

Each of the first five stories is interrupted halfway through. The novel builds up from 1 to 6, and then returns in reverse order—6 to 1—completing the interrupted stories. This creates a palindromic (A-B-C-D-E-F-E'-D'-C'-B'-A') structure, which is highly unusual and rigidly controlled. This is the formal constraint Mitchell imposes on his narrative.

The Constraint shaping the novel:

- The reader travels forward in time through fragmented narratives until reaching the center (F), the only uninterrupted story.
- Then, the reader travels backward, returning to the origin, creating a sense of temporal and structural symmetry.
- Each narrative is linked to the next by some form of textual relic: a journal, letters, a book manuscript, a film, or an archived voice recording.
- This layering creates the effect of stories within stories, like dolls within dolls.

The structure enacts the novel's major themes: recurrence, interconnectedness, and the cyclical nature of power and resistance. Each protagonist is a version of the same soul or ethical force struggling against exploitation. The palindromic design compels the reader to reflect on historical repetition and to view time not as linear, but as looping and echoing across generations.

Mitchell uses this constraint not only to challenge narrative convention, but also to embed his philosophical vision into the very form of the text. The reader's act of navigating the structure mirrors the characters' quests for meaning, freedom, and legacy. The form thus becomes a philosophical tool.

Ali Smith's *How to Be Both*: Constraint through Duality and Narrative Ambiguity

Ali Smith's *How to Be Both* is based on the constraint of narrative permutation. The novel contains two stories:

1. Francesco del Cossa, a fictionalized account of a real 15th-century fresco painter, told in a fluid, lyrical, Renaissance-style voice.

The first narrative follows the story of Francesco del Cossa himself, a painter who lived in fifteenth-century Italy. As we follow his journey, we see the challenges he faced as a young artist trying to make a name for himself in a competitive and often cutthroat world. Through his eyes, we also witness the ways in which art and politics intersected during the Renaissance, and how artists were often used as pawns in the games of the rich and powerful.

2. George, a contemporary British teenager mourning the loss of her mother, told in a fragmented modern narrative.

The second narrative follows the story of George, a sixteen-year-old girl living in present-day England who is grieving the loss of her mother. George is drawn to the artwork of a Renaissance painter named Francesco del Cossa and becomes obsessed with discovering more about his life and work. As she delves deeper into the world of art and history, she begins to question her own identity and the ways in which gender and societal expectations shape who we are.

Here's the constraint: the novel was published in two different orders. In some editions, Francesco's story comes first; in others, George's does. There is no "correct" order—both are equally valid. The narrative, then, is not linear or fixed. It depends on how and where the reader begins.

What's the constraint?

- It's a constraint on narrative sequencing and reader experience.

- Smith deliberately removes authorial control over the chronology, handing interpretive power to the reader.
- This structure forces the reader into a state of ambiguity: Who is speaking first? Who is watching whom? Which story “frames” the other?
- This mirrored structure reflects the novel’s central themes: fluid identity, grief, memory, and the simultaneity of perspectives. The title itself—How to Be Both—is a clue.

The novel asks:

- Can someone be male and female?
- Can past and present co-exist?
- Can art both reveal and obscure?
- Can a child and a parent still exist in the same emotional space, even after death?

By introducing a formal constraint that disrupts linearity, Smith embodies duality not just thematically but structurally. Readers who begin with George experience Francesco as a spectral figure. Readers who begin with Francesco experience George as the future inheritor of the painter’s vision. This double structure ensures no reading is complete without the other, reinforcing the idea of coexistence rather than opposition.

Methodology Becomes Meaning

Both authors use constraint not just as a stylistic trick but as a methodology of meaning. In *Cloud Atlas*, the Matryoshka structure reorients our understanding of history, time, and moral continuity. In *How to Be Both*, the dual narrative disrupts expectations, allowing ambiguity and simultaneity to take center stage.

By embedding constraint at the core of their narratives, Mitchell and Smith exemplify the Oulipian principle: that form itself can be a source of creative liberation, not limitation. Constraints like nesting, symmetry, permutation, and inversion become literary devices that force philosophical insight.

While Mitchell and Smith do not merely borrow European techniques but fully realize the transformative capacity of constraint-based literature to explore identity, ethics, and narrative form, their approach also gestures toward a larger contemporary shift in literary practice.

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Negotiating Soft Power: The BTS Overview

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Abstract

This article shall examine the role of BTS in the global expansion of K-pop and the power gained through its platform. Popularly known as the Korean Wave or Hallyu, the article focuses its attention on BTS's soft power gained through many hardships and struggles amidst the dominance of big entertainment companies. The unique style and identity of BTS have a global cultural impact. Korean popular culture encompasses the development of Korea both culturally and economically. The Korean Wave therefore has emphasised upon the projection of soft power through the participation of fans globally especially as the Korean Government has facilitated the country's internet infrastructure. Through their lyrics, BTS has a culture of storytelling and it has enhanced mainstream acceptance of BTS globally. Soft power has been promoted especially through the promotion of self-acceptance thereby ensuring the fundamental position of BTS even as the group has transcended borders and genres of all time.

Keywords: BTS, K-pop, Soft Power, Popular Culture, Korean Wave, ARMY, Power

This article shall situate the aspect of soft power as demonstrated in the K-pop band popularly known as BTS. BTS is a Korean phrase that stands for Bangtan Sonyeondan which means 'Bulletproof Boy Scouts'. K-pop gained its power more predominantly with the formation of BTS in the year 2013. A songwriter and a successful music producer Bang Si-Hyuk launched the famous boy band BTS in the year 2013 under Big Hit Entertainment that has limited means at the time and was thus labelled as "small entertainment" (Suryani 49). Consisting of seven members, namely, Jin, SUGA, J-Hope, RM, Jimin, V, and Jung Kook, BTS is the third generation of K-pop which brought a further and greater expansion of the Korean Wave or Hallyu globally. BTS has contribution of "\$4.9 billion to Korea's GDP (Elberse and Woodham 2020)" and its band's "popularity is the largest source of revenue in the genre" (Kim 12). The members of BTS had undergone years of intense training and suffered many hardships and were even "ignored for two years" (Suryana 49). Despite not being from a major entertainment company, BTS carved out their platform and emerged as one of the most prominent global music bands, breaking free from the dominance of large entertainment companies of their time.

While K-pop construction has traditionally been dominated by "Big 3" entertainment companies (SM, YG and JYP) since the mid-1990s, BTS of Big Hit Entertainment since their debut in 2013 has created a global phenomenon that is more widely recognized and influential. (Kim 13)

K-pop by itself is a Korean Wave or Hallyu that has its wave attaining the phenomenal growth of Korean popular culture and thus encompasses the development of Korea not only culturally,

but also economically. The concept of popular culture in Korea has made its turn over the years with the impact of the Korean Wave where the culture that was once considered “emotional and low culture” has come to be regarded as “high value and meaning for the nation” (Kim 3). The fast adaptation of K-pop and their fans with new technologies has created a new culture of music genre. The global success of the K-pop industry also largely depends on the advancement of technology where the South Korean government played a crucial role in the country’s development. It is the government of South Korea that helped the country’s internet infrastructure “before any other part of the world – an extremely ambitious project in terms of size and use of advanced technology” (Băjenaru 169).

Being the sixth largest music industry in the world, K-pop music has achieved a wide range of global music industry and has thus evolved to conquer great power within the ambit of popular culture as a whole. Popular culture which was once regarded as “low culture” in Korea changed over time and has now emerged as one of the most significant forces for the country’s development (Kim 3). This explains what Foucault has clearly stated in demonstrating how power arose. Foucault states that power “comes from below” and “that global and hierarchical structures of domination within a society depend on and operate through more local, low-level, ‘capillary’ circuits of power relationship” (Foucault “Power” xxiv-xxv). The global expansion of the Korean Wave gained its power mainly through the participation of fans throughout the world. This participation of fans from across the world has not only made the Korean Wave gain its power but also helped achieve culture by itself. As stated by Youna Kim,

The global expansion of the Korean wave can be attributed to the power of the digital fans’ participatory culture and affective labor in prompt uploading, remixing, forwarding or sharing with wider audiences, while shaping the (re)production, circulation and reception of the Korean Wave. (Kim 3)

BTS’s success has shattered the dominance of K-pop’s “Big 3” entertainment companies. Through their lyrics, the band has questioned and challenged societal conventions and sparked meaningful conversations, exerting a great impact on the music industry. It was through these online conversations and interactions that BTS has had with their fans that made a great shift within the ambit of popular culture as a whole. The growth of the Korean Wave or Hallyu created a new culture and a new music genre. BTS has emerged as the cultural ambassadors of South Korea, showcasing the culture’s vibrant globally. They become influential global role models by promoting their country’s positive lifestyles and values through different platforms. Therefore, the Korean cultural phenomenon has become attractive with the wave of Hallyu and thus created a great influence worldwide mainly through bands like that of BTS. It was beyond their messages that the band has had its impact worldwide and thus reached beyond borders of cultural differences. Băjenaru stated,

BTS members can be considered cultural diplomats of the South Korean state and representatives of effective *Kpop diplomacy*, by encouraging intercultural communication, reducing cultural differences and generating positive feelings related to Korean culture in particular. (Băjenaru 172)

Considering the influence that the band has achieved worldwide, this article will delve into the ambit of power by looking into the account of BTS as one of South Korea's bands that have attained global power along with the power that South Korea possessed, particularly while employing bands such as BTS through their music industries. Unlike the concept of power in the past that was established solely on power resources obtained through certain factors, the power that South Korea achieved through bands like BTS has come up with a very new concept of power. Rather than the concept of hard power that had been achieved utilizing wars and military forces, the concept of soft power attained through the attractiveness of culture has now played a significant role in today's world. Soft power plays a vital role where the nation's attractiveness and shared ideas conquer the global power structure. These shared ideas, shared values, and shared cultures have now controlled the global power structure by breaking cultural differences and borders that were considered significant and were thus well-kept-up throughout the past. With this breaking of differences in today's world, factors like technology and economic growth have become vital means to attain power globally. Introduced by Joseph S. Nye in the late 20th Century, soft power is the power that "rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others" (Castells 5). With this introduction of soft power, the world has opened itself to a new stage where a winner's position does not always stand with the strength of military weapons nowadays, but rather preside with the winning of people's hearts and emotions.

BTS as a soft power resource has qualified itself in winning people's hearts and emotions worldwide. While winning people's hearts and emotions, the band also demonstrated coherent group identity. Like that of their song's title "Dope," or "jjeoleo" in Korean, the band changed the notion of popularity that has been preserved by other idol groups. "While other idol groups who'd had a sudden boom in popularity would boast, 'We're dope,' BTS came forward declaring, 'We practice until we stink with sweat'". The use of the other meaning of "jjeoloe" by BTS about their struggles through their lyrics won people's hearts and emotions. "We're dope" also explains the identity of BTS as a band who identifies themselves as a group of humans who struggle to reach where they are and thus set out as one source of soft power (Hur 154). As mentioned earlier, the band exists openly for the world to see both inside and outside, onstage and offstage while showcasing their political values using their music culture that has been widely accepted not only by their Korean fans but by the international fan group of BTS commonly known as 'ARMY' (Adorable Representative MC for Youth). BTS wins power globally as they qualified for the three resources of a country's soft power as stated by Castells,

The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority.) (Castells 11)

Known now as one of the biggest stars in the world, BTS has experienced a time when their journey started from the bottom. Their music tells stories and it is through their music that they win the hearts of the people. Hip-hop for them is not only one kind of music genre that one performs accordingly, rather it is a way of telling stories to others. "BTS took on hip-hop not

only as a style or a dance choreography but also as the spirit of ‘telling stories of underdog experience.’” Coming from a humble background, BTS tells the world that they knew what hardships and struggles one could have experienced in life since they came from “Korea’s countryside and nearly all of them came from working-class families” (Kim 115). To show the world who they truly are, BTS often speaks through their lyrics. In *Map of the Soul – 7: Persona, Shadow & Ego in the World of BTS*, an approach was made by Dr. Stein as a Jungian psychoanalyst and therefore said,

They’ve had their ups and downs, yet people likely don’t see that. All they see is the bright lights of the entertainment on-stage – the beautiful smiles, the colorful hair, the clothes, the acrobatic dancing. But in this album, BTS is saying, “We’re human beings behind this entertainment façade. It’s a mask. We’re real people, we have a history, and we have struggles, we’ve suffered.” This message comes through in this album, loud and clear. (Stein 20)

With the declaration of their humble background, their struggles, their lifestyles, and the connection that they have created with their fans, BTS shaped a fandom that has become quite different as well as diverse from all the stars that were there in the past. Their connection with their fans made the fans feel as though they owned the band and that they had also created the band itself. ARMY fan club always keeps in touch with BTS by all means. ARMY breaks not only cultural differences but also language barriers. “The ability of young fans to stay in touch with their BTS stars through pictures, memes and music that cross continents, languages and cultures has allowed the ARMY fan club to feel like a co-creator of BTS along with Big Hit Entertainment.” BTS did not only break cultural differences but also accomplished the purpose of the Korean government by promoting Korean political and economic interests through the rise of the Korean Wave globally. “The Korean government appropriates popular culture as an effective way to create and sell a dynamic image of the nation through ‘soft power’...” (Kim 115). This justifies how soft power operates within the BTS phenomenon, where their role as a global diplomat is seen as legitimate and unquestionable. Their influence on the world extends beyond borders and they are seen not only as justifiable but also attractive to other nations through breaking down long-standing barriers that were sustained and forcibly maintained for years as well as having global campaigns that connected them to the world. For BTS, these global campaigns are “to digitally connect with youth culture around the world.” These global campaigns include an anti-violence campaign such as the “Love Myself” campaign that was launched in November 2017, in partnership with UNICEF. The band also delivered a speech in 2018 at the UN General Assembly in New York with a global partnership of UNICEF to launch the “Generation Unlimited” (Lee and Nguyen 2).

