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Dear Readers & Contributors,

Writing a research article requires the spirit of enquiry, application of a concept and deduce the results. I believe it is a lifelong exercise for learning. From the teetering steps of young academic writers to the confident strides of seasoned academia, this issue is a mix of both and all the spectrum in between. We at IJELLS, appreciate a genuine attempt of research writing and would like to encourage it.

With the CBCS pattern and most of the MA (English) programmes having 'Project Work', it provides the teacher an opportunity to initiate the students towards academic writing, research and publishing. IJELLS encourages young writers.

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~Creative Writing in English ~

Widaiyel

SGS Sisodia

Translated from Hindi into English by Mahabir Prasad Yadav



The sea was not at peace during that night of Kathpadi. Breath of the wind was heavy and the raging waves were coming, colliding and clashing with the seashore and then returning back as if striving hard to communicate some deep anguish to someone, but there seemed none to listen to them and perceive their pains. The thick layers of the clouds in the overcast sky neither rained properly nor cleared it out completely, as if some grief-stricken human being who wails and laments inwardly, but he does not shed tears.

Women of the village known as ‘Meenavli’ called such a night ‘Widaiyel.’ Such a night when the fishermen have gone and ventured into the sea, but there is no surety of their coming back to their respective homes.

Among those women was one called Amma Muthulakshmi. Not of fair complexion, but her eyes were so deep as if they had depth of the sea. Her age was registered in her crisscross wrinkles, but the flames of her waiting junctures still flickered in the earthen-oil-lamp of her courtyard. When the earthen-oil-lamp gave repeated indications of about to being extinguished or put off, she covered it with the *Pallu* of her saree, as if she was trying to safeguard her son against the buffets of the storms. Her youngest son, Kaaylam was still combatting with the sea. The rest of her other two sons went away and had by now settled near by the shores. One of them was working in a hotel at Madurai and the other did printings of the election banners.

But, Kaaylam, in his old boat ‘Widaiyel’, he was still conversing with the sea during that stormy night. That night, the thunder and lightning continued with awful growling in the sky. As the winds grew swifter, the sea waves became more and more obstinate.

The first ray of the morning came oozing and exuding from the clouds, but there was some kind of restlessness in the village. Rest of all the boats had returned, but only ‘Widaiyel’ did not or rather could not come back by then.

The elderly Thatha Manikam said,

“Whomsoever the sea clutches and stops, even if he comes back, he does not remain as he had gone.”

Amma Muthulakshmi said nothing. The earthen-oil-lamp was still lit up. On the third day, distant in the sea, a blue broken dingy was found floating in the water. Its string was burnt at the other end. The village folks said,

“Amma, you should consider and conclude that, this is now the only answer of the Sea-God.”

But, Amma Muthulakshmi retorted,

“The day I get the answer, I will myself absolutely extinguish this earthen-oil-lamp.”

On the other end, in the womb of the sea, amidst the salt and water, in the darkness, amidst awful emptiness, Kaaylam continued floating and drowning and then, again proceeded ahead floating on the torrents of that sea water. Something began to burn inside him. His breaths went dissolving with the salt. He wanted to cough but his lungs were filled with the salty water of the sea.

He continued combatting with the waves so long as courage remained within the spirit of his self. Then a humungous high wave took him and thrashed his body on the land of the stones, so heavily that he lost consciousness at once.

Who knows how much time passed? When he regained his consciousness, he found himself lying in the cracks amongst the rocks. The air inside him was damp, the water was dripping from the above, and at some distance, a girl was sitting over there. She might have been of ten years: wet, silent, absolutely exhausted, yet alive. Her eyes had no questions. No language, but everything was said.

Kaaylam did not ask that girl to tell her name. He began to call her by the name of ‘Widaiyel,’ the reply of which was sent back to him by the sea.

Both of them dwelt on that rock for several days. Sometimes, they would dry the wet woods, roasted fish, and though tasteless, but they would eat them with the objective of their sustenance and survival. Just like that, randomly for no reasons for a while, without speaking, sometimes, they would keep drawing figures and shapes on the sands. The girl conversed in sign language.

She would make three waves in the air, sometimes, she would draw a small house on the sands, and then, placing both her hands on her chest, she would keep smiling all the while. Kaaylam now needed no words to understand.

One day, some fishermen happened to notice them, they rescued and retrieved them out of the sea. When they returned, it seemed as if the air of the village ceased for some moments. The village folks saw that Kaaylam is still alive, but there is a strange girl with him, who can neither speak nor hear. A sense of wonder, suspicion, traditions, the cult and customary practices, conventions and conversations began to swim in the air.

Kaaylam remained calm and composed, the girl more than him. But Amma Muthulakshmi called them inside and silently said,

“Whatever the sea returns, we must cheerfully and frankly accept it all with thanks and open-mindedness.”

The whisperings began in the huts of the village. The breath of connivance and conspiracy began to float and flow in every hut and wall. The village urchins called her “the Fish of Signs and Symbols,” but the girl would keep smiling, every day, she would continue drawing and sketching something new in the sands.

Kaaylam again began to make a new boat with the same name: 'Widaiyel.' The girl assisted him in making new boat. Sometimes, she gave him woods, and sometimes, she just made signs and symbols in the air. One day, she made a wave and a small house with her fingers on Kaaylam's palm. Kaaylam bent his head down and said,

"Yes, I have just understood it all."

Then one night, the oldest of all the boats in the village caught fire and burnt. Therefore, the air of suspicion arose again. This girl has done something. She was held in dock again and again as she did not belong to their caste and community and they knew naught of from where Kaaylam had ushered her here.

One day, Panchayat meeting was duly convened by the village folks. The girl again raised up her hands in the air. She made a wall, and then, she added to that a rising Sun. Nobody said anything, but the air had changed. Thatha Velayudham said,

"If without narrating, somebody is able to predict from where the light will emit, then he doesn't have the fault, the actual fault lies in our vision."

The Panchayat concluded, "This girl doesn't need a name, her presence itself is her identity."

Now, nobody asks anything in Kathpadi. The girl wakes up early in the morning, she lights up the stoves, she cleans the courtyard, every day, she makes something in the sands—a boat, a bird, a house. Whenever, Kaaylam gets tired or he feels weary and exhausted, 'Widaiyel' would look at him, with both her hands joined and folded, she comes to him and sits nearby.

The earthen-oil-lamp is still lit up. Amma Muthulakshmi still tends the wick of the earthen-oil-lamp each night, because she has grasped it all very well that the answer sometimes returns, but it just doesn't speak.

Glossary

Pallu – The part of a saree worn over the shoulder
 Panchayat – Appointed group of elders of a community
 Amma - Mother
 Thatha - Grandfather

The Translator's Notes

"Widaiyel" is a short story written in Hindi by the author S. G. S. Sisodia and is contained in his book titled as *Maun Mein Tum* which is a collection of stories written by him in Hindi reflecting the life of persons with disabilities. The author Shri Gopal Singh Sisodia himself is a person with visual disability who has been successful in his life despite overcoming various odds of society imposed on the ground of his visual impairment. Shri Gopal Singh Sisodia (S.G.S. Sisodia) as he is known and called popularly was born on July 15 1970. He joined employment with the Government of Delhi in the year 1994.

He is very well educated with his master's degree in Hindi and he is presently working as Deputy Director in the headquarters of the Department of Education Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi. Despite his total visual disability, Sisodia has made significant contribution in Indian disability literature by writing such books in Hindi as "Maun Mein Tum," "Wapsi," "Khalish," "Premanjali," "Uski Kahani," "Vah" (dealing with third gender /

or trans gender discourse,)" "Chubhan," "Kasak," and "Aahat" etc. Some University students have written research papers and some are still doing Ph.D. on the Indian literature that he has contributed.

'Meenavar' is a caste and community of fishermen dwelling on the seashore in Tamil Nadu. Their life is associated with the water, not only for their sustenance and survival, but for devotion, dedication, fright, attachment, traditions, cult and customary practices as well which are structured and well woven with the fabrics of their social and traditional community life. The word 'Meenavar' is actually the portmanteau of 'Meen' meaning 'Fish' and 'var' meaning 'folks' or 'Masses' in Tamil. Thus, 'Meenavar' is a caste or community associated with the fish or fishermen. These fishermen consider the sea not only as a waterbody, but the sea for them is mother, a Goddess, a preserver as well as a castigating penal-power. Before going into sea, the fishermen perform special rites of worshipping the sea by breaking the coconuts in its honour and veneration, and the fisherwomen 'Meenavali' light up the earthen-oil-lamp during the nights and offer special prayers and supplications for their safe return to their respective homes.

In the community of these fishermen, that night is called 'widaiyel' in which they have gone and ventured into the sea and when there is no certainty of their returning to their respective homes. For women, every juncture of that night is filled with constant prayers and seemingly endless waiting. They believe that the typhoon comes if the sea is in rage. For the appeasement and persuasion of the sea to be calm, the fishermen offer flowers, coconuts and sweets. In certain other communities of the fishermen, there is a custom of begging pardon before catching and killing the fishes, which reflects their human emotions and some kind of balance in nature for their status and peaceful coexistence.

Even till today, their folktales are filled with the stories of goddesses, sea-monsters, and invisible divine powers, which are still vivid and alive in the customary practices and traditions like diluted sweets for the next several generations and their posterities to come. The author S.G.S. Sisodia's objective of writing his story on such subject matter, as he has admitted and declared in his preface, is not merely to sketch the images and pictures of a particular caste and community of the fisher folks, but rather, his motive is to reveal those invisible feelings and emotions, connections, devotions and dedications, intimacies, frights and attachments, which clearly tell us that the traditions are not merely the formal rites or mere formalities; but in human communities, they are the resources and repositories of keeping alive the doubts and suspicions, human emotions, intimacies, the ardent memories of profound love and close attachments.

The customs and traditions of these fisher folks also teach us that the trust and terror, the faiths and frights between human beings and nature can be lived and felt in the beautiful and yet complex language the subtlety of which must be perceived and grasped. In the backdrop of this short story, the necessity is to make an endeavor to understand that the expression 'Widaiyel' here in the context of this short story has a pun on it as it does not have only one meaning, but rather it has three meanings in it because it means the terrible night in which the fishermen have gone and ventured into the stormy sea with the least possibility or no certainty of their coming back; it is the name of the dingy or the small boat in which Kaaylam converses with the sea and tries his luck for livelihood, sustenance and survival, and 'Widaiyel' is also the name as given to the discarded disabled girl who is speech and hearing impaired and who has been rescued and retrieved to the seashore and then to the village of Kaaylam along with him in his dingy the other end strings of which were burnt before they were hurled in the cracks of the rocks.

Thus, last but not the least, this short story has another very important aspect of literature that invites our attention and paves the way for further research and discussion in literature; and that very significant aspect is actually the reflections and representations of

disabilities in Indian literature in English translation. This short story not only deals with the strife of Kaaylam's life but it also deals with and reflects the life of a girl with disability who perhaps was discarded into the sea on the ground of her severe disability of speech and hearing impairment or being deaf and dumb girl which are though offensive expressions for disabled persons but the people in the society generally do use these expressions without exercising due diligence that the disabled would be feeling hurt and humiliated. Both the original source language text as well as the target language text of this story reflect how a strange disabled girl carves her niche in the society and is able to bring changes in public attitude. This disabled girl once discarded to drown and die, dissolved and be lost forever in the sea, is actually thrown back by the Nature symbolized by the sea to the human world again and the same society where she faced rejections, disgrace, insults and humiliations. But this time too, she is first regarded and considered as a strange witch because of whom the villagers are undergoing toils and troubles symbolized by the old boat being burnt. However, with the help of the sign language that she knows to use well, this disabled girl brings the uneducated village folks into light of knowledge and wisdom by drawing the rising Sun. The sign language operates as a boon for her. It is sensitivity of Kaaylam and his mother because of which she is now reasonably accommodated in their home and accepted as an important family member gifted and endowed to them by the Nature symbolized by the sea. In nutshell, this aspect of the story has undoubtedly fascinated me most to translate from its Source Language Hindi into the Target Language English.

The Ramayana and the Mahabharata – A Brief Overview

Manoj Kumar Singh

The Ramayana contains many important characters in various deeds. They are Ravana, Indrajit Jatayu, Kumbhakarna, Vibhishana, Vali, Manthara, Prahasta, Angada, Mandodari, Akshayakumar, Sulochana, Nala, Sushena and others.

The Ramayana is the most popular epic which is traditionally divided into seven Kandas. These are Bala Kanda, Ayodhya Kanda, Aryana Kanda, Kishkindha Kanda, Sundara Kanda, Yuddha Kanda and Uttara Kanda. Each Kanda, in a chronological order, comes to deal with a particular period of Rama's life. The Bala Kanda, as the name is, is a detailed study of the childhood days of Rama and His brothers. The latter part of this Kanda also gives an account of the marriage of Rama to Sita, Lakshmana to Mandavi, Bharata to Urmila and Shatrughna to Shrutakriti as well. Ayodhya Kanda has its significance on account of the exile of Rama. When He leaves Ayodhya, Sita and Lakshmana also leave the Nagri in disguise of a hermit accompanied by the charioteer named Sumanta.

On the assurance of Rama, Sumanta brings them to the bank of Ganges where Nishadraj, Rama's Bal Sakha, greeted them. The scenario of their journey in the forest is truly tragic. Kevat, the boatman, washes His feet and takes them across the Ganga to Prayag where they meet the sages, Bhardwaj and Valmiki. Rama is advised to stay in Chitrakoot by Valmiki. In the meantime, Dasharatha breathes his last. Now Ayodhya is a kingdom without a king. Thus, on the advice of Rishi Bhardwaj, Bharata and Shatrughna come to Chitrakoot to find Rama but in vain. Rama does not violate His promise and stays there as well.

The chapter of Aranya Kanda covers Sita's abduction by Ravana, the king of demons. This Kanda describes the scene of the place Panchvati where Rama, Sita and Lakshmana build a cottage to stay there. Here Khara, Ravana's cousin and Suparnakha's brother tries to attack on Rama and Lakshmana because Lakshmana has ripped off the nose and ears of Suparnakha.

This Kanda has its significance on account of the Lakshmana Rekha in the Hindu mythology. The scene, when Sita is captured by Ravana after crossing the Lakshmana Rekha drawn out by Lakshmana for her protection, attracts the attention of the readers to know the aftermath of the story. Ravana forces Sita to marry him but she denies over and over again telling him that she is ever loyal to Rama. This event makes Rama and Lakshmana aggressive to find out Sita soon. The next chapter of the Ramayana is Kishkindha Kand in which there is a meeting of Lord Rama and Hanumana. The enmity between Bali and Sugriva, two Vanaras, with Jamvanta and Hanumana, has been clearly shown during Rama's effort to search Sita. In the meantime, Sugriva hides in the Rishyamuka Parvata but Hanumana, by virtue of his power, reveals the secrecy and takes Rama and Lakshmana to Sugriva. Now Sugriva promises Rama to bring back Sita soon. Now Rama helps Sugriva to kill his elder brother Bali and thereafter crowns him as the king of Kishkindha. Sugriva, in return, also helps Rama to send his troops in search of Sita. As a proof of His messenger, Rama gives his ring to Hanumana to show it to Sita.

Then starts the Sundara Kanda. 'Sundara' is the name of Hanumana by his mother Anjana and sage Valmiki. The entire story of this part presents the adventurous roles of Hanumana. Crossing all the corners of the country, Hanumana reaches Sri Lanka and meets Sita as well. He searches every palace and finds several warriors. Then he enters into Ravana's palace where he doesn't see Sita. When he meets Vibhishana and requests him to see Sita, Vibhishana locates him towards Ashok Vatika where Sita is staying. He identifies himself as the messenger of Lord Rama by giving the ring to Sita.

He wants to take her to Rama but she says Rama must come to rescue her. She takes a jewel and gives it to Hanumana as a proof that the two had met. Observing the meeting of Hanumana and Sita, Ravana does not digest the dilemma. He calls his army to set fire over Hanumana's tail and it happens. In retaliation, Hanumana sets fire to the entire city of Sri Lanka and comes back to Rama

and shares the entire story thoroughly. Now starts the fight between Rama and Ravana and so this Kanda is known as Yuddha Kanda.

In this Kanda, a great Setu bridge is built across the sea using stones that float on water. On each stone, the name of Rama is engraved. Rama with His great army crosses over to Lanka. Here Rama is joined by Vibhushna, Ravana's brother. It is seen that Lakshmana is injured by Indrajit. Hanumana carries an entire Mount Sumeru to Lanka to cure Lakshmana.

The war ends when Rama kills Ravana and crowns Vibhushna on the throne of Lanka. Then an ordeal is performed by Sita to prove her purity. At the end of the Yuddha Kanda, Rama's exile is also completed and thus, He returns to Ayodhya. The people of Ayodhya welcome Him with lights and celebrations. In this celebration, Bharata brings Rama's wooden sandals and places them below the feet of Rama. All of them touch the feet of Rishi Vashishta on arriving in Ayodhya. Rama's coronation takes place with great enthusiasm and He is crowned the King of Ayodhya.

The last part of the book the Ramayana is Uttara Kanda. Here Sita is banished by Rama under the hermitage of the Sage Valmiki. Sita is pregnant. She gives birth to two children in the forest. They are Lava and Kusha who grow under the guidance of Valmiki. Both Lava and Kusha sing a song about Sita that is tragic and affects Rama badly. Sita, seeing the situation, vanishes into mother Earth. Rama feels later that Lava and Kusha are His own children.

Thus, the Ramayana is a pious and religious book written by Valmiki. Hindus worship Rama as God in their mythology.

Having known to the Ramayana, the Mahabharata is another great epic in Indian tradition which presents the story of a dynamic struggle for the throne of Hastinapur, the kingdom of the Kuru clan. In fact, it expresses the fight fought between two families who are cousins to each other—Kauravas and Pandavas. But that was an unequal fight because the Kauravas, the son of the elder brother named Dhritarashtra, were hundred in numbers and headed by the older Duryodhana, and the Pandavas, the son of Pandu, were only five in numbers and headed by the eldest son Yudhishthira.

As a text, the Mahabharata is considered to be the war of Kurukshetra. The war of Mahabharata has several reasons. The first thing is the succession of the throne. The succession conflict begins when Yudhishthira seeks a fair share for the Pandavas- ruler of a mere five villages. When he is denied, the struggle for inheritance begins. As a result, the Kauravas are defeated by the Pandavas.

The story of Mahabharata has been divided into eighteen books. They are also known as Parvas. The first one is Adi Parva which begins with the history of Bharata's rule and continues to cover the birth of the princes of the Kuru Klan. Then comes the Sabha Parva which begins with the description of the palace and the assembly hall built by Maya in Indraprastha. Here Arjuna saved Mayasura in the forest fire of Khandwa. In order to repay the Pandavas for their kindness, Maya built a palace for Yudhishthira at Krishna's command. Yudhishthira performed the Rajsuya Yajna for the proliferation of the Pandavas' province.

In this section, Duryodhana invites the Pandavas to a game of dice in which Yudhishthira loses his property, his brothers and ultimately himself. Now comes the turn of Draupadi. He stakes Draupadi who is dragged to the court and disrobed forcibly. This scene is not tolerated by the Pandavas and thus they take an oath to avenge such an insult. They depart for Indraprastha along with Draupadi but return once again for a gambling match. At last, Yudhishthira loses everything in this match.

The next is the Vana Parva which deals with the life and journey of the Pandavas for twelve years as exile. In this part, there is a description of Nala and Damayanti, too. Then comes the Virata Parva, related to the kingdom of Virata in which the Pandavas spend one more year, that is, thirteenth year of their exile. They complete their years of exile successfully there. According to the terms of their exile, the Pandavas return and demand their half of the kingdom in the Udyoga Parva of the book, Mahabharata. But the Kauravas refuse it. That is why, the Mahabharata or Kurukshetra war starts.

In the series of Parvas, Bhishma Parva is the story of the great war and its consequences of the Pandavas and Kauravas. Here Arjuna and Bhishma fight and ultimately Bhishma dies. In the meantime, Krishna appears to praise Arjuna for his bravery. After the death of Bhishma, who was the commander-in-chief, Drona is appointed in his place but in vain. Thereafter, many warriors come for fight one after the other but the death of Abhimanyu, Arjuna's son as well as Ghatotkacha is unforgettable in the episode, Drona Parva. After Drona is deceased, Karna is appointed as the new commander-in-chief. The time passes and Karna is also killed fiercely by Arjuna. This section is known as the Karna Parva.

On the eighteenth and last day of the Kurukshetra war, Shalya is appointed as the next commander-in-chief of this war. So, this is known as Shalya Parva, where there is Krishna, it seems, the defeat of others is certain. The Pandavas along with Krishna is victorious, then comes Sauptika Parva. The war continues and few Kauravas, namely, Ashwatthama, Kripa and Kritavarman are seen still alive. Thinking to avenge the death of his father, Ashwatthama comes to the sleeping Pandavas at night. This is a very crucial moment to pass. Unleashing the weapons by Ashwatthama, all die except the Pandu brothers, Krishna, Satyaki and Draupadi. Among the Pandu brothers, Bhima presents Draupadi with the jewel from Ashwatthama's crown as evidence of justice having been delivered for the night massacre of the Pandava army. The Mahabharata war continues for the next episode, that is, Stri Parva which recites the pain and suffering of the women who lost their fathers, husbands and sons at last. Dhritarashtra laments for their grief over and over again. Vidura also consoles them for this loses and so, the next episode is Shanti Parva. This Parva has a lot of significance like Yudhisthira's appointment as a king, Bhishma's lessons to Dharmaraja and others. Then comes the Anushasana Parva which is replete with law and dharma, duties and rights. This Parva depicts the death of Bhishma and his final rites performed by the Pandavas. Now starts horse sacrifice, named as Ashwamedhika Parva. Yudhisthira, the new ruler of the kingdom performs the Ashvamedha Yajna on the suggestion of Vyasa and Krishna. But the war depletes the treasury of the kingdom and becomes empty. Krishna suggests mining the gold in Himavat, following it, the Yajna is performed.

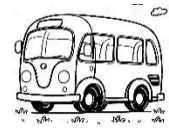
In Ashram Vashika Parva, there is a description of the fifteen years of the rule of Yudhisthira after the Kurukshetra war. This part also describes the next two years when Dhritarrashtra, Gandhari and Kunti live in Vyasa Muni's hermitage as monks. Thereafter starts the Mausala Parva which narrates the demise of Krishna after 36 years of the great war as well as the immersion of his kingdom of Dwarka under the sea. This part also illustrates the civil war of the Yadavas which kills many men. That's why, the Pandavas renounce their kingdom and decide to begin their last journey towards heaven.

The great journey of the Pandavas starts in Mahaprasthanika Parva. They pave the way to the Himalayas. Yudhisthira also follows them to the destination. Draupadi is the first one to die followed by the rest of the Pandavas. Only Yudhisthira makes it to Mount Sumeru. The last Parva of the Mahabharata is Swargarohana Parva which marks the arrival of Yudhisthira, on Indra's chariot, into heaven. It is Yudhisthira who visits both hell and heaven. In Sanskrit literature, Harivamsa Parva holds an important place. Thus, the Mahabharata is a great kavya as well as a literary text. It is a story of both kinship and conflict for the dynasty.



Pleasure in the Policy of Public Transportation

Srujana Kanjarla



Beginning with a joyful testimony about public bus services in Hyderabad, Telangana. When the current government paid the public bus fares for women, I was a working woman, and this decision by the higher authority gave me immense joy in availing myself of these benefits. Just before it was implemented, I was constantly looking for a way out from walking to the bus depot on foot to renew my bus pass every month. That was a struggle for me every month because the next month was right around the corner. The only concern was how to make this work effortlessly, as I could not find any alternative to it.

Besides this, all of a sudden, the public policy was announced, and I was glad that the Almighty not only removed my struggle of reaching the bus depot on foot, instead made my travel free of cost. Ever grateful for this token of kind thought, and it is an amazing experience for someone like me. It will be almost two years of walking in this unique service, which is only for women. There could be multiple different experiences while travelling in buses, but I would like to focus on one of the memory which I carry with me is that one day after my work as soon as I reached my bus stop there came a metro bus all empty, I felt like the bus was running for me alone like a local train which was running only for one school girl in Japan through which the girl was able to reach her school to pursue her education.

A few got into the bus as we were halfway through, and before we could reach our final stop suddenly the bus broke down. The bus driver checked the engine and tried to start the vehicle. After much effort, it was working; we began our journey again. It went further a few meters and gave us trouble for the second time; this is when we were asked to take another bus. We all started our march towards the nearest bus stop and sat on a bench waiting for another bus. This same bus, with its difficulties, the driver started to drive to the depot for repair. As it passed, leaving us behind, the driver showed a gentle gesture of kindness to wait there as the buses would approach soon. I smiled back and nodded in agreement. This simple act of the driver made my day special without complaining or murmuring.

When people project their kind behavior, it is an elating moment deep inside in that moment, and later too, even though one might verbalize it or not. We do not come across people like this on our way too often; rather, we get caught up in negative memories so much that we overlook these little moments of pleasure, which come our way daily. With this, I encourage the readers to look for goodness, meekness, and positivity around oneself because this is what keeps humans united and at peace with each other.

Hence, I offer my gratitude to the current ruling body on behalf of all the women who are utilizing these benefits of travelling with zero cost in public buses, irrespective of holidays or festivals. I also extend my deepest respect towards the bus drivers and conductors for their patience and kind treatment towards the passengers. The reason I am sharing this anecdote is to let you all help see the life, which is full of colour, brightness, and joy, right around us. Make sure you do not lose any instance where you get to learn, teach, and make a difference among your little crowd in the best way possible. Thank You!

Trapped

Subashree J



Living alone in a messy little apartment isn't so bad. Yes, as a single woman in her late twenties, with a heavy work load, a daughter to a mother who sends pictures of men with silver hairs and stable careers, and a cat-mom – *oh my lovely little Harley I would've gone crazy without you*, with nosy neighbors reminding about the 'biological clock' ticking on my birthday every year isn't so bad, right?