Their purpose of gaining power does not end with the selling of a dynamic image of their nation, rather their purpose of gaining power involves a whole new positive impact of loving oneself selflessly. Knowing they have an impact on their fans, BTS does not simply busy themselves by producing their copies of identities through different online platforms like many stars in the past but rather feels responsible for their members and fans constantly. Sharing the experience of the majority in today’s online world, they have faced two different poles of the world constantly: the likers and the haters. This could be one easy way of

identifying the similarities between BTS and the main problems faced by the majority in today's generation. The celebrity world of BTS is not something that is far from reach for the majority, as internet technology has narrowed down the world on so many levels. The band's stories have become their fans' stories and vice versa. As stated in *Beyond the Story: 10-Year Record of BTS*,

They were no longer simply walking together, they were now trailblazers, forging a new, more meaningful path forward. BTS would go from telling their own stories to listening to other voices, actively seeking out meaningful causes to champion and defend. (Hur 253)

Their new approach to promoting themselves in the world of the internet made a whole new concept of idol appearance throughout the past decades, where today's idols are now seen to have a direct relationship with their fans by depicting not only the polished self but also the unpolished self. Showing the world their "unpolished compositions" and "genuine trepidations as they spoke into the camera without airbrushing" (Hur 59), the members of BTS are then seen by their fans as humans who are also just like them, who have the unpolished sides of life, who struggle and make mistakes just like them. "This new approach to promoting an up-and-coming idol group played an important role in establishing a unique identity for BTS" (Hur 59). By pouring out their true selves to the world, BTS thus made their fans feel responsible for protecting their idols at any cost. "When your idols are seen doing something embarrassing or feeling ashamed, not only does it increase the sense of normality, but it ignites the feeling of a fan's inner caretaker" (Bora 955).

Social issues such as depression and societal pressures are taken seriously by the band and have been addressed through their music. Like that of the song, "No More Dream" (2013), the completely forgotten childhood showed the untainted world of humans or that of the world that was untouched by society while highlighting the fact that this forgotten childhood was full of dreams. The connection of a forgotten childhood with a dream created something outside of the societal norms and orders where this dream seemed to be of something that could be considered as 'natural' or 'pure', a dream that could consist of any type of dream and a dream that did not necessarily have to reach the expectations made by a society. As the song goes in verse 1, "*The completely forgotten childhood that was filled with so many dreams.*" BTS therefore confronts the world since it is a society that diminishes dreams of humans by dreams that are "stuck in place" and dreams that are made entirely according to the daily routine. Thus, verse 3 in "No More Dream." BTS goes on to say,

Okay, the boring same day, every day just repeats
Adults and parents cram us with dreams stuck in place
The No. 1 dream job, a government employee?
The dream wasn't forced, a relief pitcher in the bottom of the ninth (BTS)

"No More Dream" is the "very first single" of BTS, and it also "addresses the anxieties of living up to parents' expectations" (Sprinkel) by throwing away one's own dreams for the fulfilment of parents' dreams or parents' expectations. Anxieties of living up to parents'

expectations faced by the youths in Korea have been a serious issue from a very early age since these expectations correspond to the value of high educational achievements when children are introduced to a ranking competition. With this kind of ranking competition introduced at a very early age in children, it is not very easy for Koreans to come out of this competition and educate themselves in matters that could reduce inequality in the country. Korean youths therefore face a tremendous number of expectations from their parents which causes them to suffer mental issues.

Korea has the highest suicide rate (29.1 per 100,000 persons) among OECD countries, more than twice the OECD average of 12.4 per 100,000 persons (OECD 2019b), which is a by-product of rapid industrialization, educational competition, familial expectations and social pressures to succeed in the hypercompetitive society. (Kim 16)

By addressing this societal pressure through their own experiences has made the band capable of shaping others to fight against while they themselves were also shaping their own selves by fighting these societal norms. With their expressive performances, BTS won a power that has the ability to shape others. When hard and soft power, both have the ability to shape others, BTS's power is seen to be entirely created out of soft power. BTS as a band with their music and expressive performances does not force or command others to be like them or to fight against the societal pressure that the band have fought for. They did not go according to the traditional K-pop regime which also became a disruption in the regime. "Rather than simply automated performers produced by the company, BTS as artists play key roles in producing and writing lyrics to be the personal voices of the experiences of youth." It is the courage that led the band to have a "distinguishing attitude toward individuality and authenticity" (Kim 16). With this attitude that has its own individuality and authenticity, the band stood out from the rest of K-pop bands and thus raised their voice which has the power to shape others while shaping themselves. They do not force or command others to follow them as forcing and commanding in a power regime depends solely on hard power. BTS's strength of power depends on soft power alone. While hard power functions with some military action that involves rather forceful, soft power functions in agreement with the support of others that involves rather convincing.

Nye therefore stated, "All power depends on context – who relates to whom under what circumstances – but soft power depends more than hard power upon the existence of willing interpreters and receivers" (Nye "Soft"16). With this existence of "willing interpreters" and "receivers," there is a silent agreement between both parties, which thus holds the whole power regime realistically without carrying out any forceful actions. The silent agreement of "willing interpreters" and "receivers" has made BTS and their supporters and fans continue having this silent agreement where the state does not seem to be involved in it. In short, the power that BTS have attained does not appear to be "state-driven".

The benefits of this seemingly informal arrangement are that BTS and their management, Big Hit Entertainment, have (or are perceived as having) creative

autonomy. This allows BTS to “work” as a “soft power” mechanism, without seeming to be state-driven. (Kim 161)

When identifying oneself, the band members do not stand outside the band. The connection between BTS and the band members themselves also has a “silent agreement” in between and does not stand separately. As much as BTS and their fan club ARMY have stood together, the members of the band itself also have the same attitude towards their own band. BTS’s identity is the members’ identity and BTS’s identity is the ARMY’s identity. To get a clear picture of BTS’s identity, Jin’s statement of what BTS means to him has something to do with the identity of the band, the band members, and the fan club ARMY. Jin therefore expresses,

BTS is me, and I am BTS, that’s how I see it. Sometimes I’m asked questions like, “Don’t you feel the pressure with BTS’s success?” but just . . . It’s like this. When I go out, everyone goes, “Oh, it’s BTS.” I am part of BTS. So I don’t think there was pressure exactly. For me, that kind of question is similar to asking someone going about their life. . . . I’m just living my life as part of BTS, and lots of people are liking the fact I’m doing it. (Hur 301)

With the silent involvement of soft power, the band owns a capacity to use their “celebrity power” to “draw the world’s attention to international issues going beyond the entertainment world” (Kim 20). Raising funds for children’s relief, supporting the Black Lives Matter movement, encouraging the youths to follow their dreams, and creating a positive social impact are some of the international issues that BTS has drawn attention to in the world’s history. It is through addressing these international issues openly that the band has a strong bond with their fans and that the band itself has turned out to be the means of soft power for a positive impact in the world. As written in an article “K-Culture Conquered the World,” by *IESE Insight*, “‘K-pop fans are actively working together on social, political and environmental causes. In some cases, the power of these fans is bigger than any official political or social power,’ says Lee.”

Although BTS had already won the global fandom, their coming up with a song in English breaks not only language barriers but also gained more power. As language is a means to communicate, BTS would therefore communicate directly with the English-speaking world where their band would break into the next level although they had already won a worldwide fandom. Consisting of what the band had experienced in life, releasing of “Dynamite” during the pandemic would pave the way for the band to be discovered by new fans, widen their fan world, and also gain power to the next level. That was the moment when BTS released a new song to their audience by giving them an opportunity to become their new fans. The breaking of language barriers by coming up with a new English song by BTS had a great impact on global connectivity and thus conveyed a message of hope during the pandemic. By conveying hope and positive energy through their English song like “Dynamite”, BTS also attracted others by breaking not only language barriers but also cultural barriers and thus influenced their fans through their band’s personality. With a quiet drive of soft power through their English song, there is the existence of power shift where it no longer lies within the force of wars and weapons but it is rather a power where there is an inclination involved, even at choices made on a personal level. As stated in the article "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power,"

Soft power is a staple of daily democratic politics. The ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible assets such as an attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority. If I can get you to want to do what I want, I do not have to force you to do what you do *not* want (Nye “Public Diplomacy” 95).

When talking about the personality of the band, BTS keeps expressing who they are particularly as a group through their songs, music, and performances. They are considered as seven young men who “represent different aspects of a single personality.” With their performances on stage, the members portrayed their different personalities that emerged into one personality as a band. In reflecting the lyrics and performance of these band members in the song “Intro: Persona”, the members’ personality that merged into a “singular personality” is therefore stated,

So when RM sings the song, *Persona*, and he asks himself, “who am I”, it is a question he says he’s had his whole life. We see the other six members dancing around him. They are other aspects. He is the voice, but the others are different facets of the personality. These songs are an expression of a singular personality with different aspects and different personas. (Stein 27)

By maintaining the unity of the band, the members who have different aspects and personas expressed themselves as a band without losing their individualities which therefore highlighted how power has been created by means of keeping their unity. The journey of BTS as well as the existence of the band itself can be simply set in as to what Nee has described, “soft power to maintain the unity of a community or community of countries” (Geun 207-208). BTS not only influenced the world to love oneself selfishly but also to love others selflessly, even to the point of censoring one’s own identity by taking off the word ‘I’ translated as ‘*naega*’ for their new album “Love Yourself: Tear” in Korean if that particular word creates trouble in a bigger social context. BTS not only works to maintain the “unity of a community,” rather it takes a higher role by maintaining the unity of a “community of countries”. Knowing that there is a wider world, BTS does not limit their stage to a limited world. The journey of BTS is “the journey of growth, where an adolescent learned to look beyond the self and towards the lives of others” (Hur 252). By looking beyond, the self and by coordinating with others for the maintenance of unity, the band gains power, as well. It is by learning to keep this group unity that the band wins to keep the power of unity not only with their fans but also worldwide in which power comes in with a “different type of currency.” The currency of the band’s power here lies in the currency of their band unity and their band unity globally. Castells therefore stated,

Soft power uses a different type of currency (not force, not money) to engender cooperation – an attraction to shared values and the justness and duty of contributing to the achievement of those values... our decisions in the marketplace for ideas are often shaped by soft power – an intangible attraction

that persuades us to go along with others' purposes without any explicit threat or exchange taking place. (Castells 7)

With the empowerment of soft power that involves silently with the band that has one of the biggest communities in the world, BTS also consolidated the cultural power of Korea and remade the K-pop history (Kim 15). The purpose of the band is to create unity in the world and to fight against societal pressure and issues has been achieved through the active functioning of soft power. The band, which is therefore seen as one of the humblest bands in the world, has now created so many great impacts globally that it now has a greater power that the band itself did not even expect to achieve. The power of the band that has been achieved silently by the band is voluntary and is always present. As Foucault clearly stated,

The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere. (Foucault "Sexuality" 93)

The omnipresence of power with BTS also lies in their ability to climb to the next step where their power to consolidate with different societal issues would not go in vain and their power to be able to influence others would not jump from them to somewhere else. The fast changing of everything in today's technology world does not let the band to vanish easily by the fast change of power in "relation from one point to another". The power that Foucault stated about is the power that has been "produced from one moment to the next" in which BTS's power like others' power has also been produced accordingly. Knowing where they stand at the present moment, BTS affirmed their status in their song lyrics "Idol" (2018). As the song in the Bridge sung by Jimin and Jin goes,

I'm so fine wherever I go
Even if it takes a while sometimes
It's okay, I'm in love with my-my myself
It's okay, I'm happy in this moment (BTS)

The success of BTS and the power gained globally is determined by their ways of knowing the present situation of where they were at. It is by this knowing of the present moment that the band knows what issues to deal with. BTS's success as a global power includes their embrace of societal issues as their own. As stated by Kim, "The key to BTS's global success is the emotional resonance at a precarious time of aspirations for self-empowerment and self-discovery as well as social inclusion of minorities and the youth generation everywhere in the world" (Kim 16). By raising their voice for the "minorities and the youth generation everywhere", BTS connects with them by sharing their struggles and thus comforts their fans to find solace in them. BTS's message through their music and performances resonates with shifting societal values while inspiring themselves and their fans with a sense of belongingness and unity. Like the song "Spring Day" (2017), BTS connects with their fans' emotions and

embraces the beauty of life through the passing of time. As the song explores the seasons of life in the post-chorus by Jin and j-hope, it goes, “Until the spring day comes again/Until the flowers bloom again” (BTS). The band connects with the hope of their fans while connecting themselves with the passing of moments. The global community that BTS builds through their fan community gains power all through their journey.

BTS has become a platform to promote social change and self-acceptance globally and also transcended borders and genres. BTS not only broke the traditional rules of boyband, music, and fandom but also had their own kind of “self-production” with a “sense of authenticity” all through their stardom journey (Worthy 175). Their remarkable influence through their music, message, and global reach demonstrates the significance of soft power in terms of creating a global diplomacy as well as community building.

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Trauma, Vulnerability and Liberation in K R Meera's *Jezebel*

Megha Patil & Stella Steven

Abstract

Women's lives are always under the pressures of everyday demands and expectations from society. Even when we shift our focus on educated women in ultra-modern set-up, we still see that women bear a highly misappropriate amount of pressure laid down by the patriarchal set-up and dominant power-structures in the society which makes them vulnerable and brings traumatic experiences in their lives. According to Freud's psychoanalysis, 'trauma' as an event is defined firstly by its intensity, secondly, by the subject's incapacity to respond adequately to it and thirdly, by looking at the long-lasting effects trauma leaves on the over-all life of human-beings. This further makes the bodies of women more vulnerable to external factors and situations, which in turn reminds us of Michel Foucault's aspect of 'docility' and 'discipline'. An attempt is being made in this paper to study K R Meera's novel *Jezebel* in this light. K R Meera is a Malayalam writer and journalist, who is known for exploring themes relating to patriarchy, discrimination and individuality, mainly focusing on the inner lives of women and challenging traditional power dynamics. Her novel *Jezebel* (2022) is translated into English by Abhiram Girija Srirama and K S Bijukumar. *Jezebel* narrates the story of Jezebel, a young doctor who agrees to marry Jerome George Marakkaram, a doctor who turns out to be brutish and insensitive after marriage making Jezebel's life miserable. Thus, the paper attempts to explore the aspects of trauma, vulnerability and liberation in a patriarchal set-up by exploring the character of Jezebel who goes through trauma, is made vulnerable to situations and relationships and finally seeks freedom from an abusive marriage and claustrophobic relationships.

Key Terms: Trauma, liberation, vulnerability, docile bodies, patriarchy, power structures.

In *Jezebel*, K. R. Meera brings her signature style of psychological introspection and feminist critique to portray the entrapment and resistance of a woman within the institution of marriage. The novel traces the journey of a lady doctor—Jezebel—who navigates through a marriage marked by abuse, emotional manipulation, and societal gaslighting. Despite her professional success and modern education, Jezebel is caught in the trap of traditional gender roles. The novel is a sharp commentary on how women's lives, even in contemporary India, are structured by systems of power that perpetuate control, violence, and silence. Through Freudian trauma theory and Foucault's concepts of discipline and docility, this paper argues that *Jezebel* exemplifies a powerful feminist negotiation of suffering, resilience, and emancipation.

Sigmund Freud defines trauma as an experience that overwhelms the subject's capacity to respond, with lasting psychological effects (Freud 7). Jezebel's marriage to Jerome George Marakkaram becomes the central site of such trauma. Initially depicted as a respected doctor, Jerome quickly reveals his emotionally violent nature. Jezebel, who enters the marriage with

caution but also societal pressure, is soon subjected to relentless suspicion, humiliation, and possessiveness.

One of the most traumatic scenes occurs when Jerome accuses Jezebel of having affairs with her colleagues, questioning her morality and professionalism. This unfounded jealousy not only undermines Jezebel's confidence but also isolates her emotionally. Freud's notion of *Nachträglichkeit* (deferred action) is relevant here—these incidents accumulate and intensify Jezebel's trauma, especially as she finds herself unable to explain or rationalize her suffering to others. Even moments of intimacy are fraught with tension; Jerome's love is possessive, often bordering on the sadistic.

Jezebel's trauma is internalized in the form of recurring anxiety, insomnia, and self-doubt. The novel's stream-of-consciousness narration captures her psychological fragmentation. She begins to question her own perceptions, a classic symptom of trauma survivors who suffer from gaslighting. Judith Herman's concept of "complex post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)," arising from prolonged abuse, aptly fits Jezebel's psychological condition (Herman 115). Her trauma is not just a result of one event but the accumulation of systemic and emotional violations.

Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* provides a compelling framework to examine Jezebel's bodily vulnerability. Foucault asserts that institutions—such as marriage and medicine—discipline bodies through surveillance, routines, and normalization (Foucault 136). Jezebel is a doctor, a position that should grant her authority and independence. However, Jerome constantly undermines her at work and home, criticizing her attire, schedule, and interactions with patients or male colleagues.

In one striking episode, Jerome demands that she stop using perfume, accusing her of seducing other men. His obsession with controlling Jezebel's body—her appearance, movements, and desires—illustrates how patriarchy enforces docility through intimate surveillance. Even her menstruation becomes a point of humiliation, as he mocks her physicality. Foucault's concept of the "panopticon" is embodied in Jerome—he does not need to constantly punish; his gaze and disapproval are enough to discipline Jezebel into silence and submission.

This reduction of a woman to a docile body—regulated, watched, and shaped by patriarchy—is further seen in Jezebel's efforts to conform. She curbs her speech, suppresses her sexuality, and tries to fulfill the role of the "ideal wife." Despite being a rational, educated woman, she is emotionally manipulated into self-effacement. This contradiction—between her professional competence and personal vulnerability—highlights how systemic patriarchy can render even empowered women powerless.

Jezebel's suffering is not caused by Jerome alone but by the broader ecosystem that supports patriarchal values. Her family and friends offer little support. When she begins to share her marital troubles, she is told to "adjust" and not "make a fuss," echoing what Chandra Talpade Mohanty identifies as the "cultural script of female sacrifice" (Mohanty 88). Jezebel internalizes this script, constantly trying to justify Jerome's behavior and blaming herself for the failure of the marriage.

The performative nature of gender is also foregrounded. Jezebel's attempts to be the "perfect woman"—modest, nurturing, accommodating—are learned behaviors aimed at survival. This performativity is not liberating but deeply coercive. Her pain is invisible to the

world because she is performing femininity correctly. In this way, Meera critiques not only individual male behavior but also the structural complicity of family, religion, and cultural tradition in reinforcing gendered oppression.

Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern is apt here—Jezebel is not voiceless in the literal sense but is denied a hearing (Spivak 281). Her distress is constantly invalidated, and even the legal or institutional avenues for redress seem complicit in silencing her. In a courtroom scene, when Jezebel finally speaks of her suffering, the male-dominated environment treats her narrative as exaggerated or emotional, further proving the systemic nature of patriarchal control.

Unlike traditional feminist narratives that seek liberation through confrontation, *Jezebel* depicts emancipation as a slow, painful, and deeply personal process. Jezebel's decision to leave Jerome is not impulsive. It comes after an intense period of introspection, therapy, and detachment. Her liberation begins in the mind, through reclaiming her narrative and refusing to define herself through the roles imposed on her—wife, doctor, woman.

Uma Chakravarti argues that in deeply patriarchal societies, women's resistance often takes the form of "negotiated spaces of autonomy" (Chakravarti 122). Jezebel does not stage a dramatic rebellion; she simply chooses to walk away, refusing to perform the roles that suffocate her. This quiet assertion is powerful. By the end of the novel, she is still vulnerable, still healing—but she is finally the author of her own story.

The final image of Jezebel walking alone, unafraid, with no man defining her existence, is symbolic of Meera's feminist ethos. It's not a utopian vision of female empowerment, but a realistic one—freedom is partial, earned, and always under threat, but it is still possible.

Jezebel is a compelling feminist text that explores the insidious ways trauma, vulnerability, and power operate in women's lives. Through Jezebel's character, Meera critiques not only abusive relationships but the larger social fabric that enables such abuse. Drawing from Freud and Foucault, the novel illustrates how trauma is both psychological and embodied, and how discipline and surveillance shape female identity. Jezebel's journey from docility to agency is emblematic of many women's lives, where liberation comes not through revolution but through quiet, resolute acts of self-reclamation. The novel ultimately reminds us that feminist resistance often begins in the private, silent chambers of the self, before it can transform the world outside.

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Repercussions of Childhood trauma in the Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*

S J Ravi Prakash

Abstract

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* offers a haunting portrayal of how childhood trauma echoes across time, leaving indelible marks on identity, behavior, and relationships. Roy shows that the personal cannot be separated from the political or the social; the "small things"—neglected wounds, silences, and betrayals—carry enormous weight. The novel becomes a meditation on how trauma, when unspoken and unhealed, festers and eventually defines the lives it touches. Childhood trauma plays a critical and pervasive role in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, shaping the lives, relationships, and emotional landscapes of the central characters. The novel intricately portrays how the traumatic events of childhood—especially those tied to familial, social, and political structures—leave lasting scars.

Key words: Childhood trauma, unhealed wounds, small things, lasting scars, familial and political structures.

Introduction

Arundhati Roy full name is Sujanna Arundhathi Roy. She was created a history by receiving Booker Prize for her debut novel *The God of Small things*. This novel has received a lot of accolades and criticism as well for her protest voice on several social and political issues. In 2024 it was also bagged Pen Pinter Prize. A few considered it as a semi autobiography of Arundhati Roy.

This novel discussed the repercussions of simple mistakes, unimportant events and small decisions of the people and how they ruined the lives of the people. For this, Roy took the background of Malayali Syrian Christian family to discuss several issues like the role of family and society, human relations which questions the social norms, oppression of the weak by the strong, dominant familial and societal forces, and their helplessness in encounter the hegemonic attitude, and their relationships, sexual desires beyond the societal norms, the impact of the political system on human life and relations, human ego and jealous in their worst forms. The interesting point in this novel is the serious and solemn topics were discussed from the background of seven aged two child characters and their thoughts.

Roy portrayed the child characters out of their direct contact to the society and experiencing the turmoils in their lives. Large part of the novel was with the narration of the children. Roy took the experiences and incidents, reactions to the problems from their own lives mental condition. Readers will identify with the characters and their mental status. For this, Roy has chosen different writing style from the child perspectives. Incidents, in this novel, were not happened in a chronological order. Sometimes the story goes forth and back.

Mediocre reader can understand the story with a little difficulty.

Story in Brief

The story moves back and forth in time, primarily between 1969 and 1993, weaving past and present through the memories of Rahel, who returns to Ayemenem after years apart from her twin brother Estha. In 1969, Estha and Rahel are seven years old. Their cousin, Sophie Mol, arrives from England with her mother, Margaret Kochamma. Shortly after, Sophie drowns during an outing with the twins, triggering a series of events that forever change the family. The twins are unfairly blamed, and Estha is sent away to live with his father. The tragedy is compounded by the family's betrayal of Velutha, a kind and loving Dalit man who has a forbidden romantic relationship with the twins' mother, Ammu. Velutha is falsely accused of kidnapping the children and is brutally beaten to death by the police. Years later, Estha and Rahel reunite as emotionally damaged adults. The novel ends with a quiet, intimate scene from the past—Ammu and Velutha's brief, tender love—offering a moment of peace in a story otherwise filled with pain and repression.

Multiple Traumas

In *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, multiple traumas affect nearly every character, shaping their identities, relationships, and destinies. The novel explores how trauma — personal, social, emotional, and historical — intertwines with family, love, caste, and politics in a deeply oppressive society.

The Fragility of Childhood Innocence

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy beautifully and tragically illustrates how the innocence of childhood is delicate and easily shattered by the harsh realities of the adult world. The novel's child protagonists, Rahel and Estha, embody this innocence—curious, imaginative, and emotionally perceptive. Yet, their childhood is continuously under assault by forces far beyond their understanding or control.

a) World of Wonder

The twins create a rich inner world filled with games, secret languages, and childlike interpretations of events. Places like the History House, the Meenachal river, and the toy watchman reflect their imaginative capacity. Their world is filled with “Small Things” – moments of joy, whispers, shared looks – which they treasure.

b) The Invasion of adult realities

This imaginative world is smashed by adult cruelties: caste prejudices, sexual abuse, emotional trauma, and betrayal. The Orange drink Lemondrink man's molestation of Estha marks a major loss of innocence. Estha begins to carry guilt and fear, although he is the victim. The death of Sophie Mol is another blow. The twins are blamed, even though they are not at fault. The emotional burden placed on them is immense.

c) Betrayal of Trust

The children witness the betrayal of Velutha, their trusted friend and protector, who is brutally beaten and left to die. Their innocent love and loyalty toward him are seen by adults as dangerous and immoral, which teaches them that love too can be punished. Ammu's arrest and her eventual death deepen their sense of alienation, as the people they love are taken away by an unjust society.

d) Emotional and psychological damage

Estha becomes almost mute, burdened by silence and trauma—symbolizing the shattering of innocence. Rahel grows up disconnected, emotionally numb, and carries the scars of a childhood interrupted. Their eventual reunion as adults is marked by a shared sense of loss and quiet grief—both are still haunted by what was taken from them.

Lack of Emotional support and Parental Affection

Estha and Rahel, the twin protagonists, suffer from emotional abandonment. Their mother, Ammu, loves them deeply but is constrained by social pressures and her own mental health. Their father is absent, abusive, and alcoholic—his absence leaves a void in their lives. The twins are constantly told they are "illegitimate" and are made to feel unwelcome.

Exposure to Adult Conflicts and Realities

The twins are dragged into adult matters—divorce, class politics, caste oppression, and family scandals. They witness domestic violence, racism, and gender bias at an age when they should be shielded from such horrors. Estha is sexually abused by a vendor (the Orange drink Lemon drink man), a traumatic event that haunts him for life.