I stopped watching movies long ago; my interest shifted to horror stories. Sold my romantic novel collection on an online site for fair cash and filled my little wooden cupboard with RL Stine's ghost stories and Stephen King's scary fiction. Of course, they aren't scary at all, considering the things I lived through. I, with a strain, changed my hobbies not to think of my past, but I also cannot be in denial about my past, as my therapist told me, to move on and heal. I transformed from a fluffy teenager into a 'too-old-for-emo' woman (my mom would call me like that sometimes). But would you believe that I used to wear dark clothes most of the time – not to look edgy but to look invisible while walking on the road for my night shifts, not wanting to grab anyone's attention, particularly not to meet any man with a sharply groomed beard and with small, round, chocolate brown eyes. My mother wouldn't understand, as she would only say that he died a long time ago and that nobody's haunting me.

But I feel him in my veins, I feel him waiting outside my three-storey apartment, looking up, staring at my bedroom window, waiting for the right time to strike in. I never dared to unscreen the curtains to look outside after dark. Sometimes I feel him standing on my locked front door after 9 pm. I feel him, his gaze, penetrating through the wooden door and my pulp fiction and finally my stomach, where his gaze would spread all over, sending signals to my conscience to get under my bed and to call the cops. I feel him walking behind me on my way to take my bicycle to work. Mom says he is dead, "He overdosed Vani. They buried him in Italy." She would also tell me that it is not my fault, just to calm me. This has become our ritual every year during the month of his passing. Everyone says he's dead, but my gut says otherwise, that he is neither dead nor he forgotten me. My guts twist and turn whenever the thought of him strikes my mind, "he's still out there, Vani, waiting for you to step out". I want him both dead and not dead; I do not want to take chances with his ghost, who might turn into a monster I read about in the books. I just want him *gone*. Even if he is dead, he can still lurk around me because I can sense his wolf-like eyes glowing in the night whenever I turn back.

Twelve years of pills and consultation, but nothing has changed. I still feel how I felt on that Wednesday night twelve years before, and tonight, it just got worse. My heart is beating as if it's going to run out through my mouth and to him, to end this misery once and for all. I called my mother and she's on her way. According to her, the youngest daughter is having another panic attack, and she has to spend the rest of the night with her and take her to the hospital the next day. To her, it is the thirteenth time this year she has had to travel two hours via a rental car. But to me, this might even be the last day, the doomsday, because he is pounding on my door now, screaming my name, and I'm lying on the ground, crying, unable to breathe. I'm starting to choke myself, trying to breathe, while the monstrous pounding at the door only

makes my heart beat to rise more and more. I crawled towards my phone that slid under the sofa when I dropped it upon hearing the sudden banging at the door.

“Open the godforsaken door, Vani, or I’ll swear to God, you will regret it.” It’s funny how his voice didn’t change at all, over all these years. He should’ve damaged his voice box with all the screaming and shouting at people, with all the drugs and cigarettes, but his voice only got deeper and scarier.

I pulled my heavy and throbbing head and numb body to the bedroom while whispering prayers, *God please help me this must be a dream wake me up Mom come here soon call the police-* taking breaks to catch breath – *God please don’t let him break the door.* I felt my hair rising when he stomped his foot inside the house, smashing the door to close behind him. I’m too scared to turn my body around and look at him. I only remember a young boy with beard and chocolate brown eyes. I do not want to meet the monster he turned into.

“Vani.” He called my name bluntly; it sounded like a whisper, unlike when he was shouting while breaking in. I felt my skin freezing, and my mouth started to whimper. I pulled my legs and sat up on the floor, still facing the bedroom, staring at the porcelain flower vase immediately to the right side of the room door.

“Adhi! please Adhi! please please Adhi! I—you leave—please” my mouth struggled with words as I slowly tilted my feet to run into the door, I see his shadow immobile, seven feet away from me.

“I missed you, Vani.”

I jolted inside the bedroom, grabbed the flower vase and fell on the floor, tripped by the laptop charger. My room is dark, thank God for that. I’m unable to see his face; I only see a mass of a monstrously built body, with feathery hair enough to pull and slam his head on the wall. “Adhi, go away or I’ll, -- I’ll hit you, Adhi I will really hit you.” I stretched out my hand with a flower vase as if it were a magic wand that would teleport him to a deep ocean deeper enough to choke him to death before he swims up. He’s a national medalist for God’s sake.

He grabbed the vase from my hand and started to hit his head continuously till the vase broke into two pieces. I screamed when drops of warm liquid splattered on my hands and face. His white teeth- now bloody- are visible as the lights from the hall weakly pour into the room. He got down on his knees and grabbed my hair and pulled me forcefully. My face almost crashed into his bloody face. His forehead is cut and bleeding heavily. I feel like I am going to puke due to the strong stench. His eyes, like the ones of an intelligent predator, dig into mine in search of my soul to eat it.

I don’t even know if what stands in front of me is a ghost or a man, and it doesn’t matter since Adhi was already a monster who hides well.

“Don’t be a baby and come with me, Vani. I have a lot to show you.” He threw me on his shoulders and started walking. My vision starts to fade, as it would happen during panic attacks.

I see a flash of white light blinding my eyes.

Adhi shoves me inside his car trunk.

I hear strangers talk with terms I do not understand.

He leaves me shrunk into the darkness and the car whirrs, tossing and tumbling me.

I feel pain on my head, my left leg, spine, neck, arms, everywhere.

Pain everywhere.

Darkness again.

Ma,

Please come find me.

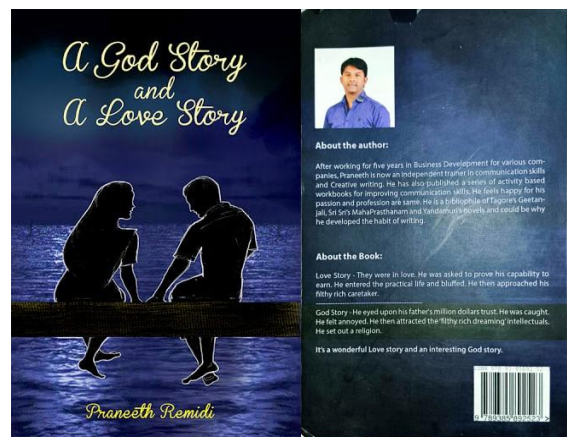
“Doctor, look at the EEG, is she dreaming?”

“We don’t know if she dreams, but her brain acts as though it might. REM activity shows up sometimes, even in chronic vegetative state patients like her. What it means, no one can say.”

“Excuse me, sir, somebody sent this patient flowers. It’s... from an Adhi. Shall I place it here?”

Book Review of Praneeth Remidi's *A God Story and A Love Story*

Vamshimohan Ledalla



Remidi, Praneeth. *A God Story and a Love Story*. Power Publishers, Apr. 2026. ISBN 978-93-85892-52-3

Genesis

During the summer vacation, my colleague, Mr D Indrasena Reddy, a mathematics teacher, visited my residence along with his nephew, Mr Praneeth, an aspiring writer, and requested me to review Praneeth's debut novel. They informed me that the book was scheduled to be launched before the press and media two days later. Prior to approaching me, they had contacted professors from a reputed university in Warangal; however, owing to prior academic commitments, the professors expressed their inability to allocate time for the review.

Recognizing the budding writer's creative potential, I took the initiative to consult an Assistant Professor from the Department of English at a well-known Government Degree College. Unfortunately, due to his own professional constraints, he too was unable to take up the task. At the earnest request of my colleague and close friend Mr Dasari Indrasena Reddy, I took on the responsibility of reviewing the printed novel. I completed a comprehensive review within one and a half days and offered constructive suggestions and editorial corrections, which I believe will be beneficial for subsequent editions of the work.

A professor from a reputed university in Warangal attended the inaugural event as the Chief Guest and also, a group of friends, relatives, and well-wishers of the budding novelist attended the launch event. On the day of the launch, I had the opportunity to speak about the salient features of the novel in my capacity as its reviewer.

Delving into the Novel

“Nishitha – With 5.5 height and appropriate weight, with fair skin and long hair, she was a reference to the beauty. The most fascinating feature was her nose. It was so perfect that if an alien should be taught on how a human being's nose looks like, one would use hers. Her lips resembled to that of a ‘Silence Please’ symbol used in libraries, hospitals etc. They were like a seedless watermelon cut and carved – carved like a bow arrowing at the sky with its string pulled a little. Her cheeks were bloated and her oily skin gave them a glossy look. The chin

was so distinguishing that it took a clear turn down after the lower lip and then an inch later, turned up flawlessly to stand out among other features. Her hair was silky with night-dominating black. All her parts synched with each other, they looked beautiful individually and collectively. Her seizing smile and commanding walk made me her glancing addict. And that was why I always addressed her stunning beauty” (Remidi, 45).

It is highly natural for a young man to describe a young woman whom he loves in this way.

This description is by the main character Vamshi Krishna about the woman whom he loves is from a fictional novel, A God Story and A Love Story written by Praneeth Remidi, a hobbyist writer who previously worked as a business developer for various MNCs.

The present novel is a series of events and life situations, challenges, entanglements that a modern young man actually encounters in his life and how he comes out of those situations of abashment.

All the twists and cataclysmic circumstances faced by the protagonist or the hero of the novel keep readers cemented to every line of the novel. All the events described gives intense feelings and the novel delineates the emotions of young man and young woman who are in love and also depicts the friends around them, finally gives a kind of sapience that comes from a real-life experience as a Good Samaritan to the main character of the novel.

Novel in nut shell

Vamshi Krishna, the protagonist, loves a woman named Nishitha, actually a neighbour of his friend Manish. She joins in a PG College and becomes their classmate and accepts the love of Vamshi Krishna. This Vamshi Krishna has a Godfather named Udhay Kumar who sponsors higher education of Vamshi Krishna on account of the sacrifice and services rendered to their family by the father of Vamshi Krishna whose name is Ganesh and this Udhay Kumar has responsibility of looking after the hero Vamshi Krishna’s higher education to keep up the promise made by his father Prabakar as a token of gratitude to the services rendered by Ganesh, the father of the main character, Vamshi Krishna. Generally, in any love episode the father of the young woman opposes the proposal of the young man, the same happens to Vamshi Krishna and he welcomes the challenge of the father of Nishitha and gets a job to earn his living. Later he gets disappointed with the organization he works and to prove himself, he hastily without pondering on pros and cons of becoming a Booni (a convert to new religion) on the persuasion of Udhayakumar, then after he feels guilt, realizes and with the advice of friend Ranadhir, and ideological support of Arjun, he leaves the organization of Booni and shuns his loyalty towards the so called Booni’s God, Hikkira and their perverted dogmas and at the end he wins the heart of the father of Nishitha and marries her and blessed with a daughter and finally joins the ‘Nipuna’, a political organization that works for the interests of the nation and Arjun was also one of the founder members. He finally lives in Milaani happily with his wife and daughter.

Analysis and Evaluation of the novel

The title of the book seems to be befitting but as a reviewer, I feel that the title should be a love story and a god story because the reader while reading will first come across the love story and then later on the God story and there after both stories gets intertwined, so to be in tune with the chronological order, the title should be a love story and a god story. Title may also likely be a love story and a religious story or briefly ‘Story of Man and a God Man’.

Any way the title given by the writer is evoking interest in the reader. The cover page design is so nice and clearly depicting the night of calmness and the waves of waters reaching the shore where a young man and young woman who are in love enjoying the moon lit night and exchanging their love by looking into each other's eyes and speaking silently.

The novelist mentions his intention behind writing this novel in the foreword, "What made me write this novel are the ironies prevailing in caste and religion. A caste has the center point as its profession which needs to be discussed, debated, imparted, and skilled upon and improvised. And all the other customs are mere. But the irony is, profession is forgotten and customs are followed. When there is no profession, there should be no caste because the circle cannot exist without a center point. In the same way, to a religion, God is the centre point and from there comes morals, ethics and values. But unlike the center point in a caste circle, God should not be doubted, discussed and debated, but only be believed and prayed. And the path guided by him should be followed, discussed, debated and improvised. But the irony is we are forgetting the path and discussing the center point which only defames it. To be born into religion is an opportunity to live in it and not a reason to compete with other religions."

Novelist meticulously carved out the character of the main characters Vamshi Krishna and Nishitha respectively.

Let us proceed with the estimate of the main characters.

Vamshi Krishna

Protagonist of the novel Vamshi Krishna is good natured, sincere, hardworking, intelligent, committed and a man with strong will power. These qualities are displayed by the character in many incidents. When Nishitha's father challenged him to earn money, he is ready to face the challenge and said "Ok uncle but why are you so mad about money?" (Remidi, 77) When Vamshi Krishna wanted to quit Booni, he made up his mind and he firmly expressed his view to Udhayanna and said, "If I can't fight an evil, I need not team up with it" (Remidi, 181), It shows his steadfastness to come out of the perverted organization Booni. Vamshi Krishna is very much attached to his family when he got time he spends with his family. (Remidi, 21) In one word we can say that Vamshi Krishna is an even minded youth with some values and tries to be self-reliant.

Nishitha

Heroine of the novel Nishitha is a beautiful young woman, good natured, humble, polite, and modest and gives high respect to her parents. She is also mirthful, jovial and friendly and she possessed a matured thinking towards the life and she is also good at her studies. When Vamshi Krishna expressed her love for the first time and waited for her response, she was not in haste to respond but she said, "I cannot say anything now." (Remidi, 43). This attitude shows her maturity of understanding and assessing the situation. When Vamshi Krishna spoke openly with her dad about their love, her father reacted violently. Then she tried her level best to pacify her father by saying, "Dad he has come to talk to you and you are over responding." (Remidi, 74)

When Vamshi Krishna realized his fault or mistake of joining the Booni and when he confessed it to Nishitha, she consoled him by saying, "You realized it, then your sin will be tolerated. And forget all that had happened. I want you to be here ASAP." (Remidi, 161) When her

husband went to Hyderabad to support the political organization NIPUNA on their marriage anniversary, she expressed her disappointment but when he said, “That’s Arjun’s call I have to respect him. Please excuse me dear.” (Remidi, 192)

She understood well and as a caring wife she worried about the future of her husband. So, we can conclude that author created a good woman and a good wife and a woman of good understanding nature and also a best life partner of Vamshi Krishna, the protagonist of the novel. All the characters portrayed in the novel are down-to-earth and we can see such persons in the present-day society. We can also note such happenings in and around the world we live in. Writer achieved success in projecting his view point in the novel through the characters like

Nishitha’s father - gave preference to caste outwardly but actually a money-minded man.

Udhay Kumar – a highly qualified educated man but for want of luxuries forsaken the religion in which he was born.

Hikkira – A filthy rich man used the words of his over joyous father Vireshbhanu, a millionaire and who uttered, ‘I gave birth to a God and the meteorite symbolized it’. And by showing the paper cuttings of his father’s words which were published in the then newspapers, this wicked rich man Hikkira declared himself as a God of a new religion Booni at a place called Skeeka, a fictitious place. Writer frequently employed the informal language that aptly suits today’s youth. Those informal words are dude, are yaar, yaar and he used abbreviation ASAP for As soon as Possible.

Style of writing

Writer wrote the novel in first person narrative style and he used vivid imagery and clear description and he employed figures of speech like personification and similes. Writer uses similes in a manner that makes us to laugh and enjoy. We can see the personification in these lines- “The clock might have had a heavy dinner; its hands were moving hard”. (Remidi, 44)

The way the protagonist suppressed his feelings when he met Udhay Kumar after years and also when he heard about the God Hikkira and he expressed his feelings appealingly by the statement, “ I arrested my tongue and laughing glands” (Remidi 81). This shows the light humorous style of writing. He uses similes wonderfully in many instances such as on to mention when he writes odd man – big face like the scary crow (Remidi 91).

In another incident, hero Vamshi Krishna says that she walked like the thickest feather floating in a denser air (Remidi 115). Writer’s creative genius is found when we go through the description of new religious cult called Booni.

Writer wrote the words like

- Hikkira – God
- Booni – Name of a religion
- Skeeka – hikkira’s abode
- Jeevari – Jeevan Parichay (7 days induction into Booni)
- Bijju – Priests (bridges between Gods and Humans)
- Bijjupee – priests who give physical training.
- Hebijju – senior most priest
- Bilal – Temple of the Booni cult
- Chillas – the books of the Booni cult

Author through the character of Arjun opened the eyes of Vamshi Krishna. Arjun calls Udhay Kumar as a 'proselytizer'. It means a person persuades others to join in a new cult. But when Vamshi Krishna talks to Udhay Kumar he uses the word 'traitor' to describe his state of situation and finally quits the Booni.

In all these conversations, writer carefully employed the appropriate words and nicely woven the events. When finally, protagonist meets the father of his beloved Nishitha, writer through the main character Vamshi Krishna points out the ironies in the caste system and the religion. The conversation between Vamshi Krishna and the father of Nishitha is quiet interesting and gives us the egalitarian approach eagerly wanted by the author.

Conclusion

Writer tried his level best to discuss the evils of the caste system and its rigidity and also clearly emphasized the sanctity and role of the religion and vehemently opposed the conversions to other religions and cited the good people from all the religions. But he would have given more emphasis on concepts related to egalitarianism than describing the new cult Booni and their process of converting the people into their cult. Of course, it is the creative genius of the writer but along with that he would have written more on the concepts of equality and humanity. Overall we can say that book is interesting to read and clearly depicts the aspirations and ideas of youth and also keeps the reader's mood elevated and follows the principle of pleasure, except while reading about some practices of the Booni cult and their perversions we may feel somewhat boring, even then we can't resist ourselves to praise the categorization or classified terminology of the writer while describing the marriage system in Booni that mentions two partners to man or woman as lifer and saver. (Remidi, 148).

Finally as a reviewer I conclude by quoting the inspirational saying of Swami Vivekananda "We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonizing the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of the, The Religion, which is oneness, so that each may choose that path that suits him best." And he said, "Let the Vedas, the Koran, the Puranas and all scriptural lumber (a heap or mass of scriptures) rest now for some time—let there be worship of the visible God of love and compassion in the country" (Vivekananda 216–217).

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~English Literature~

Percy Bysshe Shelley in Our Time

Mohammad Abas Wani, K Ragamayee & Anjali V Kumar

Abstract

Percy Bysshe Shelley remains a beloved writer, thinker, and activist of the Romantic era. He continues to be beloved as a writer and thinker. Romantic as well as the rest of the Romantic era urges social justice, individual freedom and the importance of imagination Shelley's activist spirit and imagination inspires to social movements. He inspires movements through political and environmental challenges talent to examine the human condition and the wonders of nature. He encourages self-examination. He radical thinking encourages examination of societal constructs. Mirrors the examination of. His Radical innovations of Shelley's other works innovative and use of other forms of language He remains a lyrical language. He fosters timelessness as a writer. Shelley's love is a passion to endure and inspires change. The passion is reflected to creative as well as the vision, the world better world inspires, refreshing and the rest is aligned as is done previously.

Keywords: Romantic, Imagination, Intimacy, Modern Love, Intergenerational, Sincerity

Evolving Perspectives: Shelley's Influence on Modern Love Discourse

Shelley's understandings of love go beyond the limitations of his time and align deeply with today's understandings. In this segment, we highlight the Shelley's love poetry and its influence on modern love theory, providing the discourse on the poetry's themes and the love's layers. Textual analysis on Shelley's love will highlight his love's vision and its relevance today, especially when his ideals on love are placed against the backdrop of today's love and relationships.

Shelley's Vision of Love

Shelley's love is primarily spiritually uplifting and, to an extent, transcendental. In his poetry, love is seen as one of the highest motivators to break free from the chains of the society and reach a higher consciousness. Shelley's line in 'Prometheus Unbound,' "Soul meets soul on lovers' lips," goes beyond the carnal interpretation of love to emphasize a higher union of two souls. This unique thinking of love's vision in the higher sense, where love is a meeting of souls and minds, is probably one of the early advocacy of the modern sense of love where emotional intimacy and soul connection is identified.

Shelley goes beyond the conventional framework of love and demonstrates the need to free love and the self to achieve personal wholeness. In "Epipsychidion," he states bold desires with the lines, "One word is too often profaned / For me to profane it."

Contemporary Resonance

Shelley's ideas regarding love, freedom, and individuality still meaningful to people today. In a time when people and relationships are changing, his love poetry inspires those in search of sincere relationships and best friendships. While people are trying to work with personal

identity, self-autonomy, and closeness, Shelley's love asks us to think about the other side of the equation compared to all the love and romantic poems in the 21st century.

Both a poet and a humanist, Shelley is able to speak his mind about a world without borders when it concerns the love he expresses, humanistic ally fulfilling each and everybody's innate desire and need to bond.

In conclusion, Shelley's wonderful exploration of the topic of love will always inspire admiration for the insight it offers within the realm of emotional attachment, the relationships people build, and the ever-elusive quality of emotional fulfillment. He inspires the reader to redefine their notions of love, where the poetry constructs a case for love in all its relations and in all its complexities. As we think about the complexities of romance today, we will always remember and celebrate the many forms of powerful love that has stood the test of time.

Shelley's Universality

The significance of Shelley's love poetry reaches beyond the narrow confines of the world in which he lived and speaks of emotions that transcend time and generations. Shelley articulates every facet of the human experience, including the joy of love and the pain of its loss. In 'Love's Philosophy' he speaks of the bonds of love and the unity of the natural world, a connection that is universal and timeless.

The fountains mingle with the river / And the rivers with the ocean,

Shelley's celebration of individuality and self-defiance still resonates with love's poetry. In "To ---," he expresses emotionally, "I could lie down like a tired child / And weep away the life of care," which, in its yearning for the release of tired, weighed down modern emotions, serves as an amplification of the struggle of authentic love.

Love as an intergenerational discourse

Shelley's love poetry provides an opportunity for intergenerational discourse on the theme of love. Poetry is discussed around and across many modern practices, like dinner, and readers of all ages find unity in love. Shelley's verses, which are in many cases the biblical narratives of love in the song of songs, are particularly the narratives of older generations. As grandchildren are introduced to passages by grandparents, students, and many across generations, Shelley's love poetry provides modern discourse on the theme of love.

Contemporary Resonance

The poetry of Shelley has remained very close to people that are struggling with the issues of love and self in a constantly evolving world. His desperate cry of emotional sincerity and the search of true connections cuts across the time and space, addressing directly the same predicaments and desires of contemporary relations. In the provocative poetry of Shelley, we see the mirror of how we manage to find our way in the changing landscape of love and intimacy. His words are an emotional reminder that social rules can be adjusted, and the nature of human desires and attachment is immortal.

To sum up, the poetry of Shelley is a monument to the timeless ability of art to raise thought, break the established norms and bring the change. With the constantly shifting societal norms, the words of Shelley can be considered an eternal source of wisdom and hope of those who want to find their ways in the complicated world of love and relationships and feel genuine and honest. He can be remembered by his legacy as a reminder that in the context of changing

cultural landscapes, the search of love and human connection is a universal and timeless endeavor.

Deconstruction and Reconstruction: Re-creating Shelleyan Love

The present section is a deconstructive and reconstructive process that will explore how the idea of love presented by Shelley has been redefined and reimagined in the modern discourse. In the course of the discussion of the subversion and development of the ideals of Shelleyan love, we discover the changing power of his poems to provoke new ideas and break the old conventions.

Dismantling of Shelleyan Love

The love poetry of Shelley tends to disrupt the conventional concept of love and romance and encourage the readers to challenge the hierarchies and power structures. In the *Triumph of Life*, he states, *The few that tread / The globe are but a few to the tribes / That slumber in its bosom*, which reminds the reader of the universality of love and the possibility of connection even within the limits of the society. His focus on the egalitarianism of love is a force of dismantling established systems of oppression and inequality.

Moreover, the refusal of Shelley to be possessive and jealous of love is an extreme diversion of the traditional approaches to the relationship in love. In his poem *Love*, his argument is that *the moonbeams hug the sea, and what all these hugging shall be worth. Unless thou hug me too?* His depiction of love as an unconditional and encompassing power contests the jealous nature of romantic love and proposes a broader and expanding conception of intimacy.

Reproduction of Shelleyan Love

Though the deconstructive approach to the Shelley ideals of love shows that the ideals possess the potential of subversion, the deconstructive process is carried out through reimagining the ideals in the context of the modern concept of love and relationships. Shelley gives the society hope that more empowering and equal forms of love can be imagined with the help of her poetry as the society struggles with a problem of consent, agency, and equality.

In the analysis and rebuilding of Shelleyan love, there is an active process of tradition and innovation since his classic poems still motivate generations of people to rethink the ways love and intimacy can be.

To sum up, the story of the deconstruction and reconstruction of Shelleyan love is a continuous conversation between the tradition and changes between the past and present. Reading Shelley poetry, we get reminded of the timeless ability of love to cross borders and defy conventions and make us imagine the possibilities of human relationship in this dynamic world. With this discussion, we learn that the ideals of love that Shelley explored are as pertinent and provocative today as they were during his era, and that we should continue to follow love as an agent of liberation, equality and renewal.

Love as Shelleyan in World Opinions: Cross Cultural Resonances

Here we start the exploration process of the love poetry by Shelley around the world and the cross-cultural echoes which bounce back through his poems. Shelley has portrayed love in a way that defies geographical borders, reaching out to the love of connection, intimacy, in places as far as England and other areas. The study of Shelleyan love in various cultures gives us an understanding of why his poems have remained popular in many cultures all over the world.

Shelleyan Themes on the Global Scene

The theme of love as explored by Shelley through passion, longing and transcendence is very relatable to the readers of different cultural backgrounds. In *Adamonais*, he says, Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep--/ he hath wakened in the dream of life, the immortality of love and the conviction in some spiritual relationship beyond mortal life. The transcendence of love is reflected in the cultures of many civilizations throughout the world as the poetry of Rumi in Middle East and Bhakti tradition in India are both examples of how well the vision of love presented by Shelley can resonate with people in many cultures.

Moreover, with cultures that are grappling with the issue of modernity and tradition, Shelley appeals to individual freedom and emotional authenticity resonated. He states in *Prometheus Unbound*, that he must love, and bear; hope till Hope makes / out of its ruin the thing it thinks upon, that love is the force that can redefine and provide renewal to the strength. The message will appeal to people facing the challenges of love and relationships in different cultural settings, and this will be a message of hope and empowerment.

The love poetry that Shelley wrote is a reflection of the universal truths and goals of the human heart, breaking down or crossing cultural lines that allow the love poetry to appeal to people everywhere on the planet. His songs are the way of communication between different cultures and unite us together thanks to the common language of love and longing.

Finally, Shelleyan love goes beyond the boundaries of nationality and ethnicity, and it addresses the common sense of love and desire in humans. When we look into the poetry of Shelley in international contexts, we see how diverse and diverse the interpretations of culture can be and how they bring more and more senses to his eternal poems. The result of this cross-cultural exploration is that we come to understand the universal nature of the love poetry of Shelley in that we all share the same human nature and that we are all seeking the same thing; that being love and connection.