Caste and class Prejudice

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy offers a powerful critique of India's rigid caste system and deep-rooted class divisions, showing how they deform relationships, deny basic human dignity, and ultimately lead to tragedy. The novel vividly portrays how caste and class prejudices infiltrate the lives of its characters, especially through the experiences of Velutha, the twins Rahel and Estha, and their mother Ammu.

a) Velutha: The Untouchable

Velutha, a Dalit (referred to as a Paravan), is a talented and gentle man who works for the Ipe family as a carpenter. Despite his skill and loyalty, he is never treated as an equal due to his low caste. His relationship with Ammu, an upper-caste Syrian Christian woman, is seen as a forbidden transgression. Society and even Ammu's family respond with horror and violence, ultimately leading to Velutha's brutal murder by the police—sanctioned by caste hatred.

b) Ammu and the Double Standard

Ammu, though from a respectable family, faces class-based and gendered discrimination after her divorce. Her affair with Velutha is condemned not just because of caste, but also because she is a woman asserting sexual autonomy, and a mother of “fatherless” children. While men like Chacko are allowed to have affairs with women of lower class, Ammu is punished harshly, showing the hypocrisy of caste and gender norms.

c) The Twins and Internalized Prejudice

Rahel and Estha grow up in a family where caste discrimination is normalized and unquestioned. Though they love Velutha and see him as kind and caring, they slowly learn that society will never accept such a bond. Their trauma reflects the damage caste ideology does not only to those oppressed, but to the moral development of children as well.

d) Social Hypocrisy and Class Privilege

The Ipe family, though progressive on the surface, enforces caste and class boundaries in their home and social interactions. Characters like Baby Kochamma show how the upper classes exploit power to maintain superiority, even manipulating the law to crush anyone who challenges the status quo (as she does with Velutha). Chacko claims to be Marxist and liberal, yet he treats his workers as inferior and indulges in casual classism.

e) The Tragic Consequences of Prejudice

The novel makes it clear that caste and class prejudices are not just abstract social issues, but forces that destroy lives. Velutha’s death, Ammu’s social exile, the separation of the twins, and the overall disintegration of the family are direct outcomes of caste and class oppression. These social boundaries are shown to be cruel, unjust, and hypocritical, yet deeply embedded in the cultural fabric.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* exposes the cruelty and injustice of caste and class prejudice in Indian society. Through personal tragedy, she shows how systemic inequality stifles love, ruins families, and perpetuates violence. The novel is not just a story of individuals, but a bold political statement against the inhumanity of social hierarchies that still persist today.

Betrayal of trust

One of the most heart-wrenching elements in *The God of Small Things* is the betrayal of trust, particularly when it involves love, innocence, and loyalty. Arundhati Roy masterfully depicts how personal relationships are shattered when individuals choose to uphold social norms over human bonds. This betrayal is most painfully seen in the lives of Velutha, Ammu, and the twins, Estha and Rahel.

a) Velutha’s Betrayal by the Ipe Family

Velutha, the untouchable who dares to love Ammu and is kind to the twins, becomes a

victim of social and familial betrayal. Though he is loyal and trusted by the family, his Dalit identity makes him expendable when their reputation is threatened. Baby Kochamma, in particular, falsely accuses Velutha of raping Ammu and kidnapping the children—fully knowing these are lies. The ultimate betrayal comes when Estha, under pressure, is made to "confess" against Velutha, leading to his arrest and brutal death. Velutha's trust in Ammu, in the children, and in the humanity of others is utterly broken.

b) Ammu's Betrayal by Her Own Family

Ammu is betrayed by her family when they refuse to protect or support her after her relationship with Velutha is discovered. Rather than standing by her, they humiliate her, lock her in a room, and later throw her out of the house. Ammu's father is dead, and her brother, Chacko, who himself had relationships with working-class women, turns against her—showing the patriarchal double standards. This betrayal reflects how familial loyalty collapses when caste and social norms are involved.

c) Estha's Betrayal – A Child Forced to Betray

Estha, an innocent child, is coerced into giving false testimony that condemns Velutha. This act is not born out of will, but from pressure, manipulation, and fear. The guilt of this betrayal haunts him throughout his life, making him emotionally mute and withdrawn. His forced betrayal is symbolic of how children's innocence is weaponized by corrupt adult systems.

d) Baby Kochamma: The Architect of Betrayal

Perhaps the clearest representation of betrayal is Baby Kochamma, who prioritizes social respectability over truth and justice. She manipulates everyone—Estha, the police, and her own family—to maintain caste purity and avoid scandal. Her actions betray not just individual characters, but the very values of love, compassion, and truth.

The theme of betrayal of trust in *The God of Small Things* exposes the moral collapse of society, where fear, prejudice, and social status matter more than truth and loyalty. Roy shows that the consequences of betrayal are lifelong scars—emotional, psychological, and even fatal. Trust, once broken, leaves behind trauma that shapes the destiny of every major character in the novel.

Conclusion

In *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy poignantly portrays how childhood trauma leaves deep, lasting scars on the psyche of individuals. The experiences of Estha and Rahel — marked by abuse, separation, loss, and social injustice — show how unresolved trauma shapes their identities, emotional development, and relationships. The novel illustrates that childhood trauma is not a fleeting pain but a lifelong burden, influencing behavior, choices, and the ability to connect with others. Through the silent suffering of Estha, the emotional disconnection of Rahel, and the societal oppression they both endure, Roy underscores the devastating impact of a world where love is controlled by rigid rules and hierarchies. Ultimately, the novel serves

as a powerful reminder that the wounds inflicted during childhood, when left unhealed, echo through adulthood, affecting not just individuals but entire generations.

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Mirrors of Power: Gender, Knowledge and Race in Bacon's *New Atlantis* and Cavendish's *The Blazing World*

Trisha Ghosh

Abstract

This paper examines Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* and Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* to explore the intersections of race, gender, and power in early modern utopian literature. The paper constructs how these texts create an imaginary society where the epistemic authority is tightly centralised. Bensalem's Salomon's House and Cavendish's fantastical world under their utopian surface hides a deep exclusionary logic. While Bacon's *New Atlantis* presents a patriarchal, Christian society where the elite scientists restrict knowledge and regulate truth based on religious and racial conformity, Cavendish's seemingly radical female sovereign presents the same authoritative structures removing empirical inquiry in favour of monarchical decree. However, Cavendish's epistemic sovereignty mirrors the same patriarchal dominance she appears to challenge, ultimately revealing the limitations of gendered hierarchy. Drawing on feminist epistemology and early modern scientific studies, the paper argues how *New Atlantis* and *The Blazing World*, although imagined as ideal, is extremely dystopic through authoritarian governance, epistemic monoculture and marginalisation of gendered and racialised voices.

Keywords: Early Modern Literature, Gender, Race, Epistemic authority, Patriarchy, Feminism, Royal Society, Scientific Discourse, Utopia, Dystopia

Introduction

Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* (1627) and Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1666), presents us with fictional societies where knowledge becomes central to power. Both their utopian visions reflect a system which is built on knowledge production, organisation and governance to maintain civil harmony. Yet, these ideal societies reflect the predominant hierarchies of the time: gendered, racialised and epistemologically exclusive. Bacon's Bensalem is a male dominated Christian society; production of scientific truth is controlled by their elite institution – The Salomon's House. In this regard, Deborah E. Harkness notes, "For Francis Bacon, the role and the relationship all boiled down to an issue of power. Bacon attempted to position natural knowledge at the heart of a prince's concerns and thus approached science as a way to achieve political power and might"(1). Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, on the other hand, places a female sovereign who uses her imagination and decree to control natural philosophy and science. Lorraine Code suggest, "A feminist epistemology [...] would risk replicating the exclusionary hegemonic structure of the masculinist epistemologies in its various manifestations, that has claimed absolute sovereignty over epistemic terrain"(2). Although the Empress's dominance appears to be radical, it mirrors the same patriarchal control. So, the relationship between power and knowledge not only becomes complicated but

also dystopic. This paper, therefore, argues that the neat exteriors of these two utopic worlds collapse under their own extremities, reflecting the dangers of authoritarian rule – be it masculine or feminine.

In the heart of both texts – *New Atlantis* and *The Blazing World*, lies a fundamental question – who controls knowledge and what power is blended in with that control? Considering *New Atlantis*, Bensalem's elite institution - The Salomon's House exemplifies a complicated knowledge-power relationship. The Father of the Salomon's House boasts of their ability to manipulate natural phenomenon: "we use them [caves] likewise, for the imitation of natural mines, and the producing also of new artificial metals"(3). They go as far as to "make (by art) in the same orchards and gardens, trees and flowers to come earlier or later than their seasons; and to come up and bear more speedily than by their natural course they do. [...] (Bacon, 179)" and "By art likewise, we make them [beasts and birds] greater or taller than their kind [...]. Also we make them differ in colour, shape, activity, many ways (Bacon,179)". Harkness notes, "Bacon's excitement was already tinged with issues of power and control, and he often remarked upon the sciences' ability to give mankind dominion over nature" (Harkness, 244). Evidently, the power of scientific knowledge makes nature a subject to human reconstruction; nature is transformed into raw materials that can be rearranged to support the romanticised idea of advancement. This clearly, assert the ideal vision of scientific enquiry, rather than showing a mutuality with nature, it shows a form of coercion. Further, Carolyn Merchant argues, "Bacon's goal was to use constraint and force to extract truths from nature. His choice of words was a part of a larger project to create a new method that would allow humanity to control and dominate the natural world" (4). Clearly, the portrayal of scientific mastery over trees, animals and minerals is not merely technological it is ideological; nature is used as an instrument – where scientist use the power of their scientific knowledge to serve a broader political vision of order and control, ultimately distorting their own utopian ideals.

Bacon's utopian society shows a deeper contradiction when humanity's power to control nature extends to the control of humanity itself. The Salomon's House disciplines the human body through a wide range of medical and physiological procedure. The 'Chambers of Health' creates special environment "where we qualify the air as we think good and proper for the cure of divers diseases, and preservation of health (Bacon,178)." This scientific conditioning of the natural environment of the body reflects how life is subjected to surveillance in the name of improvement. Food is no longer a medium of sustenance but is used as a tool for scientific experiments: "We have drinks also brewed [...], whereof some of the drinks are such, as they are in effect meat and drink both: so that divers, especially in age, do desire to live with them, with little or no meat or bread (Bacon, 180)." Likewise, scientists develop bread which "[...] do nourish so, as divers do live of them, without any other meat; who live very long" and meat which is "[...] made tender and mortified, yet without all corrupting, as a weak heat of the stomach will turn them into good chylus; (Bacon,180)". Additionally, bread and meat have been devised scientifically: "which taken by men enable them to fast long after; and some other, that used make the very flesh of men's bodies sensibly more hard and tough and their strength far greater than otherwise it would be (Bacon,180)." Water itself is reconditioned, "a water which we call Water of Paradise" is used for "prolongation of life" and "fair and large baths, of several mixtures," is prepared to "cure of diseases, and the restoring of man's body from rarefaction: and others for the confirming of it

in strength of sinews, vital parts, and the very juice and substance of the body (Bacon, 178).” Evidently, the natural functions of the body are ideally replaced by a systemic body, giving us a dystopic vision of bodily governance that is veiled under the notion of utopian health.

Salomon’s House works as a sovereign body whose mode of governance appears through epistemic control – “we have consultations, which of the inventions and experiences which we have discovered shall be published, and which not: and take all an oath of secrecy, for the concealing of those which we think fit to keep secret: though some of those we do reveal sometimes to the state and some not (Bacon, 184)”. What appears to be a scientific wisdom, is in fact intellectual restriction. Again, Harkness informs that Bacon “often quoted bon mot “knowledge is power” (Harkness, 246), and this becomes very evident when, by determining which discovery should be published or withheld, The Salomon’s House shows power and control over the very conditions of thought. The selective distribution of knowledge becomes a sovereign tool for societal control– the access of truth is only resting on the governing body (Salomon’s House) and this selective dissemination is shaping the perceptions, belief and consciousness of the society of Bensalem. This monopoly over knowledge and truth, which aims to administer peace and harmony, reveals a collapse of Bacon’s utopian vision into an authoritarian rule. New Atlantis, therefore fails in its portrayal of utopian society, it functions more like an ideological machine where knowledge is power and power itself is knowledge and scientific progress mirrors authoritarian rule and epistemic control.

Additionally, Bacon’s scientific utopia show yet another contradiction when it claims to be a rational and a benevolent society. Evidently there is a consistent overshadowing of feminine contributions and a marked racial exclusion. Londa Schiebinger writes, “[...] attempts were also made to deny that woman ever contributed to the development of arts and sciences. As the prestige of science began to grow, history was rallied to lend legitimacy to its European males’ claims as sole heirs to its future” (5). Salomon’s House shows a product of this – the scientists conducting evidence and scrutinising truth are male figures. The knowledge produced in controlled secrecy reflects masculine epistemology that identifies authority as a male domain rendering women as intellectually invisible (6). Moreover, *New Atlantis* only bears passing references to women. For example, the ‘Feast of the Family’ celebrates male lineage, whereas the mothers are dismissed to hidden spaces. The father of the family or the ‘Tirsan’ is served only by his male descendants while “the woman only stand about him, leaning against the wall” (Bacon, 171). This moment marks the patriarchal order of Bensalem where women are reduced to passive emblems of obedience – only identified through their moral silence and reproductive roles rather than being included as civic or intellectual participants.

It is not that this exclusion of women is neutral it is followed by racial and cultural hierarchy, setting a ground for imperialistic thought. Foreigners are accepted under the condition that they follow the laws, language and religious parameters set by Bensalem’s society. The Governor informs, “If ye will swear (all of you) by the merits of the Saviour that ye are no pirates[...], you may have license to come on land (Bacon, 154)”. This is followed by his acceptance, “[...] that by means of our solitary situation, and of the laws of secrecy which we have for our travellers, and our rare admission of strangers (Bacon, 159)”. These conditions imposed on extending hospitality clearly makes it evident that the society of Bensalem has a system of epistemic and civic gatekeeping, where acceptance lies in conforming to the

dominant political and religious order. Howard B. White notes, “Of the provisional political order, as Bacon saw it, there were three pillars: crown church and the empire. The imperial pillar is certainly the most important to him of the three, and its construction required a greater boldness than the construction of either of the other” (7). Bensalem, therefore, does not appear to be as pluralistic as it claims to be, the Father of the Salomon’s House claims that ‘the End of our Foundation’ lies in “enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire (Bacon, 177)” which directly connects that Bensalem displays the ideals of imperialism thought. White observes that “Bacon’s imperialism is also (and chiefly) the imperialism of Baconian science (White, 489) (8). The fact that they send emissaries – ‘The Merchants of Light’ to collect global information under false identities, mirrors the exploitative methods of imperial epistemology. Moreover, there are mention of Indians, Persians, and Hebrews, but they do not show any contribution to the experiments done in Salomon’s House, making it clear that alternate voices were excluded from making any scientific decisions (9). Clearly, *New Atlantis* constructs a utopian society who, under the garb of progression and benevolence, hides a system of gendered, racial and cultural exclusion to serve centralised power. This view is extremely dystopic making the ideal collapse under its own extremities of authoritarian rule.

Margaret Cavendish, in *The Blazing World*, takes a seemingly radical departure from the male visions on scientific enquiry by placing a female sovereign – the Empress – who exert power and control over scientific discourse. Written in an age where women were largely excluded from intellectual science such as the Royal Society (10), *The Blazing World*, on a first glance, offers a very progressive vision on female intellectual power. But on a closer view the Empress’s dominance over knowledge not only distorts the male scientific authority but tends to replicate it often moving into self-parody.

In the first section, the Empress is seen interrogating different animal-men. The bear-men, the bird-men, the fish-men, the ape-men – all representing different fields of science. Sara Mendelson informs, “As humanoids with bestial components, they offer the perfect vehicle for the satirical attack on the real-life successors of Bacon’s House of Salomon, the arrogant empiricists of the Royal Society (11)”. This satirical take is marked when in spite of their skilful observations and inferences, she finds them rather unsatisfactory. For instance, she tells the bear-men, “I do plainly perceive, that your glasses are false Informers and instead of discovering truth, delude your senses” (12). Again, Mendelson notes, “Cavendish ridicules empirical scientists like Robert Hooke (1635 – 1703), who claimed that optical instruments improved or completed (rather than deluded) human sense organs” (13). While Cavendish’s positioning of a female sovereign at the centre of the scientific discourse allows the Empress to critique empirical scientific method, this however, does not change the framework of epistemic authority. As Lisa Walters points, “Cavendish’s idea may not appear feminist [...], it is nevertheless anachronistic not to account for the ways she does not engage with early modern construction of gender (14)”. The Empress “imposed a general silence upon them” and declared her own terms of scientific discourse. But this authority is rooted more in decree than in dialogue. Moreover, she ultimately dismisses every observation: “I do no ways approve of your profession; and though I will not dissolve your society, yet I shall never take the delight in hearing you anymore (Cavendish, 100)”. Lisa Sarasohn states in this regard, “The more science became contained and controlled by the age is of the Royal Society, the more extravagant and speculative her own natural philosophy became. The more other investigators of nature limited

their conclusions to what they could see the more Cavendish credited the primacy of conception and reason” (15). However, this passage might also question whether Cavendish’s scepticism is mainly pointed at the male-centric scientific discourses or is it just directed at the prospect of objective knowledge? Either way, Cavendish’s scepticism shows how knowledge – when controlled by a single authority, even a female one – remains attached to the same gendered system of exclusion and control that are set by male institutions. So, what seems to be a feminist appropriation becomes a mirror of the same male hierarchy, but with female authority.

Being absolutely dissatisfied by the conflicting answers of the animal men, the Empress now turns the ‘Immaterial Spirits’ who governs the natural ways of the world. This shift from empirical reasoning to divine revelation becomes a significant withdrawal from collaborative knowledge system and a turn to internalised sovereign authority. Rather than encouraging further debates and collective observations, the Empress bypasses the problem and reconfigures it through divine revelation that is only available to sovereign power. Agnus Fletcher argues, “[Cavendish’s] attitudes does not square easily with the egalitarian ideal of modern feminism, and they make it difficult to argue that Cavendish’s work replaces masculine notions of authority with a vision of the unruly variety of nature” (16). Therefore, this gesture, although it can be interpreted as feminine, evidently replicates the same hierarchy and epistemic exclusions it aims to resist. By avoiding experimental observations and natural philosophers, and relying totally on spirits, the Empress centralises knowledge by excluding collective and verified enquiry. Again, Walter notes, “Diverse perspectives provided by the printing press has destabilizing effect upon the monarch’s power since dissenting opinions which contradicted the ruler’s claim to authority could reach vast number of population (Walter, 189)”. This shows that truth becomes embedded in a monarchical structure where knowledge is not negotiated or tested but controlled. Therefore, Cavendish’s deal utopian society becomes an autocracy of intellect.

This moment is further complicated with the introduction of the Duchess of Newcastle – she appears as the Empress’ confidant, philosophical guide and platonic friend. While scholars like Rachel Trubowitz have argued that *The Blazing World* is “rather a canny revision of utopian social paradigm, driven by competing demands of Duchess’s radical feminism and social convertism” (17), the figure of the Duchess becomes a marker for centralised power. The Duchess’s advice the Empress, “to introduce the same form of Government again, which had been before; that is, to have but one Sovereign, one Religion, one Law and one Language [...]” (Cavendish, 139). This not only suggest uniformity but shows a form of paradox – the Duchess in her attempt to empower the Empress, ends up erasing diversity in favour of control – “And since your Majesty complains so much of the factions of the Bear- Fish- Fly- Ape and Worm-men, the Satyrs, Spider-men and the like, [...], I would advise your Majesty to dissolve all their societies; for ’tis better to be without intelligences, then to have an unquiet and disorderly Government (Cavendish, 140)”. Therefore, what begins as an imaginative reordering of epistemic and political structure ends up portraying a sense of conformity and autocracy. The Empress’s power instead of replacing the masculinist authority ends up mirroring it is proving that Cavendish’s utopian society is not only dystopian, but it collapses under its own authoritarian framework.

However, this also leads to another angle of viewing *The Blazing World*. Its re-imaginings of scientific advancement by placing a female sovereign power also brings out

the same Baconian mindset of exclusionary practices of imperialistic authority. Walter argues that “Cavendish’s interest in exploring republican ideas relating to women, slaves, and masterless men highlights an even more revolutionary aspect of her thinking (Walter, 217)”. But, although not explicitly racialised, the Duchess’s insistence on “one Sovereign, one Religion, one Law and one Language” mirrors the imperialistic form of governance. Moreover, the Duchess’s advice to dissolve all society marks an absolute exclusion of diversity and the voices of the ‘other’ practiced by imperial crown. So, her attempt to replace patriarchal imperialist practices ends up replicating the same system she tries to fix. Cavendish’s ideal world or the *Blazing World*, itself cannot stand under the weight of its own contradiction, revealing a dystopic view which essentially mirrors the same patriarchal practices it claims to eradicate.

Clearly, Bacon’s *New Atlantis* and Cavendish’s *The Blazing World* make it evident that although they appear vastly different from one and another in their ideologies, they converge in their practice of using knowledge as tool for control. Bacon’s society is epistemologically monocultural and they exclude gendered and racialised other under a rational form of governance. Cavendish’s Empress, although appear as radically feminist, in her attempt to replace patriarchal order ends up replicating it. The feminine re-imagination is not an alternative to masculine perception but a mirrored autocracy. Together, these texts expose the anxieties of gender, race and knowledge under their seemingly utopian societies.

End Notes

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7. Howard B. White, ‘Bacon’s Imperialism’, *The American Political Science Review* 52(2) (1958) p. 470 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1952328>
8. Page 489, Ref. footnote 7.
9. Page 401,403. Scheibinger explores how institutions like Royal Society excluded women and black individuals from taking part in experimentation. The whites even refused to recognise any institutions founded by black individuals. Ref. footnote 6
10. Sylvia, Bowerbank and Sara, Mendelson, ‘Introduction’ in *Paper Bodies: A Margaret Cavendish Reader* (Broadview Press, 2000) p. 25
11. Sara Mendelson, ‘Introduction’ in *The Description of a New World Called the Blazing World* by Margaret Cavendish ed. by Sara Mendelson (Canada: Broadview, 2016) p. 37
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13. Page 79 (read footnote 1 by Sara Mendelson). Ref. Foot 12
14. Lisa Walters, ‘Redefining gender in Cavendish’s theory of matter’ in *Margaret Cavendish: Gender, Science and Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2014) p. 65 ((All citations from this text are mentioned in the main body)
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~ English Language Teaching ~

Reimagining English Literacy in India: Contextualising Multiliteracies Framework

Kshema Jose

Abstract

In a multilingual and culturally diverse country like India, conventional models of English as a Second Language instruction—centered on decontextualized, discrete language skills and standardized literacy practices—fail to reflect learners' lived realities or recognize their rich linguistic and cultural repertoires. This paper proposes English Multiliteracies Education as a contextualized, practice-oriented adaptation of the Multiliteracies Framework (New London Group, 1996), reimagined to meet the epistemic, linguistic, and pedagogical realities of Indian classrooms.

While the original Multiliteracies Framework offered a powerful shift by recognizing multimodal and intercultural literacies, it was largely theorized within Global North contexts, where learners often operate in English-dominant, digitally mediated environments. Its application in Indian settings therefore requires deeper attention to multilingual realities, institutionalized language hierarchies, and the sociocultural embeddedness of semiotic resources.

Advocating its contextualisation for India's multilingual classrooms, this paper critiques the Global North-centric assumptions of MLF on two grounds. First, Indian learners often use multiple home languages, and EME, treating multilingualism as foundational, not incidental, affirms their right to draw on their full linguistic repertoires. Second, unlike Global North contexts where English and digital texts are socially dominant and widely accessible, in much of the Global South—including India—English is primarily a school-taught language with limited presence in everyday life, and digital resources remain unevenly available. As a result, learners' literacy practices are often grounded in oral, visual, and performative traditions shaped by local and vernacular knowledge systems—traditions that are typically marginalised in formal English instruction. EME affirms the pedagogical and ethical imperative of using culturally familiar L1 artefacts as cognitive and linguistic scaffolds, allowing learners to deepen both English proficiency and home language awareness. It attempts to integrate translanguaging pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching to support such engagement.

Aligned with NEP 2020, EME supports inclusive, multilingual, multimodal, and identity-affirming literacy education that can be cultivated in low-resource, non-digital settings. EME is not just a pedagogical alternative, but a move toward curriculum justice—one that repositions English as a language of empowerment, enabling learners to participate meaningfully in global discourses while remaining rooted in and nurturing their local cultural and linguistic landscapes, as well as an additive and potentially indigenised resource—one that can be shaped by learners rather than a standardised form that is imposed upon them.

Keywords: Multiliteracies Pedagogy, Translanguaging, English Language Education in India, NEP 2020, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Multimodal Literacy

Literacy in transition

Literacy continues to be a key driver of individual growth and national progress. However, its nature has significantly changed with globalization, digital technologies, and increasing cultural and linguistic diversity. No longer limited to reading and writing, literacy now encompasses the ability to interpret and produce meaning across multiple modes—textual, visual, auditory, spatial, and gestural—and in varied linguistic and cultural contexts (New London Group, 1996; Kress, 2010). This shift calls for a pedagogical transformation from decontextualized instruction to dynamic, multimodal approaches.

In second language contexts, especially in culturally and linguistically diverse societies like India, literacy development must reflect the lived experiences, oral traditions, and home literacy practices that learners bring. Research (Canagarajah, 2013; García & Wei, 2014) shows that engaging learners' full linguistic and semiotic repertoires deepens comprehension and empowers identity construction.

This paper proposes English Multiliteracies Education (EME) as a culturally and linguistically contextualised pedagogy for ESL classrooms in India. Drawing on the Multiliteracies Framework (New London Group, 1996), EME emphasises multimodal communication and cultural responsiveness while integrating translanguaging and multilingual learning. English is positioned not as a dominant replacement language, but as an additive resource that complements students' home languages, affirming their identities and enhancing their global competencies.

The Role and Teaching of English in Contemporary Multilingual India

In India, English plays a dual role—as a link language across regions and a global gateway to academic and professional domains. Despite its aspirational value, English education is fraught with tensions (Canagarajah, 1999). ESL teaching practices often tend to reinforce linguistic hierarchies and marginalize local languages (Annamalai, 2004; Mohanty, 2010). The question then is not whether to teach English, but how to teach it without displacing learners' cultural identities.

Predominant ESL instruction models in India are based on narrow conceptions of literacy, emphasizing correctness, transactional functions, and the propagation of the standardised form of language. These approaches prioritise compliance and accuracy starting literacy with the alphabet and disconnected texts, ignoring the rich oral, gestural, and visual literacies children bring from their homes and communities.

Changing Nature of Literacy and Literacy Education

Traditionally defined as the ability to read and write, literacy has been treated as a universal, monolithic, static skill. However, literacy is inherently deictic—its meaning and forms shift

across time, place, tools, and communicative practices. By the 1990s, it was clear that print-based models could no longer capture the complexity of a globalised, multimodal communicative landscape. The growing use of multiple languages, digital platforms, and hybrid cultural expressions required an expanded understanding of literacy. Contemporary views (Kress, 2010; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011) recognize that meaning-making is both multimodal and socially situated. Communication in contemporary contexts requires fluency across multiple Englishes, diverse languages, and a variety of discourse styles and registers. Literacy, then, is not a discrete cognitive skill, but a set of meaning-making practices shaped by context, purpose, identity, and tools.