Challenges and Ethical Considerations: Negotiating Shelleyan Love in Popular Culture

Here we are faced with the vagaries and ethical issues of the presentation and definition of Shelleyan love in popular culture. Since the poetry of Shelley still dominates the media and entertainment industry today, it poses significant inquiries on how love and relationship are portrayed in the mainstream world. With the help of the discussion of challenges and ethical dilemmas of negotiating the Shelleyan love within the popular culture we find the fragile balance between the artistic expression and social responsibility.

The subtle themes and ideals of Shelley in his love poetry pose a problem to the contemporary interpreters of his work to tailor it to the mass market. In *Ode to the West Wind* he says, "Turn me thy lyre, as is the wood: / What wilt my leaves falling like the others! saying that she wants to be inspired creatively and refresh her spirit. Through the adaptation, however, it is possible that the original intent of Shelley may be oversimplified or misunderstood so that it can be distorted.

More so, the popular culture of the Shelleyan love can obscure the intricacies and moral issues involved in the poetry. With his poems being used in advertising or turned into tabloid entertainment, he runs the risk of watering down the deep insights and societal commentary that he wrote in his work.

The expression of love in the popular culture tends to support the negative stereotypes and impractical expectations and it brings up the ethical issues regarding the influence on the attitudes and behaviors of the society. In the story *Julian and Maddalo*, Shelley says, That there was One who gazed on that pure love / As on the dying lamp whose radiant light / In some expelled temple flaming, throws, and that these romantic relationships are very weak and

temporary. Nevertheless, in the media, love is romanticized or objectified, and therefore the false-to-life representations can destroy the real human relationships.

In addition, the commodification of Shelleyan love within the popular culture brings up the problem of cultural appropriation and intellectual property rights. With the commodification of his poetry, it is possible to exploit it and subvert it, which compromises the quality of his artistic work.

We are faced with the dilemma of artistic freedom and social responsibility as we struggle with the ethical consequences of representation and interpretation in locations with Shelleyan love negotiated in the popular culture. His poems can be seen as the mirror of our shared desires and fears, and he provokes us to thread the mazes of love with right and caring intentions.

To sum it up, the image of Shelleyan love in the popular culture brings both opportunities and challenges to the modern society. Although his poetry remains thought-provoking and engaging to the audiences, it also needs some attention to be paid and some moral analysis. It is through this that we learn to manage the twists and turns in negotiating Shelleyan love in the popular culture and also to maintain the integrity and authenticity of his works and at the same time create a sensitive and responsible discourse about love and relationships in the social sphere.

Innovative Changes: Love in the Era of sophisticated Technologies

In an effort to understand the area of love and technology in the contemporary world we discuss in this section how technological advancement has influenced the manner in which we receive and convey love. Essentially, technology has transformed the romantic relationship scene, which will bring into question the concept of intimacy, authenticity, and connection in the digital era, hence dating sites and virtual reality simulation. In analyzing the effects that technology has on love, we are able to discover the opportunities and the challenges that these technological changes have.

Technology and the Impact on Love

The technology has transformed the manner in which we find, nurture and sustain romantic relationships. Shelley, in his love philosophy, puts it by saying, And the sunlight hold the earth, / And the moonbeams kiss the sea, which is the eternal beauty and symbolism of the hugging by the nature. The use of screens and devices has however substituted the metaphorical sunshine and moonbeams with virtual interactions in the digital era.

Dating websites, social media platforms, and communication applications have enabled people more than ever to be able to get to know prospective partners and show romantic interest. But with this technology spreading there have been also concerns of the commodification of love and the loss of the true human relationship. Shelley in *Epipsychidion* has mentioned that she has given her love to the voiceless dead, and this phrase emphasizes the temporary and impersonal character of online communications that do not always have the same depth and personal touch that face-to-face communication.

Flow of Opportunities and Problems

Modern relationships introduce challenges as well as opportunities to love due to the emergence of technology. On the one hand, technology has made the world a democratic place to find romantic opportunities whereby individuals are connected anywhere and even across geographical boundaries and cultural differences. In *Adonais*, Shelley describes that, in the case of *Adonais*, the poem says, Peace, peace! he doth not die he does not sleep he hath

wakened to the dream of life High technology can open up new experiences and possibilities in expressing love.

Conversely, it is also true that technology brought new complexities and risks to the world of romantic relationships. Online harassment, cat-fishing, and digital infidelity have become so widespread that the issue of trust, authenticity, and privacy in the digital world has become problematic. According to Shelley in his book *Prometheus Unbound*, to endure miseries beyond imagination; To forgive injustices more than death or night, technology has intensified the stakes of love and demanded more endurance and empathies towards adversity.

Love in the era of high technologies is not only exaggerated, but it is twisted as well as the differences between the virtual and the real are getting thinner. We can even trace in the poetry of Shelley the tracing of our own battles and victories, and we are brought to recollection of the fact that love, in all its ways, is eternal and universal.

To sum up, the crossroads between love and technology is a tricky veil of opportunities and obstacles in the contemporary society. In a world full of online communication in romantic relationships, we need to be aware of the ethical, emotional, and existential consequences of the changes in technology on love. By a subtle interpretation of the relationship between technology and love, we can use the force of innovation to enhance and further our relationship with others in the digital era.

Cultural Dynamics: Love in the Globalized 21st Century

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Unveiling the Voices of Women in Ashapura Devi's novels *The First Promise* and *Subarnalata*

Diptimayee Sahoo & Mary Mohanty

Abstract

19th century Bengal, India was a dark period in women's life. During that period women faced severe restrictions. They had no voice in the patriarchal set-up. Their voice was silenced and suppressed. They were confined only to the domestic chorus. Many writers have written about the emancipation of the Bengali women. Ashapura Devi (1909-1995) a stalwart woman writer of Bengal, focused on women's enlightenment during her time. Her novel *The First Promise* and *Subarnalata* explore the voices of women across two generations in 19th and mid-20th century Bengal. The female protagonist Satyabati and her daughter Subarnalata Challenge the patriarchal norms in different ways. This paper delves in to the complexities of domestic life, societal expectations imposed upon women, and their voices against the traditional patriarchal structure through a close analysis of the protagonist, Satyabati and Subarnalata. In *The First Promise*, the protagonist Satyabati s married at an early age. From her young age she possesses a sharp intellect and a rebellious spirit. She raises her voice against the societal norms like child marriage, widowhood and the traditional practices that suppress the potential of women. As a symbol of protest, Satyabati leaves her family on the day of her daughter's marriage. Satyabati's effort for education, her journey from village to city life and her final act of protest by leaving her family proves herself a rebel. *Subarnalata*, the second book of the trilogy explores the social restrictions, struggle for women's right and identity. It highlights the silent suffering of women and their voice for equality through the character of Subarnalata. Her unspoken protest, her internal rebellion through writing her thoughts in a diary and her battle against the domestic environment keep the struggle alive for all women. Both the novels unveil the systemic silence of women and their longing struggle to assert identity.

Key Words: Patriarchy, Societal Expectation, Equality, Identity, Women's Right

Nineteenth century India was a period of turmoil. Women have no voice in the patriarchal set-up. Her voice was silenced and suppressed. She was controlled by her father and brother in childhood, by her husband after marriage and by son in the later years of her life. Social evils like polygamy, Sati, child marriage made their condition deplorable. Women in 19th century Bengal also experienced severe social restrictions and evil practices. Their condition was miserable. They were not equally treated as compared to men. They were confined to the domestic sphere. This was a time when all most all the girls were married off young, before they attained puberty. According to Bagchi:

The girl child was entrusted with the burden of maintaining the patriarchal family structure in the Hindu household. Her upbringing was to be such that she could fit into and participate in retaining the "patrilineal, patrilocal" family setup (Bagchi 2216).

Many women raised their voice against their oppression. Ashapura Devi is one among such women. She was a prominent Bengali poet, novelist and short story writer. Her immense will power and indomitable spirit gave her a prominent place in the writing world. Her works are

remarkable particularly for feminist approach. She portrays the helplessness of women's life, their struggle in the patriarchal society and their emerging voice during mid twentieth century.

Both the novels *The First Promise* and *Subarnalata* explore women's oppression in the 19th century colonial Bengal and their struggle against patriarchal society. This is a reflection of the struggles faced by the middle-class women. The novel *Pratham Pratishruti* (translated by Indira Choudhury as the *The First Promise*) is the first volume of her famous trilogy. It uncovers the complex realities of women's life. Ashapura Devi presents a realistic picture of the condition of women in the traditional Hindu society.

Satyabati, the protagonist of the novel *The First Promise* represents the spirit of rebellion. She is a rebel who refuses to fit into the childhood prescribed for her. She rejects to follow the age-old stereotyped ideas that make women silence and challenges the patriarchy. She is fearless and courageous from her childhood which made her different from other children. She has inherited this quality from her father Ramkali. She strongly opposes the repressive patriarchal norms of her time, including child marriage & denial of education for women. She is disliked by the members of her own family because of her rebellious and questioning nature. In the words of Mokshda: 'That's what I'm telling you!' 'This family will suffer because of that girl.' (30) ...this girl is fated to suffer (127).

At that time women were not allowed to learn. Though Satyabati does not get any formal education, she is self-educated. She educates herself, despite societal norms that restrict women's access to education. She knows the importance of learning in woman's life. When her father asks Satya about the need of education in a girl's life, her answer makes him amazed:

'What is the use of girls learning? They won't become rent-collectors or cashiers, will they?' Ramkali questioned her with an amused laugh. Once more Satya's vehemence returned . . . 'Why should they become cashiers? They'll learn to read the Ramayana Mahabharata and Puranas. Then they'd not have to keep waiting for the Kathak to come around' (131).

In the 19th century Bengal, women were not permitted even to touch the book. There was a blind belief that a woman would become blind if she was allowed to touch the book. When Satya and Neru argue about the conventional belief that women who read and write go blind, Satyabati opposes this belief and says:

'I'd like to know what happens if a woman touches this [palm] leaf. So many women read and write in Calcutta!
Her cousin, Neru responds: 'Who has told you that? Don't you know they'll all go blind if they did?'
'How absurd! You don't know a thing. As if they instantly become blind when they read! Nonsense!...I'm telling you Neru, nothing like that happens. Learning is a good thing. It can never be a sin to learn' (124).

She challenges the gender stereotypes when she is told not to touch the writing material because she is a girl. She shows her fearlessness and argues that the Hindu goddess of learning, Saraswati, is a female:

'Why should it be a sin?' Satya blazed forth spiritedly, 'If it isn't a sin when women fight and argue all day and curse away, how can it be a sin to learn? And isn't the goddess herself a woman? Doesn't she hold the four Vedas in her hands?' (126).

Neru is shocked that Satya touches the palm leaves. He tells to Punyi-pishi: She touched the palm leaves we write on and she said “it doesn’t matter!”” (125). Ashapura Devi writes:

Satya giggled and brought down a hand fan made of same leaves, from a hook on the wall, and stunned Punyi some more, ‘Here! Look, I’ve touched this! Did anything happen to my hands?’ (125)

Satyabati’s friends are surprised to see that Satyabati can learn the alphabets so easily compared to her brother. Satyabati proudly says that not only does she not hesitate to touch a taal paat (palm leaf), she can even write on it. She says:

Look at the way you’re fussing just because I touched the leaves. As if heaven has moved to hell! But do you know that I can write too?’
‘What?’ the boy and the girl exclaimed in unison, as if they had been knocked out with snake venom (125).

Satyabati’s cousin Neru and her playmate Punyabati comment when they come to know that Satyabati can compose rhymes. They say: ‘So you say you’ll make up a rhyme. Are girls supposed to do that?’ (25). Satyabati opposes this by saying:

Who said that? My foot! As if girls are unnatural and not conceived in their mother’s wombs! Do you think girls just come floating with the tide, or what? Don’t play with me if you talk like that! (25)

Satyabati faces many criticisms because of her learning. But she is always ready to justify her stand. Once Nabakumar criticises her about her teaching skills, when she starts teaching in Sarvamangala Vidyalaya. He tells:

‘Are you so learned that you can teach now?’ Satya had smiled at his sarcasm, “Teaching is in my blood- I’ve taught all my life! I could start out because that’s how I was made. And my education? That will progress as I read. I do what I can’ (394).

The nine-year-old Satyabati protests against domestic violence. When she comes to know that a man has beaten his wife mercilessly till, she becomes unconscious, she strongly protests it by composing verses against that man named Jatadharan. She gathers the village children and they make fun of Jatadharan comparing him to a rampaging elephant:

The Elephant-footed Jatadada – there he goes, the blighter! May a toad kick the back of this stupid wife-beater! Jata, Jata’s really gross, he’s an abuser like no other! Watch the fun, for now he’ll run, here comes the wife’s father! (31)

Satyabati is a very broad-minded girl. She counter attacks her husband when he says that Satyabati would lose her caste if she goes to Calcutta:

‘If a woman goes to Calcutta, what’ll become of caste?’
Satya replied gravely, ‘If your father can keep his caste, if he still has the right to touch the holy stone, I too shall not lose caste If I go to Calcutta’ (XXIII).

Satyabati wants to educate her daughter Subarnalata marry her off, after she completes her basic education. So, she would not suffer the same fate as other women of her time. But this idea is not accepted by others. She is criticised for this. Even once she has to face criticism by a village girl named Bhabani for her decision. But later Bhabani understands the importance of learning in a girl's life and congratulates Satya by saying:

I think it is a good idea that now a days they wait for girls to get a little older before marrying them off. A good thing too that you have started sending Subarna to school. It will increase her understanding and her strength (477).

Satyabati's most significant protest occurs when her daughter Subarna is married off without her knowledge. Her first promise to educate her daughter is shattered as her mother-in-law marries off Subarna against her wishes when she is away. She is devastated. Satyabati strongly opposes the marriage of her eight-year-old daughter Subarnalata. She wants her daughter back even after her marriage. Satyabati doubts her husband's promise to bring back Subarna: 'Really? You'll bring her back? You'll wipe out this doll's marriage and bring me back my Subarna?' (531) She shows her defiance by leaving her family and home on the day of her daughter's wedding instead of participating in the ceremony. Satyabati's lifelong protest against the patriarchal norms and oppressive traditions is praiseworthy. She proves herself a rebel.

Subarnalata is the second volume of her trilogy which narrates the story of a woman's struggle in search of her identity. Subarnalata is the daughter of Satyabati. She fights for her own space in the patriarchal society. She belongs to a time when women are not allowed even to step out of the house. She strives for equal rights and respect as her male counterparts in Bengali society and culture.

She is married off into an orthodox Bengali family at an early age of eight against the wishes of her mother Satyabati. Her long and lonely struggle for identity begins after her marriage. She is criticized and humiliated at every stage in the male dominated patriarchal society. Subarnalata feels suffocated in the closed world of the large family in her in-laws' house. She wants equal rights like that of her husband but she is denied as she is a woman. Therefore, she is not allowed to go to see the construction of their house like her husband. Here Ashapura Devi highlights the gender stereotypes that create a gap between men and women.

Subarnalata dreams of an open terrace from where she can look at the outside world. But the society of her time does not allow a woman to see the outside world. Her husband mocks at her wishes and says: 'Why? What is the need of an open terrace on the side of the road suddenly? Is it required to stand there decked up in the evening?' (5) Not only her husband humiliates her but also her own son, Bhanu, calls her mad when she expresses her desire to see her childhood school. He says: 'Then you accompany father; oh I can't accompany a female to any place. Do people call you mad for no reason! You have all the strange wishes!' (342) Ashapura Devi severely criticizes the patriarchal attitude towards women in her words:

They know they should show reverence to their mothers, discipline their wives and suppress the female race in every matter. It would be injustice to say that only Muktakeshi's sons are like this. Most of the men are like this. Difference can be noticed only in their manners and behavior (22).

Subarnalata fights for her personal freedom. Her struggle begins with seeking a space for her own, that is, a south-facing balcony in their new house where she can get a glimpse of the outside world. But her dream is shattered when she finds there is no such balcony in the newly constructed house. In her words:

Nowhere is there a ventilator through which even an iota of the moving air can gain entry into this house [...] there is an absence of ventilator in their understanding as well (32).

She is deeply saddened and everybody mocks at her wish. Then she takes a vow:

God, you shall be my witness, I will build a nice house with a baranda, I will, I will, I will. When my sons grow up and become self-sufficient, I shall avenge this insult (11).

After waiting for a long time, finally Subarnalata finds her dream fulfilled. She moves to a new house leaving the old house at Darjipara. In the words of Ashapurna Devi: 'Finally Subarnalata got a South-facing baranda. It was right next to the main street. It was a broad baranda, with red polished floor and green railings' (222).

Subarnalata silently participates in the Swadeshi movement from the inner chamber of her house. She joins the Swadeshi movement and abandons the foreign goods by burning all the new clothes of the Durga puja. Everybody is scared by her daring act.

Subarnalata seeks intellectual liberation as well. Despite constant opposition from her in-laws, she attempts to read and write. According to her, books are her window to the outside world. She also advocates for the better condition of women by demanding a better sanitation in the labor room.

Subarnalata raises her voice against the male-dominated patriarchal society that suppresses women's voices and wishes and oppresses them providing no space to survive as human beings with their own identity. She rebels by reading books and burning the foreign clothes. She persists her progressive mindset despite the constant humiliation and restriction from her in-laws. Unlike her mother, who fights openly in *The first promise*, Subarnalata protests silently. She asserts her identity within the four walls of her in-law's house. She persistently fights for her dignity and identity.

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Hamartia as a Dramatic Device in Selected Plays of William Shakespeare

Pochigari Guna Sai Vani

Abstract

This article examines the concept of Hamartia- a tragic flaw or error in judgement as it appears in Shakespearean tragedies. Using Aristotle's Poetics and what critics have argued since then, the study looks at how Shakespeare changes the classical idea of "tragic error" so that it fits better with the moral, psychological, and political concerns of the Renaissance stage. Focusing on Antony and Cleopatra, Hamlet, Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet the article shows how each protagonist's downfall emerges through a fatal mixture of personal weakness and grave mistakes. Rather than placing Hamartia as a single trait, the article showcases that Shakespeare presents tragic flaws as dynamic, fatal, deeply embedded in character and multifaceted. By close reading and comparative study, this work aims to enhance the understanding of Shakespearean tragedies as an exploration of human error and its consequences.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, Tragedies, Hamartia, Tragic Flaw, Tragic Error, Aristotle Poetics, Catharsis, Peripeteia, Anagnorisis

Introduction

Hamartia as it pertains to dramatic literature was first used by Aristotle in his Poetics. In tragedy, hamartia is commonly understood to refer to the protagonist's error that leads to a chain of actions which culminate in a reversal of events from felicity to disaster. What qualifies as the error or flaw varies, and can include an error resulting from ignorance, an error of judgment, an inherent flaw in the character, or a wrongdoing.

Hamartia is first described in the subject of literary criticism by Aristotle in his Poetics. The source of hamartia is at the juncture between character and the character's actions or behaviors as described by Aristotle. Aristotle mentions hamartia in Poetics. He argues that it is a powerful device to have a story begin with a rich and powerful hero, neither exceptionally virtuous nor villainous, who then falls into misfortune by a mistake or error (hamartia). Discussion among scholars centers mainly on the degree to which hamartia is defined as tragic flaw or tragic error.

The term hamartia derives from the Greek /ἁμαρτία/, from /ἁμαρτάνειν/ hamartánein, which means "to miss the mark" or "to err". It is most often associated with Greek tragedy, although it is also used in Christian theology. The term is often said to depict the flaws or defects of a character and portraying these as the reason of a potential downfall. However, other critics point to the term's derivation and say that it refers only to a tragic but random accident or mistake, with devastating consequences but with no judgment implied as to the character. In Greek tragedy, hamartia is often associated with the protagonist's fatal mistake or character defect that sets in motion a series of events leading to their demise. It's a crucial element in understanding the tragic hero and the genre of tragedy itself.

Antony and Cleopatra (1606)

Antony and Cleopatra is a 5-act play comprising of 42 scenes. It is the story of eponymous character Marcus Antonius (Antony) who loves Cleopatra (Queen of Egypt), but marries Octavia (Caesar's sister) for the sake of friendship but later on goes back to Cleopatra and

ignores his roles and responsibilities towards his nation which angers Caesar and ends with the demise of Antony.

- Hamartia of Marcus Antonius – Excessive passion towards Cleopatra, prioritizing love over duty, impulsive in taking decisions, blind trust on Cleopatra, Hubris, negligence, stubborn.
- Hamartia of Cleopatra – Passion over duty, emotional instability, ambitious, manipulation

In Antony and Cleopatra, Antony's tragic decline is seeded from the start by his overpowering passion for Cleopatra, which he places above his duties to Rome. Despite Octavius's orders, he defiantly claims "Let Rome in Tiber melt ... he will not return," rejecting all political obligation in favor of remaining with her (Act 1, Scene 1). By Act 3, Scene 7, and his pride, impulsiveness, and negligence surface: he ignores sound counsel and insists on a sea-battle against Octavius, a futile tactic influenced by his love-bound obstinacy. In Act 3, Scene 10, Cleopatra flees the naval fight and Antony abandons the battlefield to follow her, prioritizing his desire over his responsibilities. In Act 4, Scene 14, when a messenger falsely reports Cleopatra's death, Antony's blind trust and emotional frailty drive him to attempt suicide, only to reverse at the last minute upon discovering she lives — yet again placing his love above reason. Finally, in Act 4 (Scene 15 or the final scene), Antony dies trusting her promises, rejecting cowardice, and affirming that his death is honorable — yet his end is the tragic culmination of his unbalanced passions, neglect of duty, and inability to regard the consequences.

Cleopatra's downfall is precipitated by a fatal combination of her emotional volatility, manipulative ambition, and unrestrained passion. From the outset (Act 1, Scene 1), she wields her influence over Antony—alternately cajoling him to attend to state affairs and then pulling him back into her sphere—thus fostering his neglect of political duty. In Act 2, Scene 5, upon learning of Antony's marriage to Octavia, her explosive response and attack on the messenger betray her inability to control her jealousy and anger. In Act 3, Scene 10, she abandons the battlefield to preserve her own safety, sacrificing Antony's honor and thrusting him into shame and defeat. By Act 4, Scene 15, Cleopatra's earlier machinations—especially the feigned report of her death—drive Antony to attempt suicide, leaving him vulnerable to the tragic consequences of their love. Finally, in Act 5, Scene 2, her ambition surfaces fully as she negotiates with Octavius for political power through her son, only to face betrayal and resolve to die on her own terms rather than live humiliated. Her death thus arises not purely from external forces, but from the very flaws she has nurtured. Cleopatra's flaw is not simply that she loves too much, but that her love and ambition are inseparable—they both lift her up and tear her down. Her emotional intensity, her inability to step back from what she wants, her trust and manipulation, all come together in a way that makes her profoundly human: passionate, flawed, brilliant, tragic.

The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark (1600)

Hamlet is a 5-act play comprising of 20 scenes. "Hamlet" is a tragedy by William Shakespeare, centering on Prince Hamlet of Denmark. After his father's death and his mother's hasty marriage to his uncle Claudius, Hamlet is visited by his father's ghost, who reveals he was murdered by Claudius and demands revenge. Hamlet feigns madness to investigate and plot his revenge, while navigating court intrigue, his relationships with Ophelia and his mother, and his own internal struggles with grief, morality, and the nature of existence. The play culminates in a duel with Laertes, resulting in the deaths of Hamlet, Claudius, Gertrude, and Laertes.

- Hamartia of Hamlet- Indecisiveness, overthinking, procrastination, anger, cowardice, strive for revenge. (To be or not to be)
- Hamartia of Ophelia- Vulnerable, dependence, excessive obedience, excessive love towards Hamlet.

Hamlet's tragic flaw (hamartia) is his inability to act decisively, rooted in overthinking and the need for certainty. In Act 1, Scene 5, the ghost reveals Claudius's murder, but Hamlet hesitates to believe or act immediately, torn between faith and doubt. By Act 3, Scene 1, his feigned madness, existential soliloquies, and harsh treatment of Ophelia reflect how his intense introspection and emotional turmoil paralyze him. In Act 3, Scene 2, he stages the "play within a play" to confirm Claudius's guilt rather than taking direct action, and later spares Claudius while he's praying, delaying revenge out of concern for the soul's fate. In Act 3, Scene 4, his impulsiveness erupts when he kills Polonius, mistaking him for Claudius — a rash act born from inner conflict rather than decisive purpose. In Act 4, Scene 4, Hamlet sees Fortinbras's army and laments his own inaction, recognizing that he has overthought when he should have acted. In Act 5, Scene 1, he reacts emotionally to Ophelia's death, and in the final scene (5.2), his delayed commitment to revenge leads to a chaotic, fatal outcome: he kills Claudius but succumbs himself, and many others perish. His tragedy is not in evil intentions, but in being trapped by doubt, delay, and the tension between thought and action — by the time he resolves to act, the chain of consequences is irreversible.

Ophelia's tragic flaw lies in her extreme submissiveness and dependence on the men around her, which leaves her powerless to act on her own behalf and vulnerable to manipulation. In Act 1, Scene 3, she obediently accepts her father's and brother's direction—forsaking her relationship with Hamlet despite her feelings—demonstrating her lack of autonomy. In Act 3, Scene 1, she becomes a tool in the royal intrigue, agreeing to help her father spy on Hamlet even as he verbally abuses her, showing her emotional fragility and unwillingness to defy authority. By Act 4, Scene 5, after the death of her father and Hamlet's rejection, those features of her character combine—loss, dependency, grief—to push her into madness, where she sings strange songs and gives away symbolic flowers. Ultimately, her inability to assert her own identity or resist destructive forces results in her drowning (whether by suicide or accident), a heartbreaking end born from her passivity and the burdens others laid upon her. Her death is due to her flaws and partly due to Hamlet's actions too.

The Tragedy of Macbeth (1605)

Macbeth is a 5-act play with 28 scenes. It is telling the story of a Scottish general who, spurred by ambition and prophecies from three witches, murders King Duncan to seize the throne. His reign is marked by paranoia, further violence, and ultimately, his downfall and death.

- Hamartia of Macbeth- Ambitious, moral weakness, inability to distinguish between right and wrong, blind trust on Lady Macbeth, guilt, insecurity.
- Hamartia of Lady Macbeth- ambitious, manipulative, lack of morality, unable to control emotions, overconfidence.

Macbeth's tragic flaw—his unchecked ambition—unfolds progressively across key scenes in Shakespeare's play. In Act 1, Scene 3, after the witches' prophecy that he will become the Thane of Cawdor and eventually king, Macbeth's desire for power ignites, leading him to contemplate regicide. By Act 1, Scene 7, Lady Macbeth manipulates him into murdering King Duncan, questioning his masculinity and resolve, which reveals his susceptibility to external influence. In Act 2, Scene 1, Macbeth envisions a dagger guiding him to Duncan's chamber,

symbolizing his internal conflict and foreshadowing the impending murder. Following the deed in Act 2, Scene 2, he is overwhelmed with guilt, unable to say "Amen," and believes he has "murder'd sleep," indicating his deep remorse and disturbed conscience. By Act 3, Scene 1, Macbeth, fearing Banquo's descendants will inherit the throne, arranges Banquo and Fleance's murder, showcasing his escalating paranoia and moral decline. In Act 3, Scene 4, during a banquet, he sees Banquo's ghost, a manifestation of his guilt, leading to a public outburst that unsettles his guests. Act 4, Scene 1 sees him consulting the witches again, receiving cryptic assurances of invincibility, which embolden him to slaughter Macduff's family, reflecting his growing tyranny. In Act 5, Scene 3, Macbeth dismisses reports of enemy forces, arrogantly believing in his invulnerability, a stark contrast to his earlier hesitations. Finally, in Act 5, Scene 8, he learns that Macduff was "from his mother's womb untimely ripped," realizing too late that the witches' prophecies were double-edged, leading to his downfall. Macbeth's journey illustrates how ambition, when unchecked by moral constraints, can lead to one's destruction.

Lady Macbeth's tragic flaw, or hamartia, is her overwhelming ambition and manipulative nature, which ultimately lead to her and her husband's downfall. In Act 1, Scene 5, upon reading Macbeth's letter about the witches' prophecies, she fears he is too kind to seize the throne and calls upon spirits to "unsex me here, And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full Of direst cruelty," revealing her desire to shed her femininity and embrace ruthlessness. She then persuades Macbeth to murder King Duncan, questioning his manhood to manipulate him into committing the deed. In Act 2, Scene 2, after Macbeth kills Duncan, he is filled with guilt and fear, but Lady Macbeth remains calm and takes charge, planting the daggers on the guards to frame them. However, in Act 5, Scene 1, her guilt manifests as she sleepwalks, obsessively trying to wash imaginary bloodstains from her hands, symbolizing her mental unraveling. This progression from ruthless ambition to overwhelming guilt illustrates how her initial desire for power leads to her psychological and moral disintegration.

The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet (1594)

Romeo and Juliet is a 5-act play with 26 scenes. Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy about two young lovers from feuding families, the Montagues and the Capulets, in Verona. Their secret love and marriage lead to tragic consequences, including the deaths of both Romeo and Juliet after they each take their own lives when they believe the other to be dead. The play explores themes of love, hate, fate, and the consequences of familial conflict.

- Hamartia of Romeo- impulsiveness, emotional instability.
- Hamartia of Juliet- impulsiveness, doing something without considering consequences, blind loyalty towards Romeo.

Romeo's tragic flaw in Romeo and Juliet is his impulsive nature, which leads him to make hasty decisions without fully considering the consequences. In Act 1, Scene 1, he is deeply infatuated with Rosaline, composing poems to express his unrequited love. However, upon meeting Juliet at the Capulet feast in Act 1, Scene 5, he instantly forgets Rosaline and falls in love with Juliet, showcasing his tendency to quickly shift affections. In Act 2, Scene 2, despite the dangers posed by their feuding families, Romeo urges Juliet to marry him, disregarding the potential repercussions. His impulsiveness escalates in Act 3, Scene 1, when, driven by anger over Mercutio's death, he kills Tybalt without considering the long-term effects, resulting in his banishment. In Act 5, Scene 1, upon hearing of Juliet's death, Romeo hastily decides to end his life without verifying the truth, leading to his tragic demise. This series of rash actions culminates in the deaths of both Romeo and Juliet, illustrating how his impulsive decisions, fueled by intense emotions, lead to irreversible consequences.

Juliet's tragic flaw (hamartia) in *Romeo and Juliet* is her intense impulsiveness, particularly in matters of love and loyalty, which leads her to make rash decisions with dire consequences. In Act 1, Scene 3, Juliet's immediate attraction to Romeo at the Capulet feast, culminating in a kiss before learning his identity, exemplifies her spontaneous nature. By Act 2, Scene 2, despite recognizing the dangers of their families' feud, she hastily agrees to marry Romeo, highlighting her tendency to act on passion rather than reason. In Act 3, Scene 5, Juliet's refusal to marry Paris, whom her father has chosen, stems from her unwavering loyalty to Romeo, even at the cost of familial harmony. This defiance sets the stage for her subsequent drastic actions. In Act 4, Scene 1, Juliet's decision to take Friar Laurence's potion, simulating death to avoid marrying Paris, is made without fully considering the potential risks, leading to unforeseen tragic outcomes. Finally, in Act 5, Scene 3, upon finding Romeo dead, Juliet's impulsive decision to end her own life underscores her inability to pause and assess situations, sealing the couple's tragic fate. Throughout the play, Juliet's impetuous actions, driven by intense emotions and a desire for love, contribute significantly to the unfolding tragedy.

Conclusion

Aristotle used the term "frailty" in his poetics to describe Hamartia, which actually means tragic flaw. On the contrary to the term used by Aristotle, he described the term as "tragic error" which rose a debate on what actually is Hamartia. This later on is interpreted as flaw due to which, fall of the protagonist is inevitable. The idea of tragic flaw is not wrong but it appeared in the later layers of interpretation but not in that of Aristotle's poetics. Understanding Hamartia helps to see tragedy as a separate entity shaped by the flaws or errors of the protagonist. Hamartia serves as a bridge between the nobility, perfection and imperfection, frailty.

Using Hamartia triggers a shift of fortune (peripeteia), accompanied by the hero's moment of awareness (anagnorisis), and according to Aristotle it becomes the most powerful recipe for a tragedy. So, most of the playwrights used Hamartia to induce catharsis (a way of getting rid of anger and feeling relaxed) in the audience through their plays. It is because hero's downfall is rooted from a fallible mistake that is relatable to the audience rather than outright wickedness usually portrayed by the villains. The audience feel pity for the hero and will be scared of the fact that they might make similar mistakes in their life which can cost them their life or fortune. This emotional ride leads to the catharsis which according to Aristotle is a tragedy's primary essence.

William Shakespeare includes Hamartia in his tragedy to create a powerful impact on the audience. Shakespeare set a benchmark in English literature even though he included misogynistic perspectives, his works are often celebrated and still lead as an example as well as inspiration for many budding writers. He even inspired Rudyard Kipling, as it is known that Basilisk and Mandrakes are found in Harry Potter series it is initially used by Shakespeare in his play *Romeo and Juliet*. Through his works he highlights the contemporary beliefs and notions of people during that time, one of them being, all humans' emotions and movements are influenced by planetary motions. Shakespeare uses many references from History and Bible to enhance the experience of the audience. Shakespearean tragedies often involve a "tragic waste," where good is destroyed along with evil. Even when the hero is ultimately successful in defeating evil, they may still be destroyed in the process.

Instead of using either tragic flaw or tragic error given by Aristotle in his poetics, Shakespeare used both elements of tragic flaw and tragic error in his protagonists to induce tragic elements in the play. It was a controversial topic back then as one faction believed it is tragic flaw and the other believed tragic error but Shakespeare used both of them to make it more effective. In his play *Antony and Cleopatra*, both the titular characters demonstrate hamartia as tragic flaw and error. Antony's blind passion towards Cleopatra and her ambition

over everything is their tragic flaw but then Antony's decision to leave the war to follow Cleopatra and her decision to lie about her death are their tragic errors which turned out to be the main reason for their downfall.

In Hamlet, the titular characters Hamlet and Ophelia showcase hamartia. Hamlet's hubris and Ophelia's blind obedience to her can be seen as their flaws whereas Hamlet's inability to take decisions on time (indecisiveness) and Ophelia's failure in holding her ground instead of depending on people around her can be considered as their tragic error which led to their deaths along with their dear ones.

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth demonstrate hamartia as they are the titular characters. Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's ambitious nature can be viewed as their tragic flaws whereas, Macbeth's decision in blindly trusting the witches and Lady Macbeth's error of judgement believing that Macbeth can become the king if he kills Duncan, her decision of placing ambition over moral consciousness can be viewed and their tragic errors. In the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, Romeo and Juliet's passion towards each other which led to the tragic downfall of events can be considered as their tragic flaws, and their rash decision (impulsive decision) can be viewed as their tragic error.

The plays during Shakespeare time were didactic in nature as during Tudor secular era, kings were more into moral and didactic plays so they encouraged these tragedies which display the fall of previous kings due to their error and hope to avoid them. It is also one of the major reasons for inclusion of hamartia in Shakespeare's plays. By the end of this article, it is safe to conclude that Shakespeare uses hamartia as a dramatic device to inflict pity and fear in the audience, it is also a tool to correct the human nature where people can learn from the mistakes of others.

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Exploring Female Experiences in Diasporic Writings of Muslim Women Writers

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Abstract

This study examines the interplay between identity and history in diasporic literature, where the rifts and gaps in one's past are essential to the development of a new self. Their awareness of the significance of creating counter-narratives has grown as a result of their displacement experience. Most displaced people write about their relocation experiences or the difficulties they encounter in their new location, particularly to challenge the stereotype that has been "consciously" created in the West. The main characters in the novels *The Saffron Kitchen* by Yasmin Crowther (2006), *A Woman Is No Man* by Etaf Rum (2019), and *A Place for Us* by Fatima Farheen Mirza (2018) devote their lives to caring for their loved ones, as they are constantly worried about them. This study employs a qualitative approach and utilises a close reading of primary texts to analyse identity, history, and caregiving in cultural writing. The intersection of assimilation and tradition often leads to conflict, alienation, and the desire for a new identity. Therefore, this study aims to understand how a female subject reclaims the marginalised aspects of history and attempts to find a place in the borderland to express and transform her identity.

Keywords: Diasporic Literature, Counter-Narrative, Stereotypes, Alienation, Borderland, Identity

Introduction

Diaspora is frequently examined as a uniform experience, with no focus on its gendered aspects. Diasporic women often bear the responsibility of serving as cultural and traditional ambassadors in the complex dynamics of heritage preservation and societal integration. Their job, which involves teaching assimilation skills and cultivating youngsters who uphold the ideals of what Salman Rushdie refers to as the "imaginary homeland," is regularly questioned. In a foreign setting, these women serve as guardians of their heritage by maintaining and passing on the traditions, values, and customs of their native country to their children through their forced ambassadorships. This largely unrewarded responsibility generates profound pain and heartbreak, as seen in the stories of Maryam and Sara in *The Saffron Kitchen* by Yasmin Crowther (2006), Layla and Hadia in *A Place for Us* by Fatima Farheen Mirza (2018), and Isra and Deya in *A Woman is No Man* by Etaf Rum (2019).

According to Avtar Brah, "...women collaborate with other female kin and friends to create a dynamic and lively social and cultural life" (82) in the South Asian environment. The lack of social and cultural ties forces diasporic women to actively reconstruct the social and cultural networks of their native country in their new setting, creating a space where their heritage can flourish and their children can feel connected to a common cultural identity.

However, a certain amount of assimilation is necessary because they also want their children to be accepted in Western culture. This study employs affect to examine the experience of preserving and transmitting the customs and cultures of a homeland that exists only in memory, while also promoting acceptance, which results in the younger generation developing a sense of disapproval towards this imagined homeland. It does so by highlighting the unsettling ambassadorship of foreign women in the diaspora in these three novels.

Analysis

The Saffron Kitchen

Yasmin Crowther was born to a British father and an Iranian mother in the United Kingdom. The protagonist of her book, *The Saffron Kitchen*, is based on her mother, who immigrated to England after growing up in Iran. Through the book, she attempts to re-examine and reinterpret the hidden past—both individual and collective—that has been masked by the dominance of Iranian culture. However, she maintains that patriarchal and cultural hegemony are to blame for the omission and silencing of some Iranian women's history.

London and Mashhad function as supporting locations that help shape the protagonists' cultural identities, while Mazareh, a secluded village in northeastern Iran, serves as the primary plot setting. The protagonist's refusal of an arranged marriage reveals her rebellious stance toward the social mores of her era. Maryam's father, humiliated by an incident, sends her to nursing with a virginity test, but she is assaulted as a punishment. Traumatized by the incidents, Maryam lives in silence after her father exiles her to a remote area. After her sister dies, her nephew arrives in London, leaving behind a horrific legacy in her homeland. To piece together her shattered personality and create a hybrid identity in the transitional area, she intends to go back in time and rewrite her suppressed past.

Yasmin Crowther's book argues that identity is shaped by collective memory and cultural hegemony. She employs conventional narratives about women and counter-narratives to expose hidden histories, particularly those of women. "Crowther acknowledges the influence of Islamic faith on Iranian culture, particularly in terms of male hegemony" (Blaim 93–107). She primarily focuses on how cultural hegemony has "dumbed" the history and identity of female subjects, despite diasporic Iranian works linking Islam to it and blaming it for class and gender inequality.

Crowther's folktales, "Gossemarbart" and "Zohreh," serve as reminders of repressed philosophy. The story of a shepherd's daughter marrying a ruthless Khan to pay off her father's unpaid debt is highlighted in the novel. The book ends with the tale of a stone woman who was turned into stone and lived in the Mazareh village. The Khan locks the girl up in his tower and commands his soldiers to cut her hair and tongue. The mythical old woman transforms the child into a stone-faced adult who pleads for freedom and relief from pain. These stories serve as reminders of repressed philosophies.

Despite being a female hero in this story, the heroine is classified as a male object rather than a female subject. The female characters in these stories are characterized by patriarchal cultural hegemony, and they frequently struggle with defying, ignoring, and opposing male authority. Women are left with no secure replacement as male dominance controls their binary fate of blind obedience or impending death. The mute woman in Crowther's story can be interpreted as one who questions the patriarchal, cultural, and historical forces compelling her silence. Silence is a coping mechanism for troubled past and present identity changes. In her story, Crowther addresses the problem of speaking up and combating silence.

Michel Foucault posits that power is expressed through discourse and the conceptual framework that shapes the individual's identity (Dreyfus & Rabinov 46). Crowther aims to empower women to resist patriarchy by highlighting strategies for addressing female silence, as they are the primary opponents of societal dominance.

A Woman is No Man

In 2019, Arab American author Etaf Rum published *A Woman is No Man*, a memoir about three generations of Arab American women living abroad. Rum's work aims to rectify biases

and assumptions, promoting appreciation for cultural pride, religion, and homes while also demonstrating allegiance to their new environment.

In the late 21st century, American literature has embraced multiculturalism, featuring diverse authors influenced by the concept of "the other," enhancing its marketability. The 1970s women's movement played a vital role, prompting increased female authorship that intersects with gender, race, ethnicity, and identity. This literary work addresses critical topics relevant to women's lives, with a focus on identification, particularly in diasporic women's works. The book discussed is structured into three sections, each named after key female characters representing different generations in a diasporic family: Fareeda (first generation), Isra (second), and Deya (third), with a narrative emphasis on female perspectives.

Deya, a third-generation Arab American diasporic woman, is introduced at the beginning as someone who "was born without a voice, ... [she] didn't realise [she] was mute until years later when [she] opened her mouth to ask for what [she] wanted and realised no one could hear [her]". Deya is now able to speak about what was formerly considered an "ultimate shame" because of her growing awareness of her condition.

As readers, we expect Rum to perpetuate the stereotype of Arab society as one that oppresses and silences women. However, in an interview with the CGCC Amman, Rum made it clear that she only planned to speak for the three generations of one family to make the point that the existence of this family does not necessarily speak for the entire Arab community and culture. By doing this, Rum aims to "voice" the voiceless and focus on a practice of the Arab male-dominated culture that she believes her book will eliminate by bringing attention to the pain of certain women and men alike.

Fareeda, a woman in a patriarchal society, struggles to uphold her culture and to maintain her family's standards. She expects the Arab population in Brooklyn to emulate her experiences, causing her oldest son to burden himself with family business responsibilities. She also expects her daughters-in-law to be docile and obedient to her. However, Fareeda occasionally re-examines her perception of culture, as no one is unique. She "knew that no matter what any woman said, culture could not be escaped." It took more than one woman to do things differently, even if it meant disaster. "It required a lot of them" (*The Saffron Kitchen* p. 88).

Rum has presented the figure of Umm Ahmed, a Muslim Arab American woman, who embodies familial devotion, especially towards her daughters. "Without our daughters, what would we have done? Hannah and Fatima take care of everything for me. I wouldn't trade them for a thousand sons." (*The Saffron Kitchen* p. 64) She is also portrayed as a supportive mother-in-law, offering assistance to her daughter-in-law, who feels isolated in America. Umm Ahmed recalls the challenges of arriving in a new country without family, emphasising her empathy and the importance of helping those who share similar struggles.

"Scheherazade" is portrayed as a resilient and astute female character, emblematic of both creativity and ingenuity. According to Abdelrazik (2007), Arab-American women embody Scheherazade's spirit through narratives and artistic expression as forms of resistance, helping others heal and overcome doubt. Isra exemplifies this strength by sacrificing her children's future. Her daughter Deya learns the importance of storytelling and self-love, eventually giving voice to her own narrative and those of her ancestors. Deya is a vocal protagonist and representative of Arab feminism, in contrast to American feminism.

A Place for Us

Fatima Farheen Mirza's first book, *A Place for Us*, explores the diverse immigrant experiences via Layla's family of five. It is related to the comparable genre of bildungsroman, but also more concerned with upholding the ideals of the country of origin. Layla marries Rafiq as a teenager,

and her marriage becomes a way to immigrate to the West. To help her children maintain the values of their country in the West, where they are continuously marginalised for being non-conforming, Layla negotiates cultural politics. This causes generational gaps and identity uncertainties. This uncertainty results in a persistent feeling of worry and unease.

During her daughter's wedding, Layla's internal conflict comes to the surface as she worries about upholding the appearance of a flawless family. She acts frantically to keep her son's alienation from being revealed because she is terrified that it would be revealed: "took out sadaqa money...extra...then more, to protect from any comment about her son's return in a tone that might cause its unravelling" (*A Place for Us* 4). This instance demonstrates how fear controls her behaviour, driving her to do whatever it takes to protect her family from criticism. Nevertheless, Layla briefly experiences a rush of pride and strength when she sees her daughter, who appears to have struck the perfect balance between Western expectations and practices from her homeland: "Look what we have done together," she wants to tell her husband (p.11).

In the novel, Layla is left in a never-ending state of motherhood, with her children serving as barometers of her success or failure. Because Layla's biography is limited to her parental roles and does not go beyond them, Mirza's maternal narratives fall short of capturing her emotional experiences as a diasporic woman. Studying the novel necessitates reconstructing maternal accounts in the diaspora, seeing the mother as a diasporic body feeling the psychological impacts of relocation rather than merely as a representative of the country.

Conclusion

The paper discusses the significance of history in understanding the complex identities formed by individuals in diaspora. It emphasises the need for marginalised groups to revisit and reinterpret their homeland's history to better comprehend their past. The narrative of *The Saffron Kitchen* serves as an example, intertwining Maryam's personal history with that of Iran, while Sara, a second-generation Iranian immigrant, connects with her mother's memories through artefacts in Iran. Etaf Rum's experiences as a nineteen-year-old writing about abuse and gender shame in the Arab American community further illustrate the challenges faced by diasporic individuals. In *A Woman Is No Man*, the silenced voices of women are highlighted, suggesting that resistance against oppression can lead to personal and societal misunderstandings. *A Place for Us* by Mirza explores the identity struggles in diasporas, particularly the rift created when a mother's cultural values conflict with her children's adoption of Western norms. The text concludes that narratives play a crucial role in articulating emotions and guiding changes in perception and understanding, making cognitive approaches to narrative emotion instrumental in analysing the interplay between lived experiences and literary expressions.

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Women's Mind as a Battleground: A Literary Analysis on Mental Health Representation

Indu Auseri

Abstract

This article examines the representation of women's mental health in *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte, *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte and *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, through the dual lenses of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* and Elaine Showalter's *Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness*. It argues that the female psyche, in these texts, becomes a battleground upon which societal expectations, internalized repression, and gendered oppression violently converge. The figure of the "madwoman" is explored not simply as a symptom of mental illness, but as a symbolic manifestation of female rage, silenced identity, and resistance to patriarchal norms. By using Gilbert and Gubar's concept of the "madwoman" as a literary double and Showalter's call for a gynocritical reading of women's writing, this article highlights how each protagonist navigates the psychological consequences of inhabiting a world that marginalizes female autonomy. Ultimately, the study argues that these novels do more than portraying mental illness—they critique the very structures that pathologize female dissent and emotion, reclaiming madness as a form of literary and feminist expression.

Keywords Mental Health, Literary Analysis, Women in Literature, Madwoman Trope, Female Psyche, Feminist Theory, Gender Roles, Patriarchy, Identity

Introduction

The women's mental health in English literature has portrayed in a variety of ways, exploring the psychological experiences of women, reflecting societal attitudes, cultural norms and gender roles that shape their mental well-being of different time periods. From the restrained emotional landscapes of Victorian novels to the complex inner lives depicted in Modern feminist literature, the English authors have portrayed how factors like patriarchy, social expectations and personal trauma influence women's mental states. English literature has been a mirror to society's treatment of women and their inner lives, especially when it comes to mental health.

For centuries, women's psychological struggles were often misunderstood or misrepresented in fiction—sometimes viewed as madness, sometimes as weakness, and often as something to be controlled. Early literary portrayals reflected a world where women's voices were often silenced, and their pain dismissed. In stories like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, we see how a woman's mental health was deeply tied to the powerlessness she experienced in both her home and society. Her descent into madness isn't just a medical issue—it's a cry for autonomy and understanding in a world that refused to listen.

As literature moved into the 20th century, these portrayals began to shift. Writers like Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath wrote from the inside out, giving readers intimate access to the emotional realities of depression, anxiety, and societal pressure. These were no longer just characters with "nervous conditions"—they were women trying to survive in worlds that often demanded too much and gave too little. In more recent fiction, mental health is explored with greater compassion and depth. Authors delve into trauma, identity, and recovery, showing that women's psychological experiences are not only complex but deeply human.

Literature doesn't just reflect mental health—it helps to shape how we understand it. Through the stories of women across time, English literature invites us to look closer, listen more carefully, and feel with more empathy. It not only highlights the evolving portrayal of women's inner lives but also advocates for greater awareness and empathy towards mental health challenges faced by women in both literary narratives and real life through the novels such as Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*.

Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* (1847)

Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte was published in 1847 under her pen name "Currer Bell". The novel is divided into 38 chapters and it talks about the story of a young, orphaned girl who overcomes adversity to find love and independence. It explores the themes of social class, inequality, gender roles, love, independence and self-discovery.

Childhood at Gateshead Hall

Jane was treated like an outsider by her aunt Mrs. Reed and was also bullied by her cousin John. She was locked in the Red Room (traumatic space) where she feels panic, fear, and psychological distress. This gives exposure to mental oppression and suppression of female emotions.

Lowood Institution

Jane feels out of place at Lowood school and it enforces emotional repression with harsh discipline, justified by religion. She meets Helen Burns, who represents passive endurance and spiritual submission, which impresses Jane. Jane begins to learn emotional self-control but also questions stoicism as mental strength.

Thornfield Hall

Jane gets to governess position at Thornfield Hall, where she wrestles with her social position, desire for love and the need for independence. Also experiences emotional suppression, expected to remain invisible in the society. Here Bertha Mason represents the symbol of the "madwoman" trope, which is linked to the repressed woman psyche.

Jane's Emotional Turmoil and Bertha's Revelation

Jane faces an intense mental and moral dilemma after discovering Rochester's marriage to Bertha. Bertha was insane and her madness represents both colonial othering and the extreme consequences of female confinement and repression. Bertha embodies repressed rage, sexuality and entrapment, mirroring Jane's own fear of losing autonomy. Jane chooses self-respect and psychological preservation by fleeing, rather than surrendering her identity.

Moor House and St. John Rivers

Jane regains her strength and mental stability through self-reliance and kinship. John's marriage proposal to Jane highlights another form of emotional suppression, where duty erases individual desire. Asserting the need for mental and emotional wholeness, Jane rejects John's proposal.

Return to Rochester

Rochester was changed both physically and emotionally, allowing for a more equal relationship. Jane finds emotional fulfillment without sacrificing her identity, which represents a restoration of Jane's mental health through mutual respect, love and autonomy.

Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* (1847)

Wuthering Heights, a gothic novel by Emily Bronte was published in 1847 under her pen name "Ellis Bell". The novel is divided into 34 chapters and it talks about the toxic relationship between Catherine and Heathcliff. Their love is ultimately destructive, not just to them but to everyone around them. It also explores the themes of love, obsession, revenge, social class, nature and civilization.

Catherine's Childhood

Catherine was portrayed as free-spirited, emotionally expressive and unconstrained by traditional gender roles. Her mental state is healthy and energetic, though occasionally mischievous. There were no signs of madness yet-her behaviour was wild but not unstable.

Loss of Identity

After staying with the Lintons, Catherine begins conforming to upper-class femininity. Inner conflicts arise between Catherine's natural self (linked to Heathcliff) and her civilized self (engaged to Edgar). Her early signs of mental strains display mood swings, frustration, emotional isolation.

Emotional Breakdown (Brain Fever)

After Heathcliff leaves, Catherine becomes severely distressed. She refuses food, speaks in fragmented logic and experiences "brain fever" (a Victorian term for mental collapse). She claims that she is not herself and also experiences hallucinations, delusions and a split sense of identity.

Psychosomatic Illness

Catherine refusal to eat, self-isolation and emotional agitation was worse. Her symptoms mirror anorexia, hysteria and depression (common 19th-century labels for female distress. Her madness was treated by others (especially Edgar) as weakness rather than a cry for help.

Death as Escape

Catherine death was preceded by visions of the moors and a longing for freedom that are signs of psychological regression or spiritual release.