The Multiliteracies Framework was developed in response to these realities.

The Multiliteracies Framework

The Multiliteracies Framework (New London Group, 1996) emerged in response to two major shifts: increasing cultural and linguistic diversity and the growing role of digital technologies in shaping communication. It expanded the definition of literacy to include multimodal meaning-making across visual, auditory, spatial, gestural, and linguistic modes, and called for literacy education that prepared learners to navigate diverse cultural, linguistic, and social environments.

The framework introduced two key dimensions:

- Multiplicity of modes, reflecting how meaning is constructed through images, sounds, spatial arrangements, and gestures—not just print.
- Multiplicity of communicative contexts, where learners must negotiate meaning across discourses, cultures, and languages.

Rejecting the view of literacy as a neutral or purely technical skill, the framework asserts that meaning-making is multilingual, multimodal, and intercultural.

To operationalise this vision, the Multiliteracies pedagogy proposed four components:

1. Situated Practice: Engagement with authentic, culturally relevant texts grounded in learners' lived experiences.
2. Overt Instruction: Explicit teaching of how different modes and semiotic resources function and interact.
3. Critical Framing: Analysis of the ideological and power-laden dimensions of texts.
4. Transformed Practice: Creative application and redesign of meaning in new contexts for new audiences.

Together, these stages aim to empower learners as critical, context-aware communicators and meaning-makers. The pedagogy not only values learners' home literacies and cultural resources

but also challenges dominant ideologies by fostering critical reflection, identity formation, and participatory citizenship (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009; UNESCO, 2018).

Critical Reflections on the Multiliteracies Framework (MLF)

Despite its strengths, the framework is not without limitations. While it critiques the standardisation of literacy and celebrates diversity, its pedagogical elaboration—rooted in Global North contexts—often presumes access to digital tools, educator training, and relatively stable language hierarchies. In multilingual, under-resourced contexts like India, such assumptions must be questioned. This section discusses an Indian adaptation of the MLF that can account for epistemic hierarchies, linguistic inequity, and culturally embedded literacy practices.

Although the Multiliteracies Framework was designed to embrace diversity, its formulation is shaped by the sociolinguistic conditions of the Global North—where English often serves as both the dominant social language and the medium of education. In these contexts, multilingualism tends to refer to, in majority of cases, one home language maintained in private domains, while English dominates formal schooling and public discourse.

By contrast, India's multilingualism is deep, layered, and socially normative—a feature of daily life rather than an exception. Indian learners routinely operate across multiple home languages, with fluid linguistic practices embedded in everyday life. Here, multilingualism is not incidental or supplementary—it is the default mode of communication across home, community, and informal learning domains. Learners grow up navigating multiple languages across home, community, media, and religious domains. Yet, this everyday multilingualism exists within a hierarchical linguistic order, where English, a postcolonial language of prestige and mobility, functions as a gatekeeper to education and employment (Mohanty, 2010; Agnihotri, 2007).

The MLF in its current form, does not fully account for this sociolinguistic complexity. It does not distinguish between institutional multilingualism (as found in India) and individual bilingualism (common in immigrant contexts). Nor does it engage sufficiently with the political consequences of ignoring home languages in education.

A second limitation is the framework's digital bias. While it recognizes multimodality, its examples often privilege digital forms—infographics, web texts, videos—presuming infrastructure and digital fluency. In low-resource Indian classrooms, this emphasis can be alienating. Children's multimodal meaning-making resources often lie in oral storytelling, gesture, rhythm, drawing, ritual, and community memory—modes that are culturally resonant but digitally unrepresented. While the framework allows for such modes in principle, its pedagogical practice insufficiently theorises them.

Finally, the framework's emphasis on 21st-century competencies—critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication—is laudable but often imagined within digitally rich, inquiry-driven learning environments. In many Indian classroom settings, these capacities must be cultivated differently.

In short, while the MLF offers a powerful vision for inclusive, multimodal literacy, its application in the Indian context demands adaptation to include a deeper understanding of

layered multilingualism and language hierarchies and a recognition of non-digital multimodalities and cultural ontologies of meaning.

English Multiliteracies Education (EME) builds on these insights, offering a recontextualised approach to literacy by proposing ethical pedagogical approaches to culturally embedded artefacts, and a strong translanguaging practice that affirms all languages as legitimate meaning-making resources.

Reimagining English Pedagogies: Advancing Equity, Relevance, and Learner Agency

This paper proposes that ESL instruction needs to be recontextualized to affirm learners' cultural rootedness, facilitate identity expression, and bridge linguistic inequalities. This paper builds on the Multiliteracies Framework—one that treats literacy not just as multimodal expression but as a socially situated, culturally embedded, and politically conscious practice, to redesigns it to accommodate the local, cultural, and social realities of the Indian ESL classrooms. Acknowledging that children do not begin school as blank slates, that they arrive with diverse meaning-making practices—stories, songs, drawings, and oral knowledge systems—that are often overlooked, this paper argues that English ought to be taught with reference to their home languages. Rather than positioning it as a neutral or superior medium, English is treated as one among many linguistic resources. Ignoring the rich resources they come with would mean children are not only cognitively under-stimulated but also culturally disoriented. Supporting the purposeful use of culturally familiar semiotic resources, translanguaging practices, and a grounded ethics of engagement, the paper attempts to realign literacy instruction to prioritise equity, epistemic justice, and learner agency, while responding to material and infrastructural realities in multilingual, postcolonial settings.

English Multiliteracies Education: Conceptual Foundations and Pedagogic Orientation

Building on the call to recontextualize English pedagogy in India, this section outlines the conceptual and pedagogic foundations of *English Multiliteracies Education* (EME). While informed by the Multiliteracies Framework (MLF), EME reimagines its core assumptions to better serve learners in multilingual, culturally rich, and materially diverse Indian classrooms.

English Multiliteracies Education (EME) offers a reoriented conceptual framework for ESL teaching in India—one that foregrounds learners' cultural, linguistic, and semiotic realities. While drawing on the Multiliteracies Framework (MLF), EME moves beyond its original formulation by emphasising that meaning-making is not only multimodal but also epistemologically and culturally situated.

At its core, EME affirms that learners bring with them a full semiotic repertoire—oral stories, visual symbols, gestures, rhythms, performative modes—that serve as both *tools of thought* and *resources for expression*. These are not peripheral supports but central to cognition, communication, and identity formation. EME also upholds learners' right to mobilise their full linguistic repertoires in the process of meaning-making in English, treating linguistic diversity not as a barrier to overcome but as a resource for learning and identity expression. By validating and building upon these resources, EME positions learners not as passive recipients of English but as active meaning-makers who can reshape English in culturally grounded and ethically

responsive ways. And, in doing so, EME expands the pedagogical relevance of the Multiliteracies Framework while restoring epistemic dignity to indigenous and local language practices often marginalised in formal English instruction.

This reframing is particularly urgent in Indian classrooms, where English functions as a school-taught, aspirational language rather than a lived societal language, and where multilingual fluency is key to learner identity, cognition, and community participation. EME suggests pedagogic techniques that empower learners to draw upon their full semiotic and linguistic repertoires to think, communicate, and express identity. It aims to transform English classrooms into inclusive spaces where multiple languages, traditions, and ways of knowing are valued and used to build both critical and communicative competence.

While the Multiliteracies Framework highlights semiotic diversity, it downplays the fluid linguistic negotiations that mark everyday classroom interaction in multilingual Indian contexts. In these classrooms, children actively translanguage—not only to communicate, but also to express identity, engage with peers, and construct knowledge. Where multilingual socialisation begins early, Indian children do not merely “know” languages—they understand language boundaries, hierarchies, and the politics of code-switching. They are capable of cross-linguistic reflection: not only noticing how languages differ but recognising what it means to speak one language in the presence of others. EME engages with this complexity and makes space for it pedagogically. A critical component of EME, therefore, is its commitment to strong translanguaging pedagogies (García & Wei, 2014) that go beyond treating home languages as tools to access English. Translanguaging is not a pedagogical innovation to be introduced—it is a lived linguistic reality to be legitimised and built upon. It moves beyond the instrumental use of home languages (Mohanty, 2010) and affirms multilingualism as foundational to cognitive development, epistemic access, and learner agency. This perspective draws on García & Kleifgen’s (2020) view of translanguaging as identity work, and on Cummins’ (2021) conception of cross-linguistic meaning-making, where all languages in a learner’s repertoire are co-constitutive.

In addressing the framework’s digital preference, EME also calls for a more grounded understanding of multimodality—one that recognises and builds upon the semiotic practices already present in learners’ lives. While digital literacies are important, they cannot form the sole basis of pedagogic innovation in contexts where access is uneven and where cultural meaning-making often takes non-digital forms. EME therefore extends the principle of “design” beyond screen-based tools to include embodied, oral, symbolic, and performative modes of learning, rhythm, visual-symbolic forms, and ritual performance—modes that are culturally resonant but often digitally unrepresented. EME thus advocates the use of culturally familiar L1 artefacts as cognitive and linguistic scaffolds for English learning. These artefacts not only support English acquisition but deepen learners’ engagement with their own languages and cultural identities, affirming both simultaneously.

However, EME also cautions that many such cultural texts are not designed to be deconstructed or redesigned. Many artefacts—such as devotional songs, ritual performances, or sacred motifs—carry ontological significance and are not meant to be deconstructed in instrumental or academic ways. They are epistemic forms tied to intergenerational knowledge, collective memory, and lived cosmology. Subjecting such artefacts to classroom analysis or redesign may not only be pedagogically inappropriate but ethically problematic. While the

MLF's emphasis on "design" and "redesign" is valuable for fostering creative agency, it may clash with pedagogical ethics when engaging with sacred, communal, or culturally embedded artefacts. In such contexts, pedagogy must begin not with transformation, but with attentive reception, reverence, and relationality. It therefore attempts to reposition classroom activities and suggests alternative pedagogic orientations that engage with cultural forms respectfully, without erasing their epistemic and communal meanings opening up possibilities for pedagogies grounded in witnessing, storytelling, ethical documentation, and embodied participation—approaches that honour the integrity of cultural forms without rendering them objectified content for analysis. These practices reposition learners as co-inheritors and stewards of cultural knowledge, rather than as agents of transformation alone.

Aligned with the principles of NEP 2020, EME supports inclusive, multilingual, and identity-affirming education that can thrive even in low-resource, non-digital classrooms. It encourages pedagogic practices such as oral debates, folk narratives, storytelling circles, dramatized retellings, and visual-symbolic forms rooted in local cultural traditions. These are not compensatory strategies; they are authentic pedagogic spaces that reflect the epistemic richness of Indian classrooms. Ultimately, EME is not just a pedagogical alternative but a move toward curriculum justice—one that repositions English as a language of empowerment. It enables learners to participate meaningfully in global discourses while remaining rooted in and nurturing their local cultural and linguistic landscapes. It views children not as passive recipients of English literacy, but as multilingual meaning-makers, capable of participating in—and transforming—the communicative worlds they inhabit. As a pedagogic orientation, EME positions literacy as both a communicative and ethical act. It affirms that learning English need not come at the cost of learners' cultural knowledge or linguistic heritage. Instead, it invites educators to create inclusive classrooms where English literacy is enriched by—and responsive to—the learner's full semiotic and epistemic world.

Core Principles of English Multiliteracies Education

EME is guided by six interconnected principles that redefine literacy for Indian classrooms:

1. **Multimodal Meaning-Making:** Recognises that literacy involves not only linguistic forms but also visual, auditory, spatial, and gestural modes. Students engage in both interpretation and production across these modes to prepare for real-world communication and expressive fluency.
2. **Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness:** Begins with learners' identities and traditions, treating home literacies as valid starting points rather than obstacles to "standard" English instruction. This promotes epistemic inclusion and a decolonising orientation to pedagogy.
3. **Multilingualism and Translanguaging:** Treats all linguistic resources as assets. Learners use their full repertoires to explore texts, articulate ideas, and construct meaning. Translanguaging supports higher-order thinking, metalinguistic awareness, and validates identity expression. EME recognises language use as fluid and strategic, shaped by learners' ability to reflect critically on linguistic hierarchies and shifts.
4. **Multidisciplinarity and Interconnected Knowledge:** Connects English instruction to broader domains such as the arts, ecology, social studies, and local history. This enables

contextual, interdisciplinary learning grounded in lived experience and place-based knowledge.

5. **Critical and Situated Literacy:** Positions literacy as a political act. Learners critically examine how texts represent power, culture, and ideology. For instance, they might analyse local signage, folk media, or advertisements to explore how English and indigenous languages interact in public discourse.
6. **Equity and Empowerment:** Rejects deficit models and cultivates student agency. EME builds self-worth and ensures that every learner—regardless of language background or digital access—can engage meaningfully with English. These capacities are developed not just digitally but through culturally embedded practices such as oral debates, storytelling circles, revoiced performances, and dramatized retellings.
7. **Ethical and Relational Pedagogy:** Values respectful, participatory, and context-sensitive approaches to teaching. Learners engage with cultural forms not merely as content but as living epistemic inheritances, requiring pedagogies grounded in witnessing, co-presence, and interpretive humility. This principle challenges extractive modes of learning and cultivates reverence for the semiotic worlds learners inhabit.

These principles lay the foundation for English Multiliteracies Education, a transformative ESL pedagogy—one that enables learners to make meaning in English without leaving behind who they are.