Her madness intensifies, and she dies shortly after giving birth. Her emotional and psychological collapse is the price of trying to live inauthentically.

Isabella Linton (Psychological Abuse in Marriage)

After marrying Heathcliff, Isabella faces emotional and physical abuse, which leads to fear, disillusionment and mental deterioration. Though she was emotionally scared, she escaped to *Wuthering Heights*, a rare act of agency. Her letters show signs of trauma, depression and domestic PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder).

Catherine Linton (Young Cathy's Emotional Resilience)

Despite growing up in amid grief and cruel situations, Cathy remains emotionally strong and compassionate. She maintains empathy and reason even though after getting abused by Heathcliff and Hindley. By breaking the cycle of trauma, Cathy becomes a healing presence.

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* (1963)

The *Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath is a semi-autobiographical novel, published in 1963 under the pseudonym of "Victoria Lucas". The novel is divided into 20 chapters and it talks about the story of a young girl named Esther Greenwood, who appears to be successful and full of potential but begins to suffer a serious mental breakdown as she struggles with depression, identity and the pressure to fit into society's expectations as a woman. It explores the themes of mental illness and depression, female identity and expectations.

The Illusion of Alienation and Glamour

Esther feels numb and detached on a prestigious internship in New York. Her inner voice contrasts sharply with the vibrant and glamorous world around her. She feels alienated from peers and the expectations placed on women to be stylish, charming and ambitious.

Discomfort with Femininity and Sexual Roles

Esther experiences physical discomfort and revulsion at societal expectations around beauty, sex and relationships. She begins to question the traditional female roles she's expected to fulfil, leading to internal conflict and anxiety.

Breakdown of Romantic Ideals

Esther visits Buddy Willard in the sanatorium and becomes disillusioned with him. She begins to feel trapped between the idea of the pure woman and own desires. The pressure to conform to contradictory expectations contributes to her emotional instability.

A Crisis of Identity and Purpose

Esther feels lost after being rejected from a writing course. Her sense of purpose begins to crumble and she struggles with existential questions. Her inner dialogue becomes darker and more fragmented.

The Onset of Depression

Esther's depression deepens: she can't sleep, eat, write and read. She sees herself as a failure and begins to contemplate suicide. There she visits a psychiatrist which result in trauma from an electroshock therapy session.

Institutionalization and Isolation

Esther was institutionalized, where she goes through judgement. Ineffective care and isolation. She feels so trapped and humiliated by the system and her treatments. Here society's dismissal of women's mental anguish is so evident.

Descent into Despair

Sharply Esther's mental condition deteriorates and she attempts suicide by overdosing on sleeping pills and hiding in a crawl space. Her feelings of invisibility and worthlessness peak here.

Recovery and Rehabilitation

Esther was moved to a better hospital under the care of Dr. Nolan, a woman psychiatrist who treats her more humanely. The electroconvulsive therapy seems to help her and is done more compassionately. Even though the fear and uncertainty remain the same, Esther slowly begins to feel less oppressed.

Self-Reclamation

Esther tentatively re-enters into society and she starts reconnecting with herself. The “bell jar” – her metaphor for mental illness – is still present but that was slightly lifted. Esther was about to face a medical board, hinting at continued vigilance over her mental health, the novel ends here ambiguously.

Conclusion

When we look at Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* and Sylvia Plath’s *The Bell Jar* on a same frame, one thing becomes clear that the way these women writers portray mental health isn’t just about illness, it’s about identity, resistance, and what happens when a woman’s voice is silenced or distorted by the world around her. Through characters like Bertha Mason, Catherine Earnshaw, and Esther Greenwood, we see how “madness” often reflects something much deeper and how women navigate a society that demands obedience, silence, and self-denial. Using the ideas from Gilbert and Gubar’s “The Madwoman in the Attic” and Elaine Showalter’s “Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness”, we can see that madness in these novels is not just a symptom but it’s a message. It tells us about the emotional and psychological cost of being a woman in a world that doesn’t listen, doesn’t care, or doesn’t allow complexity and it shows us how writing itself can be a way for women to fight back.

In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha Mason is the most literal madwoman—locked in an attic, hidden from society. But she isn’t just there for shock value. She represents everything that Jane is expected to suppress her anger, desire, and independence. Gilbert and Gubar argue that Bertha is Jane’s dark side, a reflection of what happens when a woman’s needs are pushed too far underground. Jane’s journey then becomes about finding a way to integrate those feelings without losing herself completely. She doesn’t go mad—but only because she learns to take control of her own story. In *Wuthering Heights*, Catherine Earnshaw walks a more tragic path. Her love for Heathcliff is so intense and so at odds with the life she’s expected to live that it tears her apart. When she says, “I am Heathcliff,” it’s more than romantic—it’s a breakdown of her sense of self. Trapped in a social role that suffocates her, she loses touch with reality. Her madness isn’t just about personal heartbreak but it’s about a deep, existential conflict between who she is and who she’s supposed to be. Esther Greenwood in *The Bell Jar* gives us a very different, more modern view. Her descent into mental illness isn’t symbolic or hidden—it’s a raw, detailed, and told in her own words. There’s no attic, no moors, no ghosts but just a young woman trying to live up to expectations she didn’t choose and falling apart because of it. The “bell jar” she describes isn’t madness itself—it’s the world’s indifference, pressing down on her so hard she can’t breathe. Her story makes it clear that mental health issues don’t happen in a vacuum but they’re deeply connected to the roles women are expected to play.

Elaine Showalter talks about how women writers often build their own ways of telling stories—ways that reflect their lived experiences, not just literary traditions handed down by men. That’s exactly what we see in these novels. These writers weren’t just creating characters—they were working through their own questions about freedom, creativity, and the cost of being honest in a world that preferred them to be quiet.

Jane Eyre shows that how Jane balances independence with connection. She won’t be Rochester’s mistress, but she also doesn’t shut herself off from love. She finds a middle ground—a space where she can be herself without being controlled. That’s part of what makes her story powerful and it suggests that women don’t have to choose between sanity and self-hood. In *Wuthering Heights*, Emily Bronte doesn’t follow the rules of conventional storytelling. Her narrative jumps around, and her characters are wild and often unlikeable. But that chaos is part of the point. It reflects the emotional intensity and confinement that Catherine

feels. The way the story is told becomes a reflection of the mental world the characters inhabit. Plath's *The Bell Jar* takes this even further. The way Esther tells her story—fragmented, darkly funny, brutally honest—breaks away from traditional forms. It's messy because life is messy. And in that mess, Plath creates something deeply true. It's a narrative that refuses to sugarcoat, and in doing so, it opens space for a more honest conversation about mental health, especially for women. Across all three books, we see women who are physically or emotionally confined. Bertha is literally imprisoned. Catherine is trapped by social expectations. Esther is locked in a system that treats her feelings like symptoms. But these confinements aren't just about the characters—they're about the worlds the authors were living in. Still, even within these limits, each woman finds a way to push back. Bertha may not speak, but she burns the house down—an act of destruction that also sets Jane free. Catherine's ghost doesn't rest quietly, and her haunting presence challenges the tidy endings we expect. Esther, unlike the others, lives to tell her story. She walks out of the hospital with the hope of something different, even if it's fragile. What's important is that these acts of rebellion aren't just personal. They're political. They challenge the systems—familial, cultural, medical—that define and constrain female identity. The novels are asking: what does it cost to be a woman who thinks, feels, and wants more than the world allows?

The shift from the Victorian novels to *The Bell Jar* marks a powerful change in how women's mental health is understood. For the Brontes, madness was a symbol—it stood in for things women couldn't say directly. But by Plath's time, those silences had started to break down. Esther's madness isn't just metaphor; it's experience. It's real, clinical, painful—and yet, Plath writes about it in a way that gives Esther back her power. This shift from the metaphorical to the literal matters. It shows that women writers were claiming space to talk about their actual lives—not just through symbols and stand-ins, but in their own voices. And through that, they were reshaping literature itself. In the end, these novels don't just tell stories about madness—they rewrite what it means. They take the image of the madwoman and give her depth, voice, and humanity. They show that what society calls madness is often just the result of being unheard, undervalued, and overburdened. And they offer an alternative: writing, storytelling, and self-expression as forms of healing and resistance.

Gilbert and Gubar's idea of the "Madwoman in the Attic" is more than a metaphor—it's a warning. When women are pushed into silence, when they're forced to hide their emotions, their sexuality, their ambitions, that repression doesn't disappear. It erupts and when it does, it's often misunderstood as madness. But these novels also remind us that there's another path. Showalter's work encourages us to look for the voices that have been lost or overlooked—to read not just what's on the page, but what's behind it and when we do that with *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *The Bell Jar*, we don't just find broken women—we find the whole ones and their fighting to be seen. These stories still speak to readers today because the pressures they describe haven't entirely disappeared. Women are still expected to juggle impossible expectations, to be calm in chaos, to stay quiet when they want to scream. But thanks to writers like the Brontes and Plath, that scream has become something else: a voice which is loud, unflinching, and also deeply human.

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Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī and Derridean Deconstruction: Rule-Bound Generativity, Différance, and the Unstable Foundations of Meaning

Jasminder Singh Dhillon

Abstract

This paper examines the unexpected convergences between Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī (4th c. BCE), a generative Sanskrit grammar, and Jacques Derrida's deconstructionist philosophy. Despite divergent goals—Pāṇini's codification of ritual language versus Derrida's destabilization of logocentrism—both frameworks reveal language as a system of relational meaning devoid of essentialism. Pāṇini's rule-bound generativity (e.g., kāraka theory and recursive sūtras) inadvertently exposes linguistic instability, anticipating Derrida's différance and trace. While Pāṇini reinforces authority through algorithmic precision, Derrida politicizes fluidity to challenge power hierarchies. Their dialogue illuminates the idea that language as a contested field where structure and fluidity intertwine, resisting absolute codification or free play.

Keywords: Pāṇini, Derrida, Deconstruction, Différance, Aṣṭādhyāyī

Introduction - Bridging Millennia of Linguistic Thought

The most fundamental inquiry in the study of language is to study its structure and its capacity to generate meaning. Although the Indian grammarian Pāṇini (circa 4th century BCE) and Jacques Derrida, the 20th-century French deconstructionist (1930-2004), are separated by over two millennia, they represent two radically distinct, yet profoundly illuminating, approaches to this inquiry. The Aṣṭādhyāyī, an eight-chapter monumental Sanskrit grammatical treatise, was written by Pāṇini. The compilation of over 4,000 densely packed sūtras (aphorisms) represents one of the earliest and most sophisticated systematic attempts to formalize a natural language. Pāṇini maps the organic structures of Classical Sanskrit with unparalleled analytical rigor to achieve descriptive precision. Derrida, on the other hand, envisaged a deconstructive approach to expose the instability of meaning inherent within language. As a consequence, he destabilizes the very foundations of Western metaphysics. His method challenges the "logocentric" privileging of presence, speech, and fixed reference. Language, as Saussure would assert, is a 'signifying system'; but while Pāṇini sought to codify and generate correct forms, Derrida turns the discourse on language on its head and exposes the inherent fractures and deferrals. Therefore, although the intentions of these two great thinkers were vastly different (Pāṇini aiming for ritual preservation through systematicity, Derrida for philosophical liberation through subversion) and although they belonged to epochs and cultural contexts separated by millennia, this paper argues that convergence on concepts like relationality, anti-essentialism, and the systematicity of meaning generation runs like a scarlet thread in their work. Pāṇini's rigorous formalism to stabilize language through rule-bound constructedness inadvertently anticipates, in a nascent form, the inherent instability of meaning which Derrida later theorized as 'différance'. When we critically examine ancient grammar and postmodern philosophy, we realize that this unexpected dialogue between the two illuminates the dynamic, contested field that constitutes language—a field which encapsulates the perpetual intertwining of structure and fluidity, challenging notions of both absolute codification and pure freeplay.

Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī: Algorithmic Precision and the Mechanics of Generativity

Upon analysis, it emerges that Pāṇini's Aṣṭādhyāyī, brilliant as it is in its economy, precision, and recursive power, is a generative engine designed to produce—from a finite set of bases (roots, stems) and affixes—all (and only) the correct forms of Classical Sanskrit. Hence, it is not just a mere list of rules.

Generativity as Recursive Rule Application

At the heart of the Aṣṭādhyāyī is Pāṇini's focus on how the systematic combination of simpler elements according to precisely ordered, context-specific rules are the genesis of complex words. These rules include adding vikaraṇa (derivational) affixes to verb roots and applying sound changes like vṛddhi (strengthening) vowel gradation.

Consider the following example, Pāṇini uses a series of sūtras to establish how the root √bhū (to be, to become) generates the present tense form bhavati (he/she/it becomes/is):

- Sūtra 3.1.68: Prescribes adding the present tense marker -śap (-śa after consonants, realized as -a after bhū due to subsequent rules).
- Sūtra 7.3.84: Governs the strengthening (guṇa) of the root vowel before certain affixes: √bhū → bho.
- Sūtra 6.1.78: Mandates the coalescence (e.g. sandhi) of bho + a → bhava.
- Sūtra 3.2.123: Adds the third person singular present ending -ti.

Further rules handle final sound adjustments: bhava + ti → bhavati. As Sharma notes, "The entire process is mechanical and rule-governed... Each step is triggered by specific conditions laid down in the sūtras" (45). This exemplifies the 'algorithmic' nature of Pāṇinian grammar, transforming a semantic root into a syntactically functional word through rule application.

Economy and Meta-Language:

Compression for Mnemonic and Logical Efficiency: To achieve astonishing brevity, Pāṇini uses ingenious meta-linguistic devices. To mark grammatical features or to activate rules, Pāṇini uses anubandhas, or indicatory letters added to terms. The principle of recurrence (lanuvṛtti) allows terms or rules from previous sūtras to apply implicitly to subsequent ones unless explicitly overruled. Contextual inference (sthānivadbhāva), treating the replacement as if it were the original, simplifies the formulation of rules. Paul Kiparsky highlights this efficiency, stating, "Pāṇini's grammar is a formal system in the modern sense... Its rules are ordered, and its derivations proceed step by step... The brevity of the spūtras is achieved by sophisticated techniques of rule formulation, including a kind of algebraic notation and conventions for rule application" (112). This compression is a hallmark of formal elegance and wasn't just for memorization. By creating a system which uses minimal rules to yield maximal output, the sūtras reflected a deep understanding of linguistic patterns and dependencies.

Context-Sensitivity and Relational Semantics (Kāraṅka Theory): Meaning, for Pāṇini, emerges from syntactic and morphological relationships (context-based) within a sentence. It would be wrong to presume meaning as inherent in isolated words. His kāraṅka theory is considered revolutionary because it defines semantic roles (agent, object, instrument, location, recipient, source) based on the functional relationship between a noun and the action denoted by the verb.

For example,

- Sūtra 1.4.54 states: svatantraḥ kartā ("The independent one is the agent"). This defines the agent as an independent instigator (kartṛ), yet it has no inherent properties but works through its relationship to the verb. Similarly, for the noun denoting the karman (the object most directly affected by the action),
- Sūtra 2.3.2 assigns the Accusative case (dvitīyā). As Frits Staal emphasizes, "The kāraka relations are syntactic-semantic. They abstract away from specific case endings and define universal roles that mediate between verb meaning and nominal inflection" (78). The kāraka role assigned to the noun in relation to the verb determines the choice of case ending (nominative, accusative, instrumental, etc.;
- Sūtra 2.3.1: anabhihite – "when [the kāraka] is not otherwise expressed" [by a prefix or compound]). Pāṇini thus expostulates the fundamental relationality and syntactic governance of meaning.

Anticipation of Structuralism

Pāṇini's systemic relationality within a closed system, as exemplified in his kāraka theory and his system of generating forms based on contrasts within paradigms (e.g., bhavati vs. bhavasi vs. bhavāmi), anticipates Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralist principle that linguistic value is determined by difference within a system. Saussure asserts in his *Course in General Linguistics*, "In language there are only differences without positive terms ... the idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it" (120). **The Constructed System and Incipient Instability:** Pāṇini assumed that correct forms exist and that the purpose of grammar is to uphold an objective linguistic reality through meticulous application of rules. He believed that by thus flawlessly generating the 'existent correct forms', Sanskrit grammar achieved its crucial purpose of preserving the potency of Vedic mantras. Interestingly, Pāṇini anticipates not only Saussure as stated above but also Derrida, because his intricate, rule-bound, meta-linguistic apparatus inadvertently exposes language as a highly constructed system and meaning as complex and context-dependent. Inherent in Pāṇini's codified concepts (paribhāṣā, meta-rules) is the potential for instability. While Pāṇini's grammatical system's brilliance lay in managing and simplifying this complexity, yet the very fact that the complexity needed to be managed itself points towards the fluidity Derrida would later place at the center of his critique.

Derrida's Deconstruction:

Différance, Trace, and the Critique of Logocentrism

Both the Eastern and Western philosophical traditions were/are dominated by "logocentrism": the privileging of speech (associated with immediate presence, intention, and truth) over writing (seen as derivative, dead, and corrupting). Derrida's deconstruction emerges as a radical critique that dismantles this logocentrism together with the fundamental belief in stable, self-present meaning ('existent correct forms') accessible through language, as discussed above.

Différance:

The Engine of Meaning (and its Deferral): Derrida's core insight is encapsulated in his neologism—différance (a combination of "to differ" and "to defer"). Derrida asserts that within an endless chain of signification, meaning arises only through its 'difference' from other signs.

It does not reside stably within a sign itself. One does not arrive at a fixed, absolute, inherent meaning; rather, meaning is perpetually 'deferred'; any signified concept one points to is itself constituted by other signifiers, *ad infinitum*. Presence is always already contaminated by absence—a condition he termed the 'metaphysics of presence'.

"The signified concept is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself. Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences" (Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy* 11). The word or sound 'tree' is merely an arbitrary signifier which cannot directly capture the essence of a tree; yet it 'gains' meaning only by differing from other signifiers like "bush," "forest," "wood," "plant," etc. Its meaning is negatively relational and contextual, always 'deferred', never self-contained or fully present. Derrida argues this play of 'différance' is constitutive of all language: "Différance is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name 'origin' no longer suits it" (Derrida, *Speech and Phenomena* 141).

Trace:

The Haunting Absence Within Presence: The concept of the 'trace' is vital and closely linked to 'différance'. Every sign bears the trace of the 'absence' of other signs that define it. For Derrida, writing, unlike speech, is the most potent exemplar of this, as it operates through physical marks that signify in the 'absence' of the speaker and the referent. But Derrida radicalizes this: all signification, even speech, functions like writing in this sense; it bears the trace of what it is not.

"The trace is not a presence but is rather the simulacrum of a presence that dislocates, displaces, and refers beyond itself. The trace has, properly speaking, no place, for effacement belongs to the very structure of the trace... The trace is the erasure of selfhood, of one's own presence" (Derrida, *Writing and Difference* 230). Meaning is always mediated, haunted by the absence of other meanings that make it possible. There is no pure, unmediated presence.

Il n'y a pas de hors-texte ("There is no outside-text"):

This famous (and often misunderstood) phrase underscores the radical context-dependency and boundlessness of meaning. While context is crucial for determining meaning, Derrida argues that context itself is never saturated or fully determinable. Any attempt to fix meaning by appealing to an "outside" context (authorial intention, historical circumstance, objective reality) merely introduces more text, more signs requiring interpretation. Meaning is always produced within the play of signification, without ultimate grounding.

"What I call 'text' implies all the structures called 'real,' 'economic,' 'historical,' 'socio-institutional, in short: all possible referents... there is nothing outside the text [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]... because the referent itself is a signified concept, which is therefore always already in the position of the signifier" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 158). This doesn't deny reality, but denies that meaning can escape the structures and processes of signification that constitute our access to it.

Targeting Structuralism and Logocentric Hierarchies:

Saussure's structuralist philosophy correctly emphasizes difference, yet Derrida explicitly targets structuralism (like Saussure's), arguing that while it correctly emphasizes difference, it still clings to the idea of a stable, synchronic system and a fixed bond between signifier and signified at a given moment. Deconstruction shows how the inherent instability (*différance*, trace) within the system constantly subverts such stability. He also deconstructs the speech/writing hierarchy: if all language bears the trace and operates through *différance*, then writing is not a secondary corruption of speech but reveals the fundamental condition of all language. This undermines claims to immediate presence, transcendental truth, or unmediated access to meaning through speech or consciousness. As he states, "The epoch of the sign is essentially theological" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 14), implying a belief in a guaranteed, transcendent signified.

Convergences: Relationality, Anti-Essentialism, and Systemic Fluidity

Despite the chasm between their projects, deep structural parallels emerge between Pāṇini's grammar and Derridean deconstruction, particularly concerning the nature of meaning.

Relational Meaning: The Primacy of the System:

Pāṇini: Grammatical correctness and semantic function are entirely dependent on syntactic and morphological relationships. The *kāraka* theory explicitly defines semantic roles relationally: the agent (*karṭṛ*) is not defined by a noun's essence but by its function as "the independent instigator" (Sutra 1.4.54: *svatantraḥ kartā*) relative to the verb's action. A word like *rāmaḥ* (Rama) signifies an agent only when in the nominative case (*rāmaḥ pacati* - Rama cooks) and an object when in the accusative (*rāmaḥ paśyati* - He sees Rama), governed by its syntactic role. Meaning is positional within the sentence structure.

Derrida: *Différance* posits meaning as fundamentally relational and differential. A signifier signifies only through its difference from others in an endless chain. Meaning is never self-present or inherent: "From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We think only in signs" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 50). There is no meaning prior to or outside the system of differences. Bhartr̥hari's (5th c. CE) philosophical grammar (*Vākyapadīya*), deeply influenced by Pāṇini, resonates strongly here: "The meaning of a word is known only from its usage in a sentence; it does not exist independently" (*Vākyapadīya* II.132-133, qtd. in Coward and Raja 145). Pāṇini's rules operationalize this relational dependency.

Convergence: Both thinkers dismantle the notion of isolated, self-sufficient meaning. Meaning is an effect produced by position, contrast, and rule-governed relationships within a system. As Staal observes, "Pāṇini's grammar is a system of relations... The units are defined by their relations to other units" (102). Derrida radicalizes this, showing the relational system itself is inherently unstable (*différance*), but the foundational insight into systemic relationality is shared.

Rejection of Essentialism: Meaning Without Fixed Core:

Pāṇini: Words lack inherent, fixed meaning divorced from their grammatical and syntactic context. The significance of a term like *go* (cow) is not derived from some immutable essence

"cowness" residing within the word, but from its function within a sentence and its contrastive position within the semantic field (e.g., distinct from *aśva* - horse, *puruṣa* - man). Pāṇini's rules govern how roots and affixes combine to create meaningful units, but the meaning itself arises from the relational grid established by the language system and its usage. As Bhartṛhari elaborates, "Words do not directly denote objects; they convey meaning based on their established usage and the exclusion of other possibilities" (*Vākyapadīya* I.24, qtd. in Coward and Raja 145). The power (*śakti*) of words is conventional and rule-bound, not essential.

Derrida: Deconstruction relentlessly attacks the "metaphysics of presence," which assumes meanings or concepts exist stably prior to or outside language. Meaning is always differential and deferred, never fully present or self-identical. "There is no transcendental signified," Derrida asserts, "which, for theological or logocentric reasons, would place a reassuring end to the reference from sign to sign" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 49). The search for an essential core, a pure signified, is an illusion.

Convergence: Both reject the idea that words have stable, essential meanings anchored in something outside the linguistic system itself. Meaning is conventional, contextual, and generated by the system's internal operations (Pāṇini) or its inherent play of differences (Derrida). The notion of a pre-linguistic, self-present meaning is untenable for both, albeit for different reasons (Pāṇini: grammatical rules define function; Derrida: *différance* undermines presence).

Systemic Fluidity: Rules, Exceptions, and Inherent Contradictions:

Pāṇini: While renowned for its rigor, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is not a rigid, exceptionless monolith. It incorporates principles that acknowledge context and prioritize certain rules over others. Sutra 1.1.68 (*svaujasamauṭchaḥ*) establishes proximity as a key factor in determining verb endings in complex constructions, introducing a layer of syntactic flexibility. Meta-rules (*paribhāṣā*) guide the interpretation and application of *sūtras* in complex or ambiguous situations. Rules often contain built-in conditions and exceptions. Staal notes this inherent adaptability: "The system is designed to be flexible and context-sensitive... Pāṇinian rules are not rigid laws but principles that interact dynamically" (102). This fluidity within the system allows it to capture the living usage of Sanskrit.

Derrida: Deconstruction thrives on revealing the internal contradictions, tensions, and points of undecidability within systems (texts, philosophies, institutions). It shows how systems are not closed or coherent but contain elements that subvert their own foundational principles. Meaning is never finally fixed because the system itself is inherently unstable (*différance*). Deconstruction is "the careful teasing out of warring forces of signification within the text itself" (Johnson 5).

Convergence: Both acknowledge that meaning systems are not perfectly closed or static. Pāṇini builds contextual sensitivity and interpretative flexibility into his rule apparatus to handle linguistic reality. Derrida argues that such fluidity and potential for contradiction (*aporia*) are not bugs but fundamental features of any signifying system – the rule-bound system itself generates the possibility of its own subversion. Pāṇini manages the fluidity; Derrida exposes it as constitutive.

Divergences: Codification vs. Subversion - Intent, Method, and Metaphysics

The convergences are profound, but the divergences in intent, method, and underlying metaphysical assumptions are equally significant and define their distinct projects:

Intent - Preservation vs. Liberation:

Pāṇini: The ultimate aim of the Aṣṭādhyāyī was deeply pragmatic and conservative: to preserve the precise form and pronunciation of Vedic Sanskrit, the language of sacred rituals (yajña). Correct grammar was essential for the efficacy (śakti) of mantras. Johannes Bronkhorst states, "Pāṇini's grammar was not primarily an intellectual exercise... Its primary aim was the preservation of the Vedic texts and the correct performance of the rituals based on them" (33). His work reinforced cultural and religious authority by codifying the "correct" language.

Derrida: Seeks to liberate meaning from the illusion of fixed presence, embracing ambiguity: "Deconstruction is justice" (Derrida, Force of Law 15). Deconstruction is fundamentally critical and emancipatory. It seeks to dismantle rigid hierarchies (speech/writing, presence/absence, literal/metaphorical, philosophy/literature), liberate meaning from the illusion of fixed presence, and expose the exclusions and power structures inherent in logocentric systems.

Method

Pāṇini: Constructs a generative, algorithmic framework. Modern computational linguists liken his sūtras to "if-then" programming rules (Kiparsky 115).

Derrida: Employs literary-philosophical critique. His reading of Rousseau in *Of Grammatology* exposes how metaphors of "supplementarity" destabilize textual coherence (145–46).

Metaphysical Stakes

Pāṇini: Assumes an objective linguistic order, albeit rule-bound. For him, śabda (word) carries inherent śakti (power) when correctly deployed (Bhartṛhari qtd. in Coward and Raja 201).

Derrida: Rejects all transcendental anchors: "There is nothing outside the text" (Derrida, *Of Grammatology* 158).

Implications: Language, Power, and the "Wholly Other"

Pāṇini's grammar, while descriptive, inadvertently legitimizes Vedic authority by codifying ritual language. Derrida's deconstruction, conversely, politicizes instability: by cracking open the "nutshell" of logocentric certainty (Caputo 32), it releases suppressed otherness (tout autre), challenging systems of power that rely on fixed meanings.

Conclusion

Pāṇini and Derrida, though separated by epochs and epistemes, converge in their radical reimagining of language. For Pāṇini, meaning is a procedural negotiation; for Derrida, an endless play of differences. Together, they illuminate language as neither a static mirror of

reality nor a vessel of absolute truth, but a dynamic, contested field where structure and fluidity perpetually intertwine.

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Traces of Memories and their Contemporaneity in Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*

D Jockim

Abstract

Memory Studies, being an interdisciplinary field, revisits history, the minds of the individuals or groups through literature to unearth the truths. Literature is a potent tool to preserve some of the best and the worst moments of history. Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* (1956) and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975) have recorded the events connected to the partition of India. Basically, migrating from one country to another under the pretext of partition leads to lots of crises. *Train to Pakistan* explicates the migration of people from India to Pakistan whereas *Azadi* highlights the dislocation of the people from Pakistan to India. Such spatial relocation leads to never ending repercussions in the lives and the minds of the migrants. This paper traces the evolution of memory studies and analyses the chosen novels using memory studies as a tool to understand the contemporary relevance.

Keywords: Borders, Displacement, Nostalgia, Migration, And Patriotism

It is said, "the most beautiful things in life are not things. They are people and places and memories and pictures. They are feelings and moments and smiles and laughs." It is true when one revisits the recesses of memory, a blend of beautiful, unexpected, painful memories surfaces. Once people are tired of the present life, they resort to their memories and attempt to relive some of the worthy moments that they enjoyed in the past. Besides, this entire process of reverse journey of the mind discloses some of the truths and reminds the people about the contemporaneity of the past and the need for addressing the issues related to it.

Defining "Memory" and "Space" will enhance the understanding of memory studies. According to the sources of Wikipedia, "Memory is the past made present" and it can be evoked, created, erased, modified, forgotten, lost, destroyed, broken, returned and reconstructed. "Space" can be understood as the emptiness. It is not only related to the physical space but also the invisible space of the mind. Though people are geographically distant, they can be connected through minds and hearts. Similarly, though some live in the same place and interact every day, it is possible, they are distanced from one another in mind. Hence, this study traces the issues of memories, especially partition memories and their contemporaneity through the chosen novels.

In general, there are three levels of memory: Individual memory, Collective Memory, and Cultural Memory. Individual Memory is rooted in neuro mental system, Collective Memory develops through communication and interaction and Cultural Memory is engineered by institutional preservation and transformation. Carl Gustav Jung in his *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1968) introduces "Collective Unconsciousness" which refers to shared, inherited unconscious knowledge and experiences across generations, expressed through universal symbols and archetypes common to all human cultures. Further, he states that the collective unconscious is a universal version of the personal unconscious, holding mental patterns, or memory traces, which are shared with other members of the human species. This illustrates the interconnected nature of history, culture, and memory. Moreover, though the present generation of both India and Pakistan are not directly involved in the process of partition and migration, the memories of partition are imparted in their minds. The study of partition novels kindles those memories and demand attention.

Pierre Nora, Maurice Halbwachs, Jan Assmann, Hugo Van Hofmaannsthal, Aby Warburg, and Jan Vansina are some of the pioneers of memory studies. They explore the various nature of memory to understand the issues related to individuals and history. For example, Pierre Nora, a French historian, challenges the traditional notions of history as a linear, objective narrative and claims that in contemporary societies, the past is not a living, organic entity but a series of constructed representations. Maurice Halbwachs in *The Social Framework of Memory* (1925) affirms that individual memory is not completely closed as it is constructed through interactions with others, whereas it is influenced by the collective representation of the past. In this sense, there is no individual memory as such and whatever memories present is the result of the remaining or the transformed being of the past. According to this, the recorded history through books, journals, novels etc. need not be objective since they are shaped by various discourses. Further, today's generation can interact with the affected, in their minds, by reading the works related to partition.

Given the context, memory can be understood as a "Liminal Space" which is a threshold between the past and the present. Liminality is a state of transition or ambiguity, often associated with rites of passage. The in-between space where memories exist is neither fully in the past nor fully in the present. Hence, memory is synonymous of ambiguity, fluidity, threshold, interconnectedness, and emotional resonance. Childhood memories, dreams, trauma are some of the examples of such memories. These memories are preserved in many art forms like writings. When the author writes a book, it is the repository of his individual and cultural memories. Hence, by analysing a work of art, one can revisit history and understand the minds of the people of that time and identify its contemporary relevance.

Many writers have recorded the painful memories, traumatic experiences of the individuals or people in their creative works. Whoever reads or passes through these works, witness, or relive those experiences. Thus, literature keeps the emotions intact for generations to come. Similarly, the partition narratives bring back the lives of thousands of individuals. Two such novels taken for analysis in this paper are Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* and Chaman Nahal's *Azadi*. There are lots of similarities in these works. In these narratives, sudden, unexpected, forced migration takes place which leads to the loss of native land, business, friends, loved ones, etc., The migrated is neither able to hate the native land nor love and embrace the new one. Hence, they start living in their past or memory ignoring the present. In one way, they are caught in-between the liminal space or time-loop forever forgetting the present.

Violence, victimising children and women, arrest for no reason, state sponsored violence, hate speeches and religious intolerance prevail everywhere. Violence is the most important memory kindled by the partition novels. The setting of *Train to Pakistan* is Mano Majra, a village located in Panjab near Pakistan border. Khushwant Singh weaves an enchanting plot under this humble backdrop to record the traumatic experiences of the people during the relocation. As recorded in both the novels, several loads of dead bodies cross the borders in the trains. In one of the trains, it is written "Gift to Pakistan." Khushwant Singh satisfies himself by saving one of the trains through his protagonist Juggut Singh. He saves the train and the people in an attempt to save his beloved Nooran. In this process, he loses his life. The reading of these narratives exposes the harsh realities of freedom, and partition and calls for the need to preserve the freedom obtained.

There are politicians and religious extremists who exploit every opportunity for their political and material gain. Both the chosen authors have recorded that such extremists, both in India and Pakistan, belonging to Islam and Hinduism utilize the opportunity to spread hatred and violence against others. The following conversation in *Train to Pakistan* is an example of one such religious extremism: "I believe our RSS boys beat up Muslim gangs in all the cities. The Sikhs are not doing their share. They have lost their manliness... Here we are on the border

with Muslims living in Sikh villages as if nothing had happened” (21). This illustrates that the people from both the countries are not ready to accept each other. Violence has been normalized during the partition and the migration of the people. Over a night, due to one drastic political decision, millions of people lose their nationhood, and living space and become prone to violence, injustice, treachery, and inhumanity.

As a writer, Khushwant Singh finds fault with the people of both the countries for the violence in *Train to Pakistan*, “...both sides killed. Both shot and stabbed and speared and clubbed. Both tortured. Both raped” (1). This passage reminds the value of the freedom and human lives and urges the citizens of both the countries to utilize the freedom diligently to enrich human life and the country.

Women and children are affected severely during the uncertain political and war situation. During the partition, many pregnant women’s wombs are torn and the fetuses were burnt. In both the novels many women are raped in public and paraded naked in places like market. In *Azadi*, 40 women who belong to the age from 16 to 40 years are paraded in public which has been celebrated as an act of victory by the men. Dr Chandar Bhan’s daughters are one among the marchers. Similarly, *Train to Pakistan* records the violence against women in Gujranwala: “Pakistan police and the army took part in the killings. Not a soul was left alive. Women killed their own children and jumped into the wells that filled to the brim with corpses” (22). Lala Kanshi Ram about the murder of Madhu Bala and her husband in the train. Similarly, the women and children are in the receiving end during these troubled times. Further in the same novel, Nur, the lady love of Arun Kumar argues, “Because I’m a girl and am defenseless and cannot force my will on my family and because you’re a man, more independent than me, and I expect you to defend me and make sacrifices for me, ...” (97). She and her family are forced to stay in Pakistan since they are Muslims. She is neither in a position to accompany her lover Arun in the journey nor has the courage to abandon her family. Chaman accuses all those who witnessed the parade of naked women through the following passage: “We are all equally guilty.... Each of those girls in that procession at Amritsar was someone’s Madhu, and there must have been many among the dead you saw at Ambala” (339). This illustrates that women’s space is eroded during the violent social situation.

While revisiting the partition history, *Train to Pakistan* identifies the cause of various social issues of the country. It argues that the people are forced to go against the law for survival. “...criminals are not born. They are made by hunger, want and injustice” (45). On the other hand, some people who consider themselves large-hearted also exhibit their narrowmindedness when such circumstances arise. In the same novel, a Hindu who wants the Muslims go safe to Pakistan says, “Let them get out, but be careful they do not take too much with them. Hindus from Pakistan were stripped of all their belongings before they were allowed to leave” (23). This is an example of how people exploit the opportunity to widen their space in the society even during the troubled times. As mentioned, the uncertain situations transmute the individuals as law-breakers. They are either to yield to violence or become an outlaw to survive in this world. The irony is, if they do not resist, they will be killed. If they resist and survive, they will be punished by the law.

Azadi records the journey of seven families including the protagonist Lala Kanshi Ram from Sialkot to India. First, they incur loss in their business, which leads to the economic crisis. Their entire life savings become nothing or plundered suddenly. For example, Lala Kanshi Ram loses his grain business and Bibi Amar Vati loses her apartment that she gave for rent. Like this all the Hindu families lose their livelihood overnight. Some people like Abdul Ghani are awaiting to plunder the wealth of the migrated families. Along with the business, they lose their relationship with the other religious people of their place in no time. Similarly in *Train to Pakistan*, the relationship between the Muslims and Sikhs strains swiftly. “Quite suddenly, every Sikh in Mano Majra became a stranger with an evil intent. His long hair and beard

appeared barbarous, his kirpan menacingly anti-Muslim” (128). One of the Sikhs comments, “They have been eating out salt for generations and see what they have done! We have treated them like our own brothers. They have behaved like snakes” (130). By recording similar events, the authors register that there is no financial compensation for those who dislocate, rather they are permanently thrown into hell. Afterwards, they could live and relive the happy days only in their minds. It is unfortunate to note that, a sudden political decision deseats all the migrants against which they have no option to fight. Further, they are not sure of reaching the promised land due to the violence that breaks in all the places especially near the borders.

During a political event like partition, it is the responsibility of the governments to protect the lives and livelihood of the people. In the case of India’s partition, the then government led by the British was not interested in this since they were about to lead the country whereas the interim government led by Jawaharlal Nehru was unable to curtail the violence. Arun Kumar, the son of Lala Ram finds fault with the government for its inability to prevent violence. “If unwilling, the government is a party to the murder. If incapable, we Indians have no right to ask for freedom” (130). This incident indicates that most of the violence that took place under the pretext of partition was state-sponsored in which the government ignored the act of violence instead of curbing them. This created a sense of insecurity among the minorities. One of the Hindu characters in Sialkot discloses his fear. “If Pakistan is created, we’ll have to leave. That is, if the Muslims spare our lives” (41). This kind of trauma stays in the minds of the victims forever. Further, the police officers like Rahmat-Ullah Khan in *Azadi* misuse their power to abuse women. He goes faraway to seduce Sunanda and in this process he is murdered by Arun. Thus, Arun responds through violence to protect his lady love. If he had not, he would have lost his living space forever.

From both the novels, it is understood that some efforts were taken by the governments to curb the communal violence. For example, in India, Nehru announced that the assassin of Gandhi was a Hindu. “Jawaharlal Nehru...spoke of a light going out of their lives. It was no ordinary light, he said, it was most extraordinary flame. It was now gone and India was plunged into darkness” (362). He was very philosophic in addressing the country about the assassination of Gandhi. But some communal forces utilized the political turmoil of the country to gain religious and political mileage. Homi K Bhabha writes, “Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully encounter their horizons in the mind’s eye” (*Nation and Narration* 23). Hence, it is important to alleviate the fear of the oppressed and marginalized and create a comfortable space of survival. Otherwise, they may lose their faith in the institution of the country.

There are some officials who really want to help the people but they are unable to do so. In *Train to Pakistan*, Hukum Chand shows genuine concern over the Muslims who are migrating. “If possible, get the Muslims to go out peacefully. Nobody really benefits by bloodshed. Bad characters will get all the loot and the government will blame us for the killing” (23). Further, Singh accuses that the politicians are not interested in curbing violence against the affected. “What is happening on the other side in Pakistan does not matter to them. They have not lost their homes and belongings; they haven’t had their mothers, wives, sisters and daughters raped and murdered in the streets” (22). Here, the police officer justifies his inaction, by pointing out the violence beyond borders. Like this, many officials stayed away from their professional and moral duty of saving the innocent lives.

Religion has been playing a devastating role to divide the people in India. The combination of religion, money and power disrupt the daily life of the people. *Train to Pakistan* elucidates, “Morality...is a matter of money. Poor people cannot afford to have morals. So they have religion. Our first problem is to get people more food, clothing, comfort. That can only be done by stopping exploitation by the rich, and abolishing landlords. And that can be done by changing the government” (39). The contemporaneity of violence connected to religion in

India is very alarming. India has been losing thousands of lives in the past twenty-five years related to the violence triggered by religious causes like lynching for killing the cows, attack on religious minorities, minority priests hacked to death, the demolition of minority religious places etc.

The religious fanatics who involve in violence lose their humanity and they possess no guilty feeling towards their mistakes and sins. In *Azadi*, Abdul Ghani, one of the neighbours of Kanshi Ram involves in the train murder of his daughter Madhubala and his son-in-law. When Arun goes to identify his sister's dead body, Abdul Ghani discloses his crooked mind saying, "I put her and her husband into the fire with my own hands, and they're now on their way to dozakh, to hell – where I hope they rot forever" (185). Moreover, the mass killing of the people in a train from India is termed as "*Kurukshetra*." Such isolated incidents expose the ugly face of the religious extremism and illustrates the non-existence of human values.

Like religion caste is also playing a crucial role in the downfall of a country like India. Khushwant Singh criticizes the deep-rooted caste divide in the country. "In a country which had accepted caste distinctions for many centuries, inequality had become an inborn mental concept. If caste was abolished by legislation, it came up in other forms of class distinction" (75). Memories connected to caste have not faded in India even after seventy-five years of independence. Whereas, the divide in the name of religion, caste, race, ethnicity has been deepened in one form or other. The poor and the oppressed are ensured the right to live by the constitution of India. However, the people who are in the helm are not serious about ensuring minimum safety to the oppressed. In *Azadi*, when Kanshi is asked by a guard about the purpose of his visit to Delhi, he replies, "I'm going there to have a meal with Jawaharlal Nehru – to celebrate azadi" (328). After the assassination of Gandhi, Bibi Amar Vati does not feel for Gandhi, but says "It's good he is. He ruined us" (362). This kind of reply comes since the people are affected during the partition in all aspects.

The repercussions of the partition memory never stop. In *Azadi*, after many months, the family members of Kanshi Ram get a permanent place to live in India. Though it is a one room house, considering the hardships that they underwent, it is a relief to them. In spite of that, they are unable to adapt themselves to the changing environment. "The three of them lay fully awake. Not being able to fathom their minds and feeling restless about it. Not being able to talk to each other and feeling angry about it. A sadness weighed on their hearts, and each felt stifled, crushed" (370). Here, the problem of the family is deeply psychological and it transcends time and space. "The appalling misery they were going through had to have some meaning. They had to emerge different, modified, reborn" (232).

Some youngsters take extreme efforts to uphold their religious and racial beliefs. When Niranjana Singh was forced to forgo his hair and turban, which are his Sikh identity, for safety, he refuses and immolates himself to show that world about his faith. When the elders ask him not to take risk, he affirms, "Lose your head, if need be, Don't lose your Sikh Faith" (246). This type of fanatic thoughts is prevalent in many religions in India. This kind of extremism is prevalent even today and has greater impact on many growing minds. Over the period, the extremists process them as heroes and saints and use them as a strategy to influence the youth by keeping their memories alive. Observing the birth and death anniversaries of such people is one of the ways of keeping the memories of such extremists alive and infuriate the youth for religious and political gain.

Revisiting the partition narratives discloses that the lives of the people have not changed even after seventy-five years of independence. In *Train to Pakistan*, Iqbal says, "Freedom is for the educated people who fought for it. We were the slaves of the English, now we will be slaves of the educated Indians – or the Pakistanis" (52). He further emphasizes, "...the Englishmen have gone but the rich Indians have taken their place. ...You are in the same handcuffs and fetters which the English put on you. We have to get together and rise. We have

nothing to lose but these chains” (64). One of the important dimensions of memory studies is realizing the contemporaneity of the history preserved in literature. In this sense, one cannot deny that the fruits of freedom have not reached all the sections of the society especially the poor and the underprivileged. Khushwant Singh criticizes the social evils of the country in *Train to Pakistan* as follows:

India is constipated with a lot of humbug. Take religion. For the Hindu, it means little besides caste and cow-protection. For the Muslim, circumcision and kosher meat. For the Sikh, long hair and the hatred of the Muslim. For the Christian, Hinduism with a sola topee. For the Parsi, fire-worship and feeding vultures. Ethics, which should be the kernel of a religious code, has been carefully removed (180).

The problems highlighted by the author before six decades continue to resonate in the socio-political set-up of the country, and the poor and the marginalized continue to suffer. If these issues are not addressed or solved, the country will remain a place of inequality, and the idea of nation will be in their minds and not in reality.

Memory is not an exclusive history in itself; it is the present embedded in the past and the future that evolves forever. The memory's space is not physical but liminal and the journey towards that space is everlasting. One who is in a pursuit of realizing that space is like one who is after the mirage which shifts its space forever and never to be realized. Reik says, “History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme” (Reik 133). Similarly, Hegel affirms, “History teaches us that man learns nothing from history” (Hegel 9). Memory studies enhance the individuals to assess the past and gives an opportunity to amend the present and future by avoiding the past mistakes. If the politicians and the religious extremists do not listen to the cries of the past, they will be forced to repeat the same. George Santayana conveys this universal truth as “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it” (121).

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The Problematic Prism of Childhood: An Analysis of Depictions in Select Malayalam Fiction

Liji Varghese

Abstract

The present paper tries to trace how the depictions of childhood in literature are often guided by socio-cultural signifiers that remain entrenched in contemporary societal codes. The works selected for analysis locate the tangent of such depictions; from idealised constructions to problematic portraiture. *Unnikuttante Lokam* and *Pattunoolpuzhu* address crucial notions tied to the evolution and dissemination of social constructs related to the idea of childhood. The idea of childhood becomes one that is open to interpretations and re-interpretations, guided by the praxis of identity politics and power dynamics.

Keywords: Childhood Depictions, Normative Categories, Social Constructs, Privilege, Vulnerability, Social Invisibility

Introduction

Childhood is often touted as an age of innocence and portraiture of childhood in literature resonate with images that glorify such ideals. Children's literature often assumes a didactic tone and one can even argue that such narratives aim to disseminate ideological codes along with aesthetic pleasure. However, children's literature is often an ambiguous term as many works intended for children, have been read and enjoyed by adults as well. The present paper tries to analyse the varying nuances of childhood depicted in select Malayalam fictional narratives. The works selected for analysis, Nandanar's *Unnikuttante Lokam* (1973) and S. Harish's *Pattunoolpuzhu* (2024) belong to opposing ends of the literary spectrum and offer very diverse reading experiences. While Nandanar's work can be cited as one that falls within the purview of Children's literature, Harish's novel may not be easily comprehended by children. However, both works depict a child as the protagonist and foreground worlds that are evolved from the child's perspective. The present paper aims to scrutinise the opposing worldviews delineated in these narratives and thereby offer a critique of the socio-political ethos that shaped them.

Childhood has always been a very prolific theme in literatures all over the world. The tangent of childhood depictions has varied from the highly idealised to gritty portrayals of lost innocence and shattered dreams. These depictions mirror the lived realities of the world around us and provide insights into how "contemporary childhoods are imagined, produced and experienced" (Khan and Saltmarsh 267). The present paper tries to compare and contrast two opposing views of childhood that navigate the problematic prism of such depictions. While *Unnikuttante Lokam* hinges itself on idealism and nostalgia, *Pattunoolpuzhu* explores the power dynamics cast by economic schisms. A comparative analysis of these two works reveals the intricate web of societal structures that collude in the creation of the discourse on childhood.

Analysis

The worlds witnessed by the child protagonists in *Unnikuttante Lokam* and *Pattunoolpuzhu* are so divergent from each other that it draws attention to the focalisation of the narratives. *Unnikuttante Lokam* which can be translated as "The World of Unnikuttan" delves into the

quotidian life of an upper caste family and explores the intricate labyrinth of social interactions through the eyes of the eponymous protagonist, Unnikuttan. As the member of a socially mobile class, Unnikuttan's world is permeated with privileges that strongly moulds his perceptions and perspectives. Unnikuttan, as the innocent little boy, sees the world as his playground and whiles away his time, trying to amuse himself. *Unnikuttante Lokam* can be seen as a typical example of children's literature in Malayalam that "serves the purpose of constructing childhoods that are temporally and spatially desirable" (Noorunnida M.). As the privileged scion of an upper middle-class family, his whims and fancies are catered to by a flurry of servants. He does not realise that the world that he sees through his curious eyes is one that is circumscribed by his social position.

On the other hand, *Pattunoolpuzhu* explores a darker world through the eyes of a thirteen-year-old boy called Samsa. His interior monologues reveal an intricate social order that foregrounds how a man's public persona can determine his visibility in the eyes of others. Samsa is the perennial outsider, the "Other" who is invisible to the people around him. His loneliness aggravates his alienation and his existence is always limited to the fringes of the society. His family's poverty and his father's debts inevitably shape the way in which he sees the world. Samsa doesn't experience the buoyancy that Unnikuttan takes for granted as his world is one that hinges on uncertainties. The world of Samsa is bereft of the innocence that one associates with childhood and offers a critique of how the adult world hems the child's horizon of expectations.

Even the names of the protagonists indicate the kind of worldviews that they will later adopt. Unnikuttan's name is one that is very common and "Unni" literally means "young boy" and "Kuttan" is often a term used to denote a certain degree of affection. Thus, Unnikuttan is defined by his very name; he is the darling son of the family who lords over the adults in the family. Samsa's name is strange and doesn't really belong to the milieu in which he is born. His strange name accentuates his alienation in a world that is bereft of the comfort of belonging. His strange name has a stranger story behind it and it is revealed that he wasn't named till he was four. It is Mark Sir, the librarian, who names him and he chooses Kafka's character for the little boy (PP 64). The fact that he wasn't named till he was four, foregrounds the lonely world of Samsa. Both Unnikuttan and Samsa try to perceive the world outside through the windows in their respective houses. While the windows in Unnikuttan's house offer a clear and panoramic view (UL 18), Samsa's impressions are hindered by windows that refuse to open (PP 4). His perception is further obstructed by the dark and gloomy atmosphere inside his house. Windows in both novels can be seen as extensions of the child's connection with the world around him. While Unnikuttan enjoys the privileges of his elite background, Samsa's world is bereft of such privileges.

The differing worlds are signified by the interaction with the adult world. All the adults in Unnikuttan's world serve as guardians; people who protect and nurture. His parents and grandparents make him feel cherished and protected. The servants act as an extended family and he feels at ease in their presence. Kuttan Nair, the *karyasthan*, becomes a soothing paternal presence who indulges Unnikuttan's relentless demands. The adult world in *Unnikuttante Lokam* is portrayed as a benign cosmos that exists to ease the child's initiation into the world at large. While the parents and grandparents act as the primary caregivers, Kuttan Nair and Kaliyamma assume the role of secondary and tertiary caregivers who "protect" the child. The word "protect" is emphasised as it highlights the position of the child vis-à-vis the adult world. The child in the novel becomes an entity that requires constant care and protection and concomitantly, Unnikuttan is seen as a character without agency. This is presented as normative and children are relegated to a realm without active participation. Unnikuttan's actions are summarily dismissed as mischievous and the adults dictate the standards of accepted behaviour.

He spends his entire day seeking new adventures and often gets into trouble as the adult world constantly challenges his autonomy.

The adult world in *Unnikuttante Lokam* is depicted as one that is marked by a clear hierarchy. Patriarchal hegemony reigns absolute and is never questioned. Since the novel is primarily focalised from Unnikuttan's perspective, it is significant that the little boy will imbibe these societal codes of behaviour as he grows up. His father and grandfather become authoritarian figures in whom power is invested and he perceives that his mother and grandmother cater to the demands set by the men. Even Kuttan Nair becomes a figure of reverence as he is an upper caste male and the women of the family treat him differently as opposed to the way in which Kaliyamma and Mundi are treated. Though caste plays a pertinent role in these interpersonal interactions, the gender of the person is also a seminal factor in the equation. Even when the women of the family assume the societal role of superiority, they defer to Kuttan Nair as he is a man. While Unnikuttan may be too young to comprehend the complex societal signifiers, he will invariably imbibe these thought patterns as he grows up.

Throughout the narrative, Unnikuttan's actions and decisions are controlled by the normative parameters of his social world. His perspectives and value judgments are constantly manipulated by the adults around him who try to shape his worldview. It may be argued that these prejudices constantly mould his attitudes towards others. While he is deferential towards Kuttan Nair and is awed by the latter's proficiency in crafting toys and discovering interesting objects; his attitude towards Kaliyamma and Mundi is often laced with thinly veiled disdain. Though at first glance, this disdain can be attributed to Kaliyamma's and Mundi's lack of hygiene, it may be argued that the child's aversion towards the women stems from the way in which other adults perceive her. As members of a lower caste, they are seen separate from Kuttan Nair, who is an upper caste man. The distinctions are reinforced by the food that they eat, the clothes that they wear and the way in which they talk. Though Unnikuttan is unaware of the deeply entrenched casteism prevalent in society, he too perpetuates the same discrimination when he views the women as Other.

Unnikuttan's relationship with Kuttan Nair can be analysed in the light of the self/Other dichotomy as well. Though Kuttan Nair is not a member of the family, he is treated differently from the other servants. He is primarily seen from Unnikuttan's focalisation and is projected as a very efficient and diligent man. He is someone who offers solutions to the myriad problems that the young boy faces and this earns him the latter's devotion. At many points in the narrative, there is a deliberate attempt to stress Kuttan Nair's work ethics and managerial skills. His efficiency is acknowledged by the members of the family and he is instrumental in arranging and managing seminal activities within the familial circle. Kuttan Nair thus embodies the upper caste sense of "self" and constantly placed in contrast with the "others" like Kaliyamma and Mundi, who are posited as outsiders.

While Unnikuttan internalises the differences, he is too young to fully comprehend the nuances of societal codes. As a young boy, he is invested in exploring the world around him and the intricacies of the adult world remain hidden from his gaze. While the narrative doesn't offer explicit references pertaining to Unnikuttan's privileged world, it does foreground an event that disturbs the child's complacency. Unnikuttan's visit to his friend, Krishnankutty's house (UL 222-29) creates a furore and he is left perplexed as he doesn't understand the social segmentation that separates the families. Krishnankutty is from an economically underprivileged family and it is suggested that his mother is not a "good woman" (UL 228). Unnikuttan doesn't understand why his friend's mother is branded like that as he perceives her as a kind and loving woman who served him food. Even when Unnikuttan retains the memory of his friend's mother as a kind woman, the social demarcation is clearly etched in his conscience and he understands that it is forbidden to visit the house again.

Unnikuttan is too young to understand the world around him and subsequently, his gaze is marked by a certain innocence that will be corrupted as he merges with the adult world. Unnikuttan is depicted as an idealised character, whose innocence is not just a trait of childhood; but one that is cultivated in layers of privilege. His innocence is closely tied to his identity as a member of the privileged class for it has shielded him from poverty, casteism and related issues that children like Krishnankutty experience firsthand. The deep-seated schisms in society are noticed but not completely comprehended by Unnikuttan, who remains trapped in the worldview of the adults around him. Nandanar himself intended Unnikuttan as an idealised character; one who brings back the nostalgia and simplicity of a bygone era. Unnikuttante Lokam caters to the normative category of fixing childhood as an era of untainted innocence. Commenting on such works, Deepa Sreenivas succinctly argues that, “Childhood has been hegemonically represented in children’s narratives, textbooks, consumer culture and popular media as a period of innocence, play, spontaneity and vulnerability – clearly marked off from adult worlds of responsibility and work” (316).

While Unnikuttan is situated in an idealised and privileged realm, Harish’s Samsa is a character who views the world through a troubled lens. Samsa’s monologues reveal the extent of his loneliness and he is the eponymous silkworm that is imprisoned in its cocoon. He shies away from societal scrutiny and prefers to elude attention. His world is shaped by his loneliness and his only friend is the ghost of a thirteen-year-old girl whom he imagines into existence. He remains invisible to the others around him as they view him as an inconsequential being who is lost in his own world. Unlike Unnikuttan, whose boisterous conquests draw attention to himself, Samsa is forever roaming the labyrinths of his inner world. Samsa believes that he has the ability to remain hidden from others’ view and there are several instances in the novel where he remains unnoticed by the people around him. This foregrounds the social invisibility of a child who has been branded as an outcast due to events that are beyond his control and is suggestive of “the symbolic politics of childhood” (Devika 81).

Samsa prefers to wander his inner world as the outside world appears demanding and uninviting. He has no friends and it is implied that his peers find him strange. The adults in his world either ignore his presence or treat him harshly. He is a boy who is caught between worlds and occupy the in-between realm of actuality and imagination. The dysfunctional family that he inhabits makes him vulnerable to the taunts of others and he trains himself to be invisible to the people around him. While Unnikuttan’s life is marked by his social and economic presence, Samsa’s life is manifested in a series of absences. When his father’s debts make him a target for the creditors, he withdraws into his inner world to ease the pain and humiliation. The juice shop owner who ignores his presence when he asks for a glass of juice is a painful instance of how the conflicts of the adult world taint a child’s life (PP 81-82). Samsa is confused as to why the man is ignoring his request and wonders whether he didn’t hear his request. Then, he understands that his father’s debts have made him an outcast as well. He doesn’t relish the aftertaste of the juice as it is tinged with his public humiliation.

Samsa recedes to his inner world as the people around him constantly violate his trust. The fact that he finds companionship in a ghost speaks volumes about his alienation from the world that he is born into. The world that he inhabits include his own thoughts that run free and the shadowy presence of people who once inhabited earth. He feels safer in the presence of shadows than the actual manifestations. The spirit of the thirteen-year-old girl instils in him the confidence to share his thoughts and it is ambiguous whether she is a figment of his imagination or a supernatural presence. She is the only friend that he has and he names her Natasha (PP 70). The act of naming is significant as he realises her as an important presence in his life. Unlike other children, Natasha will not judge him or his family and that is why Samsa feels relaxed in her presence.

Samsa internalises the agonising shame that is wrapped around his family like a shroud. While Samsa and his mother are acutely aware of this crippling shame, his father's reactions are more ambivalent as he seems strangely impervious to it. Vijayan, Samsa's father does not fulfil the role of a conventional guardian as he fails to protect his family. He is more intent on saving his own face and does not seem to care about the shame that is brought upon his family by his antics. Samsa is forced to deal with his father's creditors and in one particularly disturbing incident, he is humiliated in front of his classmate Mira as Vijayan had borrowed money from her father, Mohanan (PP 154-58). The cruelty of the adult world is foregrounded in this interaction where Samsa becomes the object of Mohanan's annoyance in lieu of Vijayan. When the adult world transgresses the ideal of acceptable behaviour, it is Samsa who feels the shame and not the adults who have overstepped their boundaries. Samsa's world is starkly different from that of Unnikuttan as the latter does not bear the burden of shame foisted on by the adult world.

Samsa's world lacks protective father figures and the innocence of his childhood is tarnished by the emotional, verbal and physical violence unleashed by his father's creditors. Samsa's world is portrayed as one that is highly unjust but perhaps, more realistic when compared to Unnikuttan's world. The bout of physical violence unleashed in the climax of the novel (PP 251-52) can be seen as the forceful obliteration of childhood. Even the perpetrator of the violence understands the great wrong that has been done to the little boy and yet his actions cannot be rescinded. The slap meant for Vijayan is given to Samsa and that act signals the end of childhood. Unlike Unnikuttan, who is the perennial little boy, Samsa becomes the little boy who is forced to enter the adult world before his time.

Conclusion

Unnikuttan and Samsa occupy opposing sides of the childhood spectrum and hold a mirror to the divergent worlds that they embody. Unnikuttan's innocent childhood is preserved through the actions of the adults around him and his world is sheathed in privileges that he takes for granted. He is seen and treated as a child and his lack of agency can be attributed to the fact that in his world he is meant to act and live like a child. While Unnikuttan's world is privileged, one shouldn't presume to overlook how his actions and thoughts are constantly limited by the world that he inhabits. His individuality is conditioned by the world around him and the very innocence that is a hallmark of his character is a careful construct aligned by specific socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, one may argue that Unnikuttan is a character who cannot function outside his situational matrix of relationships.

Unlike Unnikuttan, Samsa is situated outside the societal matrix as his family exists outside the same. His status as an outsider is reinforced by the positioning of his family on the fringes of society. His father's debts make his social standing more precarious and there emerges a vacuum that separates him from the world around him. Samsa is aware of his social invisibility and tries to stay away from the societal gaze that is judgmental. His understanding of the world around him is profound and that stems from his lived experiences. His reflections foreground his worldview that is forged by the socio-economic coordinates of his milieu. Concomitantly, one can argue that Samsa is a character forged by the alienation that societal standards have imposed on his familial structure.

Childhood as depicted in these two novels foreground the idea that it is largely a construct of society and is rooted in socio-economic determiners that shape its contours. While *Unnikuttante Lokam* depicts a highly idealised portrayal, *Pattunoolpuzhu* offers a widely divergent stance. Unnikuttan is a character steeped in signifiers of normative childhood, whereas Samsa exposes the "constructed-ness" of social and cultural categories that celebrate the ideal of childhood. One can argue that Unnikuttan and Samsa epitomise "the plurality of

childhoods located in experiential categories such as religion, caste, gender, class, sexual orientation, skin colour and race” (Easo). The childhoods depicted in the works consequently become repositories of cultural ideations that are firmly rooted in ideological perceptions of identity politics.

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Heritage And Hybridity: A Cultural Examination of Second-Generation Identity

W Nancy Hephzibah

Abstract

This paper aims to study the hybridity that shape the second-generation identities in the short story unaccustomed Earth by Jhumpa Lahiri. This research explores the conflict between the diasporic experience and inherited cultural heritage. It also focuses on identity formation, cultural hybridity and looks at how Lahiri interprets the difficulties of second-generation immigrants. The study illustrates how the family, memory, and belonging plays an important role in shaping the charters. The study concludes by demonstrating how second-generation immigrants can manage cultural ties and identify in a global society.

Keywords: Heritage, Hybridity, Second-Generation Identity, Culture Studies, Identity crisis.

Introduction

‘Culture Studies’ explores the relationship between culture and social practices and power relation with an emphasis on heritage and hybridity. From this research the heritage and hybridity can be explored in great detail through the experiences of second-generation immigrants, especially those juggling multiple cultural identities. Jhumpa Lahiri works are known for the themes likes Heritage, Hybridity, Second-Generation Identity, Culture Studies, Identity crisis. This short story Unaccustomed Earth deals with the characters that are torn between native (Bengali) and immigrant (American) identities and customs. The purpose for this research is to examine how Lahiri is handling the second-generation identity from the perspective of cultural hybridity.

Culture Studies

Culture Studies is concerned with how culture functions in the society, especially when it deals with identity, power and social structures. culture is the dynamic changing force impacted by location, politics, and history. This idea is particularly helpful in exploring the realities of diasporic population. And it give way for examining the evaluation of identity as both moulded and negotiated. According to the cultural theorist Stuart Hall “Cultural identity... is a matter of becoming as well as of being” (Hall 222). This concept emphasizes that identity is not a fixed state, but rather an ongoing process that is influenced by historical, cultural, and personal contexts.

Jhumpa Lahiri

Jhumpa Lahiri is an American author who is also a Indian descent, she is most known for her narration of immigrants’ life in the third space. Her writing usually addresses themes of cultural displacement, the complexities of family dynamics, and the quest for belonging in a foreign country. She was born in London to Bengali parents and raised in the United States. The short stories in the collection “Unaccustomed Earth” (2008) examine the lives of second-generation Bengali-Americans, emphasizing the psychological and emotional challenges faced by those torn between the expectations of American society and their parents' traditional values. Her works are known for the nuances of emotions.

Heritage: The Role of Cultural Memory

In *Unaccustomed Earth*, the concept of heritage is conveyed through immigrant's recollection, family story, and the transfer of cultural values between generation. In Lahiri's stories, characters frequently struggle to balance blending into American life with honouring their parents' Bengali traditions. In this short story the protagonist Ruma's father follows Bengali tradition where as she follows American tradition. At the same time when the father gives importance for gardening and spending time with his grandson she is feels the value for her culture.

Hybridity and Transcultural Identity

Hybridity means blending of culture, which is clearly seen in Ruma. Her identity is molded by both her Bengali roots and American upbringing, which is reflected in her character both as a daughter and as a mother. When she takes care of the father the Bengali roots are seen at the same time when he plays the role of a mother and wife her westernized roots are seen. Transcultural identity is seen in the character Akash, Ruma's son. Since he is been raised in the United States, which is completely disconnected from Bengali traditions. His interaction with his grandfather was also not that very smooth initially, which shows the transcultural differences.

Second- Generation Identity

Ruma's character the apt example for second generation identity conflict because she is caught in between two cultures influences. She always has the tension between the expectation of the immigrant generation and the desire of the second generation to assert her individuality. She always has this conflict of whether to follow the expectation of immigrant parents or to follow her striving for a more independent life within American society.

Conclusion

This character of Ruma explores the nuanced journey of second-generation immigrants as they delicately balance between maintaining cultural ties and following their identity in a globalized society. Ruma's character suggest the key to manage cultural ties and self-awareness. Ruma not find a way to honour her roots and also manages to adapt to globalized world. Ultimately Ruma's character as shown the reader how to manages cultural ties and survive in this global society.

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Beyond Postcolonial Tokenism: Indigenous Feminist Agency in Maraea Rakuraku's "*When does it start?*"

T Prabhu

Abstract

This paper reads Maraea Rakuraku's poem "*When does it start?*" through the lens of Indigenous feminist thought to show how activism, for Rakuraku, is not a theoretical claim but an embodied, ancestral act. Her poem questions the performative nature of postcolonial discourse, revealing how colonial power structures persist beneath academic and institutional rhetoric. By confronting white privilege, gendered hierarchies, and the emotional labour placed upon Indigenous women, Rakuraku gives poetic form to *whakamanawahine*—the empowerment of Māori women through voice and self-determination. Drawing insights from Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Glen Coulthard, this study argues that Rakuraku's work turns poetry into a space of resurgence and truth-telling, where the act of speaking becomes a decolonial gesture linking art, activism, and survival.

Keywords: Indigenous Feminism, Whakamanawahine, Decolonial Activism, White Privilege, Indigenous Voice, Survivance, Patriarchy, Postcolonial Theory

Maraea Rakuraku, a Māori poet and creative voice from Tūhoe and Ngāti Kahungunu ki te Wairoa, locates her work where Indigenous feminism meets activism and decolonial thought. Her poems— "Tan-Knee," "The Prospect," and "Te Papakāinga," among others—speak directly to the everyday realities, resilience, and struggles of wāhine Māori. Through this work, Rakuraku calls attention to the continuing influence of colonial and patriarchal systems that have shaped the lives of Indigenous women. Her creative philosophy is deeply tied to *whakamanawahine*, a concept that means empowering Māori women to reclaim voice, agency, and presence within both art and life.

Apart from poetry, Rakuraku's efforts extend into production and community work through her company Native Agency, and through editorial projects such as *Tātai Whetū: Seven Māori Women Poets in Translation* (2018). These contributions show how her artistic practice operates hand in hand with decolonial advocacy. For Rakuraku, writing is never separate from activism—it is a way to give space and sound to Indigenous perspectives that have long been marginalized.

Her poem "When does it start?" captures this fusion of poetic craft and political urgency. Written in both English and *te reo Māori*, it challenges the hollow performance of academic tokenism, arguing instead that genuine resistance begins with lived experience and voice. Rakuraku turns the act of "opening your mouth" into a metaphor for Indigenous feminist assertion. The poem refuses the safety of theoretical abstraction and insists that decolonization begins in the body and breath—in the moment when silence breaks and speech becomes an act of courage.

In Rakuraku's work, language itself becomes a tool of activism. Her poetry moves beyond description to performance, where each word enacts resistance and preserves memory. Through devices like rhythm, repetition, and candid emotional expression, she constructs a space in which rhetoric and lived reality converge. The following lines illustrate this dynamic, highlighting how the very act of speaking functions as both survival and assertion of selfhood.

“When does it start?”

It’s not waving a flag, holding a banner, knowing what postcolonial theory means and when to use it, memorising quotes and lining them up like soldiers that are sent out in waves of attacks,

It’s not being polite, remaining open, listening fairly, vigilantly assessing your motivation, re-writing your carefully worded response, marvelling how the person who has cornered you on-line, at a party, work do or rugby game is not hearing how every word they are saying is offensive and they may as well be slicing through your heart, with the intent-sity of a scythe clearing long grass,

It isn’t realising dressing up racist rhetoric in flash language is still just racist rhetoric in flash language and sniffing that out in the first, I’m not racist ... but,

It isn’t recognising white privilege and entitlement, functioning under white privilege and entitlement, loving under white privilege and entitlement,

It doesn’t start with the huge fucking disappointment when a brown brotha is worse than the worst redneck you’ve encountered in your life,

It doesn’t start by standing up for your iwi, people, culture, colleague, son, daughter, lover, missus, Koro, Nan, cuddie, animals, Papatūānuku, or even yourself

’
It starts,

with that first step from the margins into the glare of light

and

opening

your

mouth,

that started

when the idea of you was born and took seed

that started

when the idea of you was born and took seed

that started

when the idea of you was born

that started

with the idea of you.

Rejecting Token Postcolonialism

The opening stanza of Maraea Rakuraku's "When does it start?" dismantles the façade of intellectualized activism: "It's not waving a flag, holding a banner, knowing what postcolonial theory means and when to use it, memorising quotes and lining them up like soldiers." In this biting critique, Rakuraku exposes how postcolonial theory, when detached from lived Indigenous realities, becomes a performance of resistance rather than a practice of liberation. Her tone is satirical and defiant, pointing to the gap between the rhetoric of decolonization and the persistence of colonial structures that continue to shape Indigenous life.

This rejection of performative postcolonialism aligns with Linda Tuhiwai Smith's argument in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, where she critiques Western academic traditions for commodifying Indigenous pain while claiming to "study" or "represent" Indigenous peoples (Smith 24). Rakuraku's refusal to participate in such academic tokenism echoes Smith's call for Indigenous epistemologies and voices to define their own terms of resistance. For both, decolonization must move beyond theory into praxis—embodied, communal, and accountable to Indigenous communities.

Furthermore, Rakuraku's satire targets what Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang describe as "settler moves to innocence," gestures that allow settlers—and, by extension, the academic establishment—to appear decolonial without relinquishing power (Tuck and Yang 10). By mocking those who "know what postcolonial theory means" yet fail to live its ethics, Rakuraku challenges the institutionalization of postcolonial studies, which often privileges linguistic sophistication over lived resistance. Her poetic stance exposes the academic containment of Indigenous pain, where theory becomes a substitute for action.

This critique also recalls Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's insistence in *Decolonising the Mind* that true liberation begins not in adopting theoretical language but in reclaiming one's own speech and cultural grounding. Rakuraku's imperative to "open your mouth" literalizes this act of reclamation—voice becomes a site of decolonial resistance, rooted in self-definition rather than academic citation.

In the context of Indigenous feminist activism, Rakuraku's rejection of token postcolonialism is deeply political. It resists the objectification of Indigenous women as subjects of study and reclaims them as producers of knowledge. By refusing to "memorise quotes and line them up like soldiers," she critiques the militarized logic of academia itself—its hierarchies, gatekeeping, and its tendency to silence those it claims to empower. Her poem calls instead for what Aileen Moreton-Robinson terms Indigenous sovereignty of the mind, where knowledge production is grounded in the lived, embodied, and spiritual experience of Indigenous women (Moreton-Robinson 67).

Ultimately, Rakuraku's poem rejects postcolonialism as a linguistic performance of resistance and redefines it as an ethical and ancestral practice. Her critique exposes how postcolonial theory can risk reproducing colonial hierarchies when it becomes an academic identity rather than a lived commitment. In doing so, she transforms the very act of speaking—"that first step from the margins into the glare of light"—into a radical gesture of Indigenous feminist sovereignty.

White Privilege and Structural Power

Rakuraku's insistent repetition— "*recognising white privilege and entitlement, functioning under white privilege and entitlement, loving under white privilege and entitlement*"—confronts the pervasiveness of settler power that structures every dimension of Indigenous existence. The reiteration mimics the suffocating rhythm of colonial dominance, reminding readers that whiteness is not an individual flaw but a systemic condition shaping social, political, and intimate relations. Aileen Moreton-Robinson in *Talkin' Up to the White Woman* argues that white subjectivity maintains control over feminist and academic discourses by universalizing itself as neutral and normative (Moreton-Robinson xxi). Rakuraku's verse exposes this same dynamic: even gestures of empathy or solidarity remain framed by the privileges of those who inhabit whiteness without interrogating its foundations.

The poem also illuminates how structural power extends into the emotional and domestic spaces where Indigenous women love, labor, and live. By linking "loving" with "white privilege," Rakuraku underscores that colonization penetrates the most personal domains, shaping identity and desire through historical inequities. This recognition echoes Sara Ahmed's argument that emotions are political—they "stick" to bodies differently depending on race and history (Ahmed 12). For Indigenous feminist activism, naming these layers of privilege is an act of resistance; it exposes how colonization operates through everyday interactions rather than only through overt policy or violence. Thus, Rakuraku transforms the acknowledgment of privilege into a decolonial strategy: to speak it aloud, to make it visible, and to dismantle its normalcy through poetic testimony.

Disappointment and Patriarchal Complicity

Perhaps the most arresting moment in Rakuraku's "When does it start?" arrives with the confession: "the huge fucking disappointment when a brown brotha is worse than the worst redneck you've encountered in your life." This line lays bare the emotional and political exhaustion that accompanies betrayal from within one's own community. Rakuraku's anger is not directed solely toward settler structures of power but also toward the replication of those structures by Indigenous men who perpetuate patriarchal dominance. This tension reflects a painful truth of Indigenous feminist critique: that colonialism and patriarchy are not separate forces but deeply intertwined systems that reinforce each other.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, in *As We Have Always Done*, insists that any meaningful Indigenous resurgence must confront internalized patriarchy, since the refusal to do so merely replicates the colonial hierarchies that subjugate Indigenous women (Simpson 64). Rakuraku's disappointment thus transcends personal frustration—it becomes a political statement about accountability and the limits of solidarity when gender justice is sidelined. Her poetry refuses to romanticize Indigenous unity, exposing instead how colonial trauma can manifest as lateral violence within Indigenous communities.

Furthermore, the juxtaposition of "brown brotha" and "redneck" collapses the binary between oppressor and oppressed, revealing how colonial masculinity can be internalized and reproduced. In voicing this betrayal, Rakuraku performs a decolonial feminist act: she reclaims the right to critique from within, affirming that Indigenous liberation cannot occur without the emancipation of wāhine Māori. Her verse demands that resurgence include not only resistance to colonial power but also the dismantling of patriarchal complicity at home.

Activism as Intergenerational Continuity

Maraea Rakuraku's "When does it start?" powerfully reclaims voice as the central locus of Indigenous feminist resistance. Through her refusal of token postcolonialism, her exposure of white privilege, her confrontation with patriarchal complicity, and her invocation of intergenerational continuity, Rakuraku articulates a decolonial praxis that bridges theory and lived experience. Her poem dismantles the illusion that liberation can be achieved through academic or symbolic gestures; instead, it insists that activism must emerge from embodied truth, communal accountability, and ancestral memory. In this way, Rakuraku transforms the act of speaking into a revolutionary assertion of being—one that challenges both colonial and internalized forms of domination.

Drawing upon the insights of theorists such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and Glen Coulthard, Rakuraku's work extends the discourse of Indigenous resurgence by centering wāhine Māori as agents of decolonial transformation. Her vision of whakamanawahine—the empowerment of Māori women—operates simultaneously as political resistance and cultural regeneration. The poem's final refrain, "that started when the idea of you was born," encapsulates the cyclical nature of Indigenous survival: resistance is not invented but remembered, not declared but lived. Rakuraku's poetics thus enact a form of survivance, affirming that Indigenous feminism is both inheritance and future promise. Her voice invites readers to recognize that the struggle for liberation begins not with theory or recognition, but with the courage to speak—to step, as she writes, "from the margins into the glare of light."

Resurgence Beyond Recognition

Maraea Rakuraku's poem "*When does it start?*" ultimately advances a vision of resistance that aligns with what Glen Sean Coulthard terms Indigenous resurgence—a self-determined refusal of colonial validation. Her dismissal of symbolic activism — "*It's not waving a flag, holding a banner...*"—reveals a deep skepticism toward what Coulthard in *Red Skin, White Masks* calls the "politics of recognition," wherein settler institutions selectively acknowledge Indigenous rights while maintaining control over the terms of that recognition (Coulthard 154). For Rakuraku, genuine decolonization cannot be conferred by external systems of power; it must emerge from within Indigenous communities and embodied acts of truth-telling. The imperative to take "that first step from the margins into the glare of light" dramatizes this movement from dependence on colonial validation toward autonomous visibility and voice.

Moreover, Rakuraku's notion of resurgence is not limited to political protest but extends into ancestral and spiritual dimensions. Her repeated affirmation—"*that started when the idea of you was born and took seed*"—suggests that resistance is genealogical, pre-existing colonial encounter and rooted in whakapapa. This emphasis aligns with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's understanding of resurgence as "a radical reimagining of Indigenous presence" sustained through relationships to land, language, and community (Simpson 22). Rakuraku's poetics thus transform resurgence into a lived, everyday practice rather than an abstract theory. By locating empowerment in ancestral continuity rather than external approval, her poem articulates a decolonial feminism that reclaims sovereignty not through recognition, but through presence, persistence, and the regenerative power of Indigenous voice.

In "When does it start?," Maraea Rakuraku advances a vision of resistance that resonates with Glen Sean Coulthard's idea of Indigenous resurgence—a turn away from colonial validation toward self-determined renewal. Her dismissal of symbolic gestures—"It's not waving a flag, holding a banner..."—reflects a mistrust of what Coulthard calls the politics of recognition, where settler institutions acknowledge Indigenous presence while still defining

its limits. For Rakuraku, decolonization can never be granted; it must grow from within, from the courage to speak and to act. The image of “that first step from the margins into the glare of light” captures this inward awakening and the move toward autonomous visibility. Rakuraku’s understanding of resurgence also carries spiritual and ancestral dimensions. The repetition—“that started when the idea of you was born”—suggests that resistance predates colonization and continues as part of whakapapa, the living connection to one’s ancestors. In this sense, Rakuraku’s work aligns with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s idea of resurgence as a radical expression of Indigenous presence sustained through relationships with land, language, and kinship. Rakuraku transforms this principle into a lived and poetic practice, one that affirms the continuity of Indigenous voice across generations.

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Quiet Spaces, Universal Truths and Subtle Art: The Unending Legacy of Jane Austen

Pradeep Kumar K

Abstract

The year 2025 marks the 250th birth anniversary of Jane Austen, a novelist whose quiet yet transformative art continues to shape modern literature to this day. This paper examines Austen's narrative realism, moral irony, and enduring global influence through the lens of literary history and feminist criticism. Situating her within the social and cultural context of Georgian England, it explores how Austen's treatment of women, class, and domestic life subtly challenged patriarchal norms and redefined the English novel. Drawing on critical perspectives from Virginia Woolf, Henry James, EM Forster, and Raymond Williams, the study reaffirms Austen's position as a revolutionary figure who transformed the ordinary experiences of her time into universal reflections on human nature.

Keywords: Jane Austen; Realism and Irony; Women and Marriage in Georgian England; Social Critique; Timeless Characters; Global Literary Influence.

Introduction

The 250th anniversary of Jane Austen's birth this year is expected to renew academic and cultural interest on the life and works of the author, testifying to her unbroken hold over readers and scholars alike. Born on 16 December 1775 in Steventon, Hampshire, Austen published her novels anonymously—“By a Lady”—a reflection not of modesty but of the restrictive conventions surrounding women writers in late eighteenth-century England. More than two centuries later, she stands as one of the most widely read and critically studied authors in world literature.

Austen's art operates within the intimate spaces of domestic life, yet her moral clarity and psychological precision render her novels vast in implication. Her works—*Sense and Sensibility* (1811), *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), *Mansfield Park* (1814), *Emma* (1815), *Northanger Abbey* (1818), and *Persuasion* (1818)—continue to delight readers of all types and to offer insight into gender, class, and human relationships. As Henry James observed, “Her exquisite touch makes everything she touches interesting” (James). Austen's subtle ironies, disciplined style, and social acuity made her the quiet revolutionary of English fiction.

Austen's Realism and the Challenge to Sentimentality

When Austen began to write, the sentimental novel—often overwrought with emotion and moral instruction—dominated English prose fiction. Austen's response to the genre was both aesthetic and ethical. She replaced sentimentality with psychological realism, building narratives around observation, irony, and restraint. In *Sense and Sensibility*, she dramatized the conflict between reason and feeling, offering a critique of romantic excess through the Dashwood sisters. Her art achieves what Raymond Williams later described as a “structure of feeling,” capturing the lived moral climate of her age (Williams). Austen's focus on everyday life and ordinary conversation allowed her to reveal deep social truths within limited settings.

As Sir Walter Scott admitted with admiration, “That young lady has a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with” (Scott). In this sense, Austen’s realism, though domestic in scope, is moral and ideological in power.

Women, Marriage, and the Middle-Class Ethic

Austen’s novels offer a sustained examination of women’s dependence on marriage for social and financial security in a patriarchal order. Her heroines—Elizabeth Bennet, Elinor Dashwood, Fanny Price, Emma Woodhouse, and Anne Elliot—are all engaged in the struggle to balance affection and autonomy within restrictive social codes.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Charlotte Lucas’s decision to marry the pompous Mr. Collins for economic security is depicted with sympathetic irony. Austen neither romanticizes nor condemns her; rather, she exposes the social structure that leaves women with few choices. As E. M. Forster noted, “Jane Austen’s books are not about people who are ill or dying, but about people who are living—living thoroughly and triumphantly” (Forster). Austen’s focus on survival, intelligence, and moral growth constitutes a quiet form of feminist realism, preceding later articulations of women’s consciousness in fiction.

The Craft of Irony and Free Indirect Discourse

Austen’s stylistic innovation lies in her mastery of free indirect discourse—a narrative technique blending third-person narration with the character’s inner voice. This method allows for psychological intimacy without abandoning authorial distance. Through it, Austen achieves an unparalleled balance between empathy and irony.

Virginia Woolf famously remarked, “Of all great writers, she is the most difficult to catch in the act of greatness” (Woolf). That elusiveness lies in Austen’s delicate tone: her humour conceals judgment, and her simplicity hides intellectual rigor. George Henry Lewes, partner of novelist George Eliot, similarly praised her: “The genius of Jane Austen has had no rival. She created a world of her own, perfectly real and full of delicate truth” (Lewes).

Social Critique and the Domestic Revolution

Though Austen rarely addresses politics directly, her fiction contains a quiet but potent social critique. The domestic sphere becomes the site where moral and social values are tested. Marriage, property, and inheritance—key institutions of Georgian England—are examined with irony and moral intelligence. Her portrayal of class mobility and gender expectation resonates with Raymond Williams’s argument that culture is a “whole way of life,” reflecting social and economic relations (Williams). Austen’s world of parsonages and drawing rooms is not trivial; it is the moral laboratory of her age.

The Enduring Appeal: Universality and Character

Austen’s characters endure because they embody universal human conflicts. Elizabeth Bennet’s defiance, Darcy’s transformation, Emma’s vanity, and Anne Elliot’s moral constancy remain relatable across centuries. Winston Churchill, reading Austen during World War II, observed with affection: “What calm lives they had... Yet, if one has to read novels, there are none better” (Churchill). His remark underscores the restorative power of her fiction—a return to moral order in times of chaos. John Mullan, a modern critic, notes that “even her most

fleeting characters have a vividness that makes us remember them as if we had met them in life” (Mullan).

Austen’s universality lies not in grand themes but in the minute fidelity of her observation. The emotional truth of her work transcends its historical setting, confirming her place as one of the first truly modern novelists.

Global Influence and Cultural Legacy

Two centuries after her death, Austen’s influence has become global and interdisciplinary. Her novels have inspired films, series, and literary reinterpretations across cultures. In India, adaptations like *Bride and Prejudice*, *Kandukondain Kandukondain*, *Trishna*, and *Aisha* testify to her international appeal.

Her irony and psychological realism have influenced novelists from George Eliot to Henry James and from Virginia Woolf to Jhumpa Lahiri. Harold Bloom called her “the first true modern novelist, whose irony established the very tone of modern narrative” (Bloom). Austen’s art endures because it reveals the ordinary as extraordinary—showing that the moral and emotional struggles of the drawing room are as profound as those of the battlefield.

Conclusion

At 250, Jane Austen remains one of literature’s most subtle revolutionaries. Her fiction, grounded in realism and irony, redefined the possibilities of the novel. By transforming domestic life into a mirror of society, she created a world both particular and universal. Beneath her quiet surfaces lies a critique of social inequality and gender constraint; within her humour, a vision of moral intelligence and empathy. As C. S. Lewis observed, “For every age, she has something to say. She is a great moralist, because she shows how reason and affection must unite to form character” (Lewis). Austen’s novels continue to remind us that the drama of human life resides in the smallest of gestures—and that literature’s truest revolution lies in clarity, compassion, and truth.

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Navigating Mortality Beyond Humanity in Shakespearean Tragedy and Recent Films: Thanatopolitics and Posthumanism

Pradeep Trikha

Abstract

This paper explores the convergence of thanatopolitics—the politics of death and power over mortality—and posthumanism, which challenges human-centric views of agency and existence. It examines how these frameworks reshape understandings of mortality across theoretical, literary, and cinematic contexts. In *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, thanatopolitics and posthumanism intersect to depict death as a force extending beyond human agency, involving nonhuman elements like ghosts and storms. Films like *Fateh* (2024), *Dune: Part Two* (2024), and *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga* (2024) illustrate thanatopolitics and posthumanism in science fiction and action genres. Drawing on Achille Mbembe and Donna Haraway, the paper examines how these films portray death as politicised in contexts like war and apocalypse, while posthumanism redefines mortality through technology and hybridity, presenting it as a site of resistance, evolution, and transcendence. Across these domains, thanatopolitics and posthumanism reframe mortality as a complex, distributed process, challenging traditional humanist boundaries and requiring new ethical approaches to death in a posthuman world.

Keywords: Thanatopolitics, Posthumanism, Literature, Films, Mortality, Resistance, Evolution, Transcendence, Apocalypse, Technology, Hybridity, Science Fiction and Action Genres

Thanatopolitics, the politics of death, flips the script on biopolitics by focusing on how power structures decide who or what gets to live or die. Rooted in Foucault's work and expanded by Agamben, it exposes how states "let die" certain groups through neglect or active harm, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic, when marginalized communities faced higher mortality rates. Meanwhile, posthumanism, as championed by Braidotti, shakes up the human-centric worldview, emphasizing interconnectedness with nonhumans—such as animals, AI, or ecosystems. It argues that agency and mortality are not just human affairs but ripple across networks. When these two frameworks collide, situations become complex in intriguing ways. Thanatopolitics, traditionally focused on human death, now extends to include the demise of nonhuman entities—such as extinct species or outdated care robots. This shift presents death as a shared, relational phenomenon rather than a matter solely involving humans. For instance, the sixth mass extinction, driven by human activity, exemplifies multispecies thanatopolitics, where prioritising human interests leads to the extinction of other species. Similarly, care robots used for ageing populations blur the boundaries between human and machine, raising questions about grief and loss when they "die." Even AI in healthcare can perpetuate thanatopolitical neglect by biasing resource distribution. Thanatopolitics, as described by Foucault in 1978 and expanded by Agamben, relates to the governance of death within biopolitical regimes. Foucault argued that modern power functions by managing populations through life-affirming mechanisms, but thanatopolitics highlights the darker side: the state's capacity to "let die" certain groups or entities. For example, higher mortality rates among marginalised communities during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate thanatopolitical neglect. This framework is particularly useful when analysing how power structures decide whose lives are valued and whose are expendable. Posthumanism, as theorised by Braidotti, rejects

anthropocentrism by emphasising the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman entities. It suggests that agency, subjectivity, and mortality are not solely human attributes but are distributed across networks of animals, machines, and environments. This perspective is vital in a world where technologies like AI and care robots reshape notions of care, intimacy, and loss. Panchadhyayee suggests that "Posthumanism provides a lens to examine how mortality extends beyond humans, including the 'death' of ecosystems, species, or artificial entities".¹

I

Thanatopolitics, as conceptualised by Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben, refers to the exercise of power through the administration of death, contrasting with biopolitics' focus on fostering life.² It encompasses the right to kill or expose populations to death, often in the service of political order or exclusion. In literature and films, thanatopolitics manifests in narratives of violence, tyranny, and the state's management of mortality, revealing how death shapes social and political relations. Posthumanism, meanwhile, critiques humanist exceptionalism by emphasising the interconnectedness between humans, animals, technology, and environments, often through eco-materialist perspectives that highlight shared vulnerabilities in the Anthropocene.³ In Shakespeare's tragedies, such as *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, these ideas converge to explore mortality "beyond the human," where death is not merely an individual end but a relational event involving spectral presences, natural forces, and animalistic degradations.

Another dimension of the paper is to consider some recent films, such as *Fateh*, *Dune: Part Two*, and *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga*. Shakespeare's plays portray thanatopolitical regimes—monarchies that wield death as power—while post-humanist elements blur human boundaries, exposing mortality as enmeshed with nonhuman agencies. Through close readings informed by Foucault's analysis of madness and power dynamics in Shakespeare, as well as post-humanist theories, one uncovers how these plays anticipate modern crises of extinction and ecological finitude. The narrative of *Fateh* delves into mortality through the lens of digital thanatopolitics, where death is not merely physical but algorithmically orchestrated—hackers and corrupt officials weaponize data to control life and death, echoing Mbembe's "necropolitics" in a modern, surveillance-driven context. *Dune: Part Two* revolves around ecological necropolitics and posthuman symbiosis on Arrakis. The film is an adaptation of Frank Herbert's novel, continuing Paul Atreides' (Timothée Chalamet) journey on the desert planet Arrakis, where spice—a resource enabling prescience and interstellar travel—fuels imperial conflicts. *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga* highlights an apocalyptic wasteland and posthuman prosthetics of survival. George Miller's prequel to *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga* (starring Anya Taylor-Joy as a young Furiosa), unfolds in a post-apocalyptic Australia ravaged by nuclear fallout and resource scarcity. The synthesis of thanatopolitics and posthumanism reveals a complex interplay. While thanatopolitics traditionally focuses on human mortality, a posthuman approach extends this to nonhuman entities, such as extinct species or malfunctioning AI systems. "This convergence challenges binary distinctions between life and death, proposing instead a continuum where mortality is relational and distributed. For instance, the extinction of nonhuman species due to human intervention exemplifies a thanatopolitical act within a posthuman network".⁴

II

Thanatopolitics derives from Foucault's biopolitics, where modern power shifts from sovereign killing to managing life, yet keeps death as its "reverse." Agamben expands this to "thanatopolitics" as reducing life to mere existence, where the state determines who lives or

dies, often through exclusion or violence.⁴ In Shakespearean contexts, this appears in tyrannical rule and political corruption, where kings orchestrate deaths to retain power. 'Posthumanism, inspired by Derrida's hauntology and Lacan's psychoanalysis, questions human autonomy by incorporating nonhuman elements. Eco-materialism further presents humans as part of vibrant matter networks, where mortality impacts ecosystems and species alike. In Shakespeare's tragedies, posthumanism manifests in human-animal hybrids, technological extensions (such as cyborg-like warriors), and environmental agents that extend the influence of death.'⁶ Collectively, these frameworks reveal how mortality goes beyond human politics to include cosmic and ecological dimensions. Apart from theoretical perspectives, the paper attempts to decipher various dimensions regarding 'madness,' 'post-humanist ecocriticism,' and 'decentering anthropocentrism' as tropes in Shakespearean tragedies and recent films.

III

Michel Foucault's explorations of madness and power offer a profound lens for interpreting Shakespeare's tragedies, including *Hamlet*⁷, *King Lear*⁸, and *Macbeth*⁹, revealing how these works dissect the fragility of human reason and authority. In *History of Madness*, Foucault posits, '...madness not as mere pathology but as a rupture in the social fabric, a site where power relations are contested and truth emerges from the margins.'¹⁰ This framework intersects with posthumanist theories, which challenge anthropocentric views by emphasising entanglements between humans, nonhumans, and environments, as seen in works like Craig Dionne's *Posthuman Lear*. Together, these perspectives uncover how Shakespeare's plays anticipate modern crises of extinction and ecological finitude—existential threats like climate collapse and biodiversity loss that decenter human dominance. Through characters' descents into madness amid crumbling power structures, Shakespeare foreshadows a posthuman condition where human agency dissolves into chaotic, nonhuman forces. This essay analyses these dynamics with textual evidence, arguing that the plays' portrayals of madness as a response to power abuses prefigure the Anthropocene's ecological reckonings. In *Hamlet*, Foucault's ideas illuminate madness as a strategic tool against oppressive power, where the protagonist's "antic disposition" exposes the corruption of the state. Hamlet declares his intent to feign madness after encountering his father's ghost:

How strange or odd some'er I bear myself
As I perchance hereafter shall think meet
To put an antic disposition on
(*Hamlet*, Act I, Scene V, lines 170-72).

This pretence allows Hamlet to navigate the surveillance of Claudius's court, where power operates through discourse and observation, aligning with Foucault's notion that "it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together."¹¹ By appearing mad, Hamlet subverts the king's authority, using incoherent speech to voice truths that sanity would suppress, such as his accusations of incest and murder. Ophelia's genuine madness further exemplifies Foucault's view of madness as a "tear in the world's fabric,"¹² revealing suppressed realities. Her fragmented songs and flower distribution—

There's fennel for you, and columbines.
There's rue for you
(*Hamlet*, Act IV, Scene V, lines 179-80)

symbolise the breakdown of patriarchal power structures that exploit women, leading to her suicide. This madness anticipates ecological finitude: Denmark is described as "an unweeded garden / That grows to seed" (*Hamlet*, Act I, Scene II, lines 135-36), a metaphor for moral and environmental decay where human overreach poisons the natural order. Post-humanist readings amplify this, viewing Hamlet's existential quandary—"To be, or not to be" (*Hamlet*, Act III, Scene I, line 56)—as a proto-post-humanist interrogation of human exceptionalism amid symbiotic relations with worms and dust, foreshadowing species-wide extinction crises in the Anthropocene. Thus, madness in *Hamlet* critiques power's illusions while hinting at humanity's vulnerable entanglement with decaying ecosystems.

King Lear dramatises Foucault's power-knowledge nexus through Lear's descent into madness, triggered by his abdication and betrayal, exposing the relational nature of authority. Lear's initial division of the kingdom—"Which of you shall we say doth love us most?" (*King Lear* Act I, Scene I, line 51)—embodies Foucauldian power as a "net-like organisation," where affection is commodified and Cordelia's silence disrupts the discourse of flattery. His madness erupts on the heath, where he rages against the storm:

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!
 You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
 Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!
 (*King Lear*, Act III, Scene II, lines 1-3).

This invocation blurs human and natural fury, illustrating Foucault's idea of madness as a plenitude nearing death, where reason yields to elemental chaos. Post-humanist theories deepen this analysis, positioning the storm as a symbol of ecological finitude, where, human sovereignty crumbles before nonhuman agencies. Edgar's feigned madness as Poor Tom—"Poor Tom, that eats the swimming frog, the toad, the tadpole" (*King Lear*, Act III, Scene IV, lines 127-28)—evokes a posthuman entanglement with animal and environmental abjection, anticipating modern crises like climate-induced displacement. A parallel can be drawn with the character Jaques in *As You Like It*, who mourns hunting and the wounded, dying deer. Jaques seems to anticipate something posthuman in this, whereas Poor Tom does not mourn the death of the creatures he eats, yet the fact that he eats strange creatures pushes the audience to transcend their anthropocentric sense of things. *King Lear*'s "spectres of nature," such as the storm's ambivalence, haunt Lear, revealing human vulnerability and foreshadowing extinction through the collapse of lineages and kingdoms. Gloucester's blindness and suicide attempt further embody disabled knowledge, per Foucault, where power's failures lead to existential reckoning with finite bodies in a hostile world. Shakespeare's depiction thus critiques anthropocentric power while prefiguring the Anthropocene's ecological limits. In *Macbeth*, Foucault's theatre of madness manifests through ambition's distortion of reason, where power's pursuit breeds hallucinations that unravel the natural order. Macbeth's post-murder insomnia—"Sleep no more! / Macbeth does murder sleep" (*Macbeth*, Act II, Scene II, lines 35-36)—exemplifies Foucault's linkage of madness to disrupted rest, a "great perturbation in nature." Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking, confessing in delirium, reveals truth, aligning with Foucault's observation that madness discharges secrets needing "divine forgiveness" rather than medical cure. This madness stems from unnatural acts like regicide, which provoke spectral hauntings—Banquo's ghost and the dagger vision—disrupting the power-knowledge binary.

IV

Post-humanist ecocriticism interprets these as anticipations of ecological crisis, where human overreach desecrates nature. The witches' heath, a "blasted" wasteland, symbolises

environmental barrenness, with unnatural events like "horses...turned wild in nature" (*Macbeth*, Act II, Scene IV, line 16) signalling cosmic disorder. Macbeth's ambition mirrors anthropocentric exploitation, leading to existential finitude:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
 To the last syllable of recorded time
 (*Macbeth*, Act V, Scene V, lines 19-21).

This soliloquy evokes posthuman extinction, where human narratives dissolve into meaningless repetition amid ecological collapse. The play's "spectres of nature" haunt the characters, blurring human and nonhuman boundaries and foreshadowing modern crises like deforestation and climate instability. Integrating Foucault with posthumanism reveals Shakespeare's tragedies as harbingers of the posthuman condition, where madness exposes human limits against nonhuman forces. In *Hamlet*, the prince's reflections on dust and worms de-centre humanity, echoing post-humanist critiques of anthropocentrism amid ecological decay. *King Lear's Heath* scenes model a "flat ontology," where, proverbs and storms level human and nonhuman, anticipating survival in a post-sustainable world. Macbeth's unnatural disruptions prefigure environmental backlash, with madness as a symptom of breached finitude. These plays collectively warn of extinction risks, where power's madness accelerates ecological collapse, urging a posthuman ethics of interdependence. Foucault's analysis of madness as a counter to power, combined with post-humanist theories, illuminates how *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth* anticipate modern ecological crises. Through textual ruptures—feigned antics, stormy rages, and spectral hauntings—Shakespeare critiques human hubris, foreshadowing a world where extinction looms from our entanglements with the nonhuman. This reading not only enriches Shakespearean scholarship but also calls for reflection on our own era's finitude.

In *Hamlet*, thanatopolitics operates through Claudius's regicide, exemplifying sovereign power's deployment of death for political gain. The play's court is a site of corruption where mortality is managed—poisonings and duels serve as tools of exclusion, reducing subjects to "bare life"¹² Hamlet's hamartia of revenge ties into Aristotelian tragic necessity, where death's meaning derives from moral faults, culminating in spectacular on-stage demises. Yet, posthumanism expands this: the Ghost blurs human-spectral boundaries, invoking hauntology where death haunts the living, challenging anthropocentric presence. *Hamlet* exemplifies thanatopolitics through the ghost's demand for vengeance, which politicizes death as a sovereign command, forcing Hamlet into a cycle of violence that exposes the fragility of human subjectivity. Post-humanist readings highlight the ghost as a nonhuman spectral force that deconstructs humanist selfhood, as Hamlet grapples with identity beyond the corporeal human. He says:

What is a man,
 If his chief good and market of his time
 Be but to sleep and feed? A beast—no more.
 Sure, he that made us with such large discourse,
 Looking before and after gave us not
 That capability and god-like reason
 To fust in us unused.
 (*Hamlet*, Act IV, Scene IV, lines 33-39).

This soliloquy confronts mortality's levelling effect, reducing the human to animality and questioning anthropocentric reason amid political intrigue. Herbrechter points out: "The affinity between Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and some of the existential questions raised by contemporary posthumanism... is striking. From the beginning of the play, the question of identity, and of the identity of the human more specifically, is the main focus in *Hamlet*, which culminates in Hamlet's famous monologue..."¹³ Herbrechter links this to posthumanism's "deconstruction of humanism,"¹⁴ where Hamlet's lament:

The time is out of joint; O cursed spite,
That ever I was born to set it right!
(*Hamlet*, Act I, Scene V, lines 188-89)

reflects thanatopolitical disruption: mortality as a disjointed legacy of anthropocentric oppression:

To be, or not to be—that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them.
(*Hamlet*, Act III, Scene I, lines 56-60).

Here, suicide contemplates mortality as a political escape from sovereign violence, but fear of the "undiscovered country" (line 79) underscores posthuman uncertainty beyond human control. "Hamlet's contemplation reveals his existential dread and highlights how the human tendency to overthink and fear the unknown leads people to bear their current miseries rather than risk facing potentially worse ones after death".¹⁵ This ties to thanatopolitics: death as a state-managed "bare life," where Hamlet's inaction critiques the biopolitical control over mortality in Claudius's regime. Mortality extends beyond humans in Hamlet's soliloquies, such as "To be, or not to be," which questions human exceptionalism amid existential doubt. 'Yorick's skull meditation reduces the body to matter, a posthuman relic entangled with worms and earth, anticipating eco-materialist views of decay.'¹⁶

The afterlife as purification (Purgatory echoes) further decenters human mortality, linking it to nonhuman realms. Thus, *Hamlet* navigates thanatopolitical intrigue while posthuman elements reveal death as a shared, non-anthropocentric process.

King Lear exemplifies thanatopolitics through Lear's division of the kingdom, unleashing familial and state violence that exposes subjects to death. Gloucester's blinding and Cordelia's execution embody sovereign cruelty, where power manifests in letting die. Madness, per Foucault, serves as a thanatopolitical exclusion, reducing characters to nonhuman states. Posthumanism dominates via eco-materialism: the storm on the heath entangles humans with indifferent nature, decentering anthropocentrism. Lear's "unaccommodated man" speech:

A serving man, proud in heart and mind, that
curled my hair, wore gloves in my cap, served the
lust of my mistress's heart and did the act of
darkness with her, swore as many oaths as I spake
words and broke them in the sweet face of heaven;
one that slept in the contriving of lust and waked to
do it. Wine loved I deeply, dice dearly, and in

woman out-paramoured the Turk. False of heart,
 light of ear, bloody of hand; hog in sloth, fox in
 stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in
 prey. Let not the creaking of shoes nor the rustling
 of silks betray thy poor heart to woman.
 (*King Lear* Act III, Scene IV, lines 84-96)

blurs human-animal divides, portraying mortality as cheap as beasts'. Cordelia's death prompts Lear's query:

Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life
 And thou no breath at all?
 (*King Lear* Act V, Scene III, lines 307-308)

highlighting flat ontology, where, mortality levels species. The afterlife is mere spirit-passing, emphasising earthly purgatorial suffering. In Anthropocene terms, the play's cosmic decay mirrors ecological crises, with proverbial speech as mnemonic survival amid mortality. *King Lear* thanatopolitically exposes mortality through Lear's division of the kingdom, which unleashes chaotic violence and familial betrayal, politicising death as a tool of sovereign folly. Posthumanism emerges in the play's storm scenes, where human hubris dissolves into nonhuman forces (weather, animals), revealing mortality as an ecological, non-anthropocentric process.

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!
 You cataracts and hurricanes, spout
 Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!
 You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,
 Vaunt-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
 Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
 Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world!
 (*King Lear* Act III, Scene II, lines 1-8).

Lear's rant against the storm humanises nature while exposing his own fragility, thereby blurring the boundaries between human and nonhuman in the face of mortality. Timothy Morton approaches the land and weather as 'hyper-objects'¹⁷ that defy human comprehension. Karen Raber highlights Shakespeare's "...chaotic, post-equilibrium ecology... as fitting with a post-humanist aesthetic".¹⁸ Raber frames this as thanatopolitical: the storm as a nonhuman sovereign that "makes die"¹⁹ the humanist king, entangling mortality with environmental finitude.

Shakespeare in *Macbeth* focuses on supernatural thanatopolitics and cyborg posthumanism. *Macbeth* enacts thanatopolitics through regicide and tyranny, where Macbeth's ambition deploys death to seize power, inverting biopolitics into mass killing. Duncan's murder triggers ecological disruptions—earth-shaking, unnatural events—blurring political and natural realms. *Macbeth* thanatopolitically dramatises death as a tool of ambition, with the witches' prophecies politicising murder as a sovereign right. Posthumanism appears in the blurring of human agency with nonhuman prophecy and guilt-induced hallucinations, where mortality exceeds individual control. He says:

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day

To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death.
 (*Macbeth*, Act V, Scene V, lines 19-23).

Macbeth's fear of judgment ("jump the life to come") reveals thanatopolitical anxiety over inescapable mortality. Posthumanism emerges in supernatural entanglements: the witches as nonhuman agents equivocate mortality, positioning Macbeth as a cyborg warrior in perpetual war. Sensory