Pedagogic Advantages of Culturally Familiar Semiotic Resources

The pedagogic advantages of drawing on culturally familiar semiotic resources are central to EME's emphasis on inclusive, identity-affirming English education. Drawing on learners' cultural semiotic worlds confers a range of pedagogic benefits that reflect the transformative potential of grounding literacy in learners' lived worlds:

- **Reduced Cognitive Load:** Familiar cultural content allows learners to direct cognitive effort toward language production rather than on grasping unfamiliar content.
- **Enhanced Identity and Belonging:** Validating students' traditions affirms their sense of self, builds pride, and sustains motivation.
- **Authentic Language Use:** Learners express themselves more fluently when English is used to narrate known events or describe lived artefacts.
- **Multimodal Language Development:** Engagement with storytelling, drama, art, and song supports vocabulary growth and genre fluency across expressive modes.
- **Scaffolded Translanguaging:** Students explore meanings in their home languages, then express them in English—fostering multilingual flexibility and metalinguistic awareness.
- **Empowerment and Voice:** Learners become producers of meaning, using English to articulate their worldviews rather than reproduce external texts.
- **Critical and Situated Literacy:** Engagement with semiotic resources enables reflection on ideology, representation, and power in both local and dominant texts.

- **Linguistic Equity and Innovation:** Expressing Indian experiences and idioms in English reshapes the language to reflect India's multilingual realities.
- **Alignment with NEP 2020:** These practices support NEP's emphasis on multilingualism, inclusion, and culturally responsive pedagogy—especially in low-resource or non-digital settings.

Conclusion

This paper has proposed English Multiliteracies Education (EME) as a practice-oriented, culturally grounded, and epistemically inclusive framework for English language education in India. Moving beyond the limitations of conventional ESL models and the epistemic blind spots of the original Multiliteracies Framework, EME situates English learning within learners' lived multilingual realities, cultural traditions, and semiotic repertoires. It reimagines English not as a neutral skill or colonial residue, but as a flexible, indigenizable resource capable of carrying Indian voices, values, and ways of knowing.

EME is anchored in seven interwoven principles: multimodal meaning-making, cultural and linguistic responsiveness, translanguaging, interdisciplinarity, critical literacy, learner empowerment, and ethical and relational pedagogy. Together, these principles position English learning as a socially situated, identity-affirming, and context-responsive practice that engages learners as active meaning-makers across languages, modes, and cultural forms. Drawing on Vygotskian (1978) notions of semiotic mediation, EME treats artefacts—such as oral stories, folk performances, and visual traditions—as cognitive and cultural tools that support both comprehension and expression. These resources enable learners to articulate identity, challenge dominant narratives, and participate actively in shaping English as it is used in their contexts. Aligned with the vision of NEP 2020, EME foregrounds inclusive, multilingual, and culturally sustaining pedagogies. It offers an equity-oriented alternative to subtractive English-only models by treating translanguaging as a central pedagogical strategy—one that affirms learners' home languages, deepens engagement, and enhances cognitive flexibility.

English Multiliteracies Education thus offers a transformative reimagining of English pedagogy in India—one that bridges language and culture, policy and practice, tradition and innovation. By grounding literacy in learners' lives and positioning them as agents of meaning-making, EME reframes English not merely as a subject to be mastered, but as a dynamic space for participation, critique, and belonging.

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A Study on Relevance of Critical Pedagogy in Teaching English Language and Literature at University Education in India

Rajesh. S

Abstract

The essay analyses the significance of critical pedagogy in Teaching English Language and Literature. Critical Pedagogy is a philosophical approach or method that educates and enables learners to develop their critical aptitude. Curriculum Frame works of Indian universities certainly emphasizes on developing critical aptitude of learners as a constitutional obligation. Nonetheless, the objective remains unfulfilled in its broader facets. The accomplishment of this objective demands a formidable political will of curriculum committee of a university as what methodology it adopts for teaching its students. It is observed that majority of university curriculums in India have less focussed on this aspect, especially with reference to pedagogy of English Language and Literature. Teaching English Language and Literature is only seen as an obligation to teach language. Moreover, it has remained a routine colonial activity in universities across India, which is clearly reflected in their syllabi. These universities still owe to continue to teach British and American Literatures as the whole. Whereas, World literature, Diaspora Studies, Comparative Studies and Indian Literatures in English have a flimsy presence in these syllabi. On the other hand, teaching language through the path of colonial propaganda has confined the student community to pass examinations only otherwise, it has remained an activity of rote memory. While, the obligatory aspects like developing scientific temperament or critical thinking skills have remained sporadic in this process of teaching English language and literature. Unlike the school education curriculum, the university curriculums in India probably do not accentuate a prescribed teaching methodology, instruction materials or teaching aids to teach English language and literature in the process of inculcating the values of critical and rational thinking. Therefore, the study problematizes these gaps with relevant examples or evidences and argues for the relevance of critical pedagogy in TELL.

Key Words: Banking Model of Education, Co-creators, Critical Aptitude, Critical Pedagogy, Dialogical Teaching and learning, Discourse, Facilitator, Learner, Learner Orient, TELL.

Introduction:

Critical Pedagogy is an educational philosophy that aims at bringing transformations in societal and cultural aspects of education policies. It emphasises the philosophy of developing rational and critical consciousness amongst learners. The concept has its roots connected to critical theory of Frankfurt School. But it gained its popularity in 1960's with one of its pioneer contributors Paulo Freire's publishing of *The Pedagogy of Oppressed* in the year 1968. Paulo's pivotal argument in this work is about rising political and social consciousness of liberty and freedom of oppressed or marginalized communities in learners through the pedagogy. He further argues that a curriculum's essential objective should be to critique the social and

political aspects of everyday life. In-turn this creates a better world for everyone to live. Freire calls this process as *conscientization* which has corresponding terms “consciousness rising” or “critical consciousness”. Rising critical consciousness amongst the learners enables in contesting the foundationalist ideas in the society.

Discussions from the Point of Paulo Freire’s Contributions

Interestingly Freire discusses two aspects of pedagogy, one is conforming to the method already established in the process of teaching. The other is problematizing or challenging the existing social and political issues in the society. First one he calls it as “banking model of education” because under this process of transacting curriculum, a teacher treats learners or students as empty vessels who will be filled with knowledge. The passive reception of knowledge is dangerous because learners are made mute spectators and knowledge remains unquestioned due to its classicism. This universalist attitude will further augment the disparities in the society rather than resolving them. Hence, Freire suggests that pedagogy or teaching methodology be made learner orient, where learners out of their critical consciousness becomes the co-creators of knowledge. Teaching therefore, to be understood as a *dialogic* action rather than *monologic* imposition of epistemology of knowledge. Further, it should be noticed that Freire’s arguments reflect the idea that teachers are mere facilitators to comprehend knowledge that is instructed in curriculum. The process will further enhance the critical consciousness and aptitude amongst learners to question the hegemonical ideologies that oppressing the marginalized. Inclusively Freire argues for learners-oriented pedagogy than the traditional epistemology. In simple terms learners-orient pedagogy endorses an overall personality development of an individual through rising his or her critical consciousness to think and to question.

In the later stages it is observed that the concept has engrossed *discourse* as a field of study in to its realm. Joe. L. Kincheloe and Shirely R. Steinberg have proposed to accentuate the discourse analysis as part of their contribution to expand the vastness of critical pedagogy. The championing of CDA or Critical Discourse Analysis approach by these researchers have led to development of understanding the social and political environment of people across the globe. However, the concept of discourse or CDA plays a major role in Critical Stylistics, which helps in comprehending the hidden political agendas background of political ideologies in language usage. Discourse, of course assists in perceiving the world through communication and thought process or knowledge that is constructed around an individual. According to Developmental Psychologists like Jean Piaget and Erik Erikson, a child’s overall development depends upon the environment that it is brought up. Similarly discourse theorists like Micheal Foucault argues that language and communication shape the thought process of an individual. An individual gains his or her life experiences through language system and moreover what is communicated to them. Thus, adoption of CDA theory into critical pedagogy has to be observed as a positive development in the field of study. Apart from these scholars there is another critical pedagogist by name Ira Shor, who supporters the applicability of critical pedagogy in classrooms. He strongly argues for the re-examination and re-construction of

curriculum. The process involves in relieving students from being mere objects to be active critical subjects.

Critical Analysis

Keeping these aspects in view the analysis begins with observations made with reference to application and relevance of critical pedagogy at university education in India. As discussed above critical pedagogy is inclined to invoke critical consciousness amongst learners. It is needless to say that even Indian education system inculcates the values of rational and critical thinking in students. Developing scientific temperament is a constitutional obligation under Article 51A of the eleven Fundamental Duties of Indian Constitution. These facets are also reflected in the National Curriculum Frameworks of 1975, 2005 and 2020, NCERT Framework-1988, NFSCE 2000, which accentuate on developing spirit of inquiry and rational thinking in the pupil. Spirit of inquiry helps in evolving at logical and critical thinking in a student. The spirit of inquiry is of course, not new or occidental to Indian Education system because *Tharka*, *Mimamsa*, *Sankhya*, *Yoga*, *Nyaya* and *Vaisheshika* dharshanas or the Indian system of philosophies have underscored this. Even the times of *Upanishads* have strived to foster scientific temperament in pupils through Gurukula system, *Kena*, *Prasna* and *Mandūkya* Upanishads are the best examples. *Tharka*, for instance helps in inquisitive development of logical and critical aptitude in learners about the philosophical tenets. Moreover, Gurukula system of education considered *Tharka Shāsthra* as the foundational course for learning. However, critical pedagogy does deal with philosophical questions of social and political existence of human beings through rising critical consciousness. Alike the school education system, the university education system does promote the spirit of inquiry, rational and critical thinking in its curriculum frameworks. University and Higher Education Commissions set up from time to time have recommended for inculcating values of scientific inquiry and research. For instance, University Education Commission 1949, acclaims for intellectual development and research aptitude through innovations. Kothari Commission 1964, another prominent commission on university education has advocated for imbibing the basic principles of problem solving, analytical skills, spirit of inquiry, experimentation and applying them in resolving social and environmental problems. Simultaneously, National Policies on Education have also recommended for including these values in university education.

Universities across the country have strived to incorporate values like spirit of inquiry, rational and critical thinking in their curricula. Science and humanities streams have indoctrinated these values to sufficient development in new innovations and research. This satisfactory progress in science and humanities have been accomplished through encouragement of students to think logically and critically. Nevertheless, there are exceptions to this observation because language studies have focussed less on imbibing these aspects in their curricula especially, English studies. English studies have always remained unique in university curriculum in India due to its imperialistic and historical superiority. Historically, the language's popularity begins as a political apparatus to create labour market for British in India. In the initial stages English teaching is seen as mere language teaching enabling learners

to acquire English communication for managing administrative and clerical works in British governance.

This in-turn leads to lay formidable foundation of the British empire to expand its economic, cultural and political superiority. The colonial masters manifest their plan to introduce English language through literature as one of the subjects in the schools and colleges. The process enables them to subordinate the colonized to serve the objectives of trade and commerce as well as the territorial expansionist policy. Meticulously they teach English language through literature to achieve their objectives of imperialism. At first, the target is to proselytize the elite and upper strata of the Indian society. The Anglicization process becomes successful to the fullest. This also makes the 'colonized-elite' to institute their lifestyle towards the western orientation. They see that learning English language as the symbol of social prestige and status. In the initial stages the elite communities of our country enjoy this opportunity to establish their supremacy on the "Others" (Orientals) – middle classes and poor classes. Most of these subaltern classes are peasants, labourers, and marginalized, who almost stay away from access to the English education. Eventually, the Christian missionaries come in support with the ordain of the Kingdom or royal orders from "His Majesty" to realize the plan to convert Indians to Christianity. However, missionaries fail to achieve the objective due to the diverse, sectarian, multicultural and multilingual structure of Indian society. Finally, the British East India Company achieves the task by opening English schools and colleges through introducing English Literature to teach English language. The company becomes successful in achieving both commercial and political goals of the Kingdom or the British Raj.

Gradually, teaching English language through literature developed as a progressive act. Also, the company introduced many reforms in the later stages which led to social, political, economic and cultural transformations in India. As the years rolled down the British decided to open educational institutions for all the communities. Alongside, this also created capable new administrators and clerks in the government offices, job stability and additional benefits created attraction towards public employment. People mustered confidence and inspiration through learning English language. This process promised them sufficient living standards but they also developed blind adoration and reverence towards the colonizer as the savior. As a result, Calcutta, Madras and Bombay became the hub of English education. The concurrent passage of the various statutes and enactments strengthened the foundation of teaching English through literature in India. For instance, Thomas Macaulay's "Minutes on English Education – 1834", "Bentinck's Resolution- 1835", "Woods Dispatch- 1854", "Hunter Commission- 1917", and finally the "Wardha Scheme of Education" established strong political grip on Indian Education. All these events ensured that Macaulay's dream come true by suppressing Oriental and regional languages, who once said that the whole lot of Indian literature was compared to vague in comparison with single book of the literature of the west. This can be cited from the words of Thomas Macaulay himself:

The question now before us is simply whether, when it is our power to teach this language, we shall teach language in which, by universal confession, there are no books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own.....
(Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 492)

The above presented analysis is just a worm's eye view of the rationale behind colonial past of the introducing of English language and literature. The post – independent Indian government also agrees to prolong English language as one of the official mediums of communication for the next fifteen years. As the decades passes on, the policy happens to continue till date. Not only at the administrative level, but also the educational institutions are seen perpetuating with teaching English language through literature. Though country is free and independent from colonization, it still continues to be colonized especially, with regard to English education system. The post- colonial writers and thinkers have also contested these colonial ideas. For instance, Gauri Viswanathan, presents the clear objectives behind the introduction of English in India, she says that:

My argument is that literary study gained enormous cultural strength through its development in a period of territorial expansion and conquest....” (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 492).

Vishwanathan's arguments have strong reason to agree with because historically English language introduction could accomplish colonial motives till independence. After independence the language continued as a requirement of the day for official management. Nonetheless after embracing the Liberalist and Neo-Liberalist economic policies in seventies, eighties, nineties and in millennium, English language learning once again gains popularity in the school and university education as the IT companies, MNCs and BPOs started booming in India. Still, these three decades have seen English language as only a means to get jobs in companies, undoubtedly even today this condition remains the same. UG and PG pedagogy of “English Departments” of universities across the country is the best example for this.

Comparative Observations on Pedagogies of Select Central Universities of India

Comparative observation of pedagogies of these universities provides insights into the following observations. Firstly, there is deep confusion that whether English is a language or a whole study or only a literature. Some prestigious public universities like JNU have developed this department as a Centre for English Studies, which remains very inclusive because the pedagogy comprises of English literatures, semiotics, linguistics and language philosophy, which provides space for rational and critical thinking of the students. Whereas, another prestigious university like Banaras Hindu University, Delhi University and AMU funded by Central Government of India or Bangalore and Madras Universities funded by the state governments have named it as Department of English. But, naming it Department of English has problems revolving around because of obsolete and draconian pedagogy that the department follows. The latter mentioned universities for instance, still provide major importance to British Literature and American Literature, while flimsy significance is given to other literatures. In addition, linguistic and language aspects are very meagre in their pedagogies. These universities have only prolonged the colonial obligation or aesthetic objective of teaching literature and language, and have partially failed to develop rational or

critical consciousness in learners. These curricula can fulfil summative and examination objectives only.

Case-Study

Critical pedagogy, actually should have been a tool to develop critical aptitude in learners in teaching English language and literature. English is no more a language study rather, it is a literature, theory and life lessons to develop personality, self-consciousness, and critical aptitude. Personality and consciousness can be developed through the process of questioning or spirit of inquiry with critical pedagogy alone. In teaching English language and literature, critical pedagogy assists in analysing crucial problems involved in stumbling of imbibing critical and rational thinking process. This is discussed below in detail:

1. The weightage of the curriculum as discussed above, most of the universities have flimsy curricula to teach English language and literature. British and American literatures alone cannot be English literature. Teaching basic phonetics can only fulfil teaching basic linguistics. These curriculum aspects can only fulfil the goals of summative assessment. For instance, Banaras Hindu University and Delhi University have given 75% weightage to British Literature, Indian Literatures in English has scope of 5%, World Literatures have gained 5% significance, language and linguistics constitute 5% of the curriculum, remaining 10% goes to literary criticism and theory. It has to be said that the curricula of teaching English language and literature of these universities can only help students to get degree certificate. But actually, they have failed to develop their critical consciousness and personality. Whereas, the JNU has enabled a positive scope for developing critical aptitude and spirit of enquiry in learners through its meticulous and vast constructed pedagogy. Each component of the syllabus specifies the objectives behind them for example, in Literary Criticism and Theory part, there is a sub-chapter called Philosophy of Literature (ES 473E). Delhi University syllabus does not mention anything as such, the chapter on Literary Criticism paper directly begins with Plato and in second part with I.A. Richard's. On the other hand, BHU syllabus has Bharatha Muni's *Natyashastra* as the first excerpt in Literary Criticism, in the second part it begins with Ferdinand de Saussure. Both these university syllabus does not provide any scope for teaching criticism from the philosophical point of developing intellect or critical consciousness, rather they fulfil the specific objective to pass examination. That's why Paulo Freire call this process as "Banking Model of Education" or "Piggy Bank Model of Education", where education has become the process of filling information or providing knowledge. Passive reception of knowledge is always dangerous because the spirit of inquiry arrested and confined to particular thought process alone in the students. Systematically this leads to intellectual drain, therefore, *Tharka* or logic has to be taught first in criticism without which criticism loses its meaning, logic and educational philosophy are inseparable. *Student oriented* or *student centric* teaching of language and literature can always enable students or learners to develop their intellect and thinking capacities. This is what should remain the true objective of education, instead education should not become money minting agency. Neo-Liberalist and Libertarian economic policies have of course turned education in to a capital market, due to which there is a

compulsion on learners to learn the curriculum by heart for passing exams and to get employment. This is nothing but continuing the purpose of colonial goals, also the system is creating slaves to capitalists and not intellectuals. English is still seen as a product to be consumed rather than considering it as one of the paths to develop consciousness and persona. Philosophical learning of any subject or discipline can enable a student to develop his or her thinking capabilities. The philosophical or critical learning fulfil the objectives of constitutional obligations. In addition, there is no requirement to teach every minute information of literature, philosophical foundations in teaching can certainly promote inquisitiveness in learners, which provoke the spirit of inquiry and rational thinking. This spirit helps learner to explore other nuances in literature apart from what they learn from curriculum. Only critical pedagogy which is part of educational philosophy alone can accomplish this objective.

2. Curriculums of these universities on the other hand, have their own restrictions. As discussed above their curricula provide more weightage to British and American literatures, other literatures like African, Canadian, Brazilian, South American, Australian and Indian literatures are found insubstantial. Language and linguistics, critical and literary theories are insufficient. For instance, very less preference is given to post-colonial theories, Delhi University syllabus has just given 0.99% of significance by including only Homi K. Bhabha. The critical theoretical aspects like New- Historicism, Practical Criticism, Readers Response Theory, Feminist theories, Poststructuralist theories, Psychoanalysis, Cultural theories, Stylistic theories, Semiotics, Discourse theories, Film Criticism and psychological theories should have certainly gained enormous significance, but only their contours are sporadically present in these syllabi. The syllabi do not speak about educational philosophy and pedagogical methods that they intend to follow. Educational philosophy at Primary and Secondary educational curricula in India have a clear direction to advance the critical aptitude and rational thinking in the learners. Nonetheless, at university or higher education levels despite having clear directions from UGC, RUSA and other higher education policy agencies the universities are almost ignoring to imbibe them in their curricula, especially when it comes to language curriculum. This is prolonged due to prominence of teacher-centric methodologies still adopted in universities, particularly the “English Departments”. It is observed that some teaching fraternity of “English Departments” do not show their enthusiasm to adopt critical pedagogy to teach English, they still show their desire to continue with teacher-centric methods. Lecture method, one of the teacher centric methods lays absolute emphasis on content control by teachers. Controlling content will only make teacher a dictator and not a facilitator of information or knowledge. Dictator-teacher can only impose his or her ideology on learners, without providing them a chance to re-think or develop their consciousness. Further, this enables in finishing the task of syllabus completion and passing exams. In-turn, this has only led to declination in Gross Enrolment Ratio at colleges and universities. According to recent Report updated by Ministry of Education, Government of India and *THINKIMPACT* analysis College and University Drop-Outs percentage ration has increased from 24.5% in 2014-2015 to 32.9% specifically with reference to public universities in India. According to this *THINKIMPACT* a report published on 1st November 2024, highlights some of the major reasons for college or university drop-outs, which are given below

- 13% of the students find it difficult to adjust to the social environment of the colleges.
- 28% of the students drop their college education due to academic disqualification and failure to meet the established academic necessities.
- 3% of the students drop out because of emotional, mental and psychological issues.

In consolidation, the report tries to underscore the major drawbacks and limitations of our education system to cope up with the changing trends. It is pathetic to note that university education particularly, public universities have gone unsuccessful to build confidence and hope in students. The reason is the nostalgia towards obsolete teaching methodologies and failure to employ critical pedagogies based on philosophical and logical learning system. Universities that survive on the tax money of people should answer as why the drop out numbers are increasing gradually; this is a sheer violation of constitutional obligations. Three percent of students are leaving colleges without completing their degrees because of emotional and mental stress according to the report. Psychological imbalances and mal adjustment to social environment of colleges, question the authenticity and accommodativeness, of pedagogies and teachers involved in the process of teaching. Imposition of knowledge and ideologies will definitely create mental stress in students to adapt themselves to teacher's thought process. Students in this process of learning will either pass the examinations or discontinue studies without bearing emotional and psychological stress. It is also pathetic to observe that "English Departments" across the country have no dispositions to conduct diagnostic tests and formative assessments or at least unit tests after completing each unit. Teachers who draw lakhs of salaries gobbling on public money have no concerns for social contribution or social transformations through imparting their intellectual capacities to students. It is a time that they come out of their sacrosanct or narcissist personality and cater to the needs of the student community. Again, imparting a teacher's intellectual capacities does not mean he or she becomes a charlatan, but to provide freedom and liberty to students. Students should be allowed to think freely beyond the set boundaries of curriculum, this alone can contribute to develop critical consciousness as said by Paulo Freire.

Comparative Assessment of Critical Pedagogy and Digital Humanities in the West and in India:

As discussed previously critical pedagogy is a western model of educational philosophy. It has gained its popularity at school education in the west. Many critical educators in the west have applied this philosophical concept at schools to develop critical consciousness amongst students. Patricia H. Hinchey, a critical educator in her seminal work *Becoming a Critical Educator*, emphasises to apply critical pedagogy from the point of "Other" children. Other children, she refers to non-white or coloured children of America, who hail from poor families of United States. Moreover, she emphasises that the elite American children must understand the economic, social and political disparities that others are facing in America. Therefore, she advocates for critical pedagogy and critical methods of teaching to create awareness about existence of others in America. Further, she insists teachers must be critical educators to train their students into critical pedagogy.

Liam Kane, in the essay “Community Development: Learning from Popular Education in Latin America” (2010), observes that Freire’s contributions to critical pedagogy are immeasurably influential on Latin American education system. The essay acknowledges critical pedagogy for its influence on social movements not only in Latin America but also in Scotland, Edinburgh and Glasgow. The pedagogy has overall enabled the participatory community development. Gerri Kirkwood and Colin Kirkwood in *Living Adult Education: Freire in Scotland* (2011), have observed that Freire’s inspiration has enabled the establishment of ALP or Adult Learning Project in Edinburgh, to provide inexpensive parochial learning opportunities with the support of local teachers’ network. Freire’s major advocates in North America like Henry Giroux, Peter McLaren and others have revolutionized Freire’s concept across the country. They mainly emphasise the problems of social justice that are prevailing in United States of America since the ages. Thus, they argue that there is an urgent need to reform American education system through incorporating critical pedagogy. Even South Africa is not free from Freire’s ideas because Black Consciousness Movement, United Democratic Front and Abahlali base Mjondolo movements are greatly influenced. Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research in its newsletter published on 9th November, 2020 observes that as a result of these struggles today there is a Paulo Freire Project at University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg. With the World Bank’s support Philippines and Papua New Guinea have tried to spread the Paulo Freire’s project to another twenty-four countries. Moreover, these Catholic countries have tried to absorb Paulo Freire’s ideas with *Christian Socialism*, which considers capitalism as a sin caused by idolators. However, Freire’s egalitarian ideas have spread widely across the west by establishing Freire’s projects and institutes. Freire’s ideas of freedom, equality and social justice have fused together as critical pedagogy.

Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy has not directly reflected on Indian education system but since independence all the education commissions, committees, policies and projects have obliquely or directly mentioned about developing scientific temperament and critical thinking skills in learners. The Constitution of India has clearly mentioned about right to education as one of the basic fundamental rights and 42nd Amendment Act incorporated scientific temperament and humanism as one of the basic fundamental duties of a citizen. The ideas of liberty, equality and justice are already cherished in the preamble of the constitution, but materialization of these principles have not come true to the larger extent. Institutions are striving their best to manifest these ideas to full-fledge development but universities across India have no political will to realize these constitutional obligations. The drop-out rate is increasing year by year and GER is gradually declining in higher education institutions. Insensitive teaching environment that is existing in these universities are solely responsible for this situation. Teachers have no inclination to reform their pedagogical and curriculum structures, particularly the “English Departments”. The pedagogies that these universities have developed are not fulfilling the above-mentioned constitutional obligations. Teaching and learning process has only become a rote-memory activity and training the students to clear degree and NET exams. After clearing NET exams these are the teachers who are recruited to teach the forthcoming generations, retrospectively this creates “Banking Model of Education”. This Model can only create passive receptors of knowledge, instead of being critical thinkers. Therefore, co-creation of knowledge or curriculum by both teacher and student alone can assist

in developing critical consciousness. Freire strongly believe in dialogical teaching in bring social transformations.

Conclusion

However, it should be noted that Freire does not oppose teacher's right to academic and administrative control. His only argument is that while practicing critical pedagogy both teachers and students become *co-creators* of knowledge. Knowledge is no more a passive imposition rather otherwise, it a reciprocative transaction. Teacher in this process also becomes a learner from his student, they both to gather explore new ideas and innovations in their field of study. Learners can become co-creators only when they are allowed to think freely on topics that are taken for discussion. In this process teacher should remain neutral and facilitate or transact the text without ideological bias or creating ideological fear. In turn, this comforts a student that his or her freedom has been appreciated in learning process and confidence is built in them to develop belongingness to their educational and social environment. Through this process of emancipative learning Gross Enrolment Ratio will progressively shoot up and this will enable in achieving constitutional obligations of developing spirit of inquiry. Moreover, the progression in intellectual capacities leads to social and economic development of the country.

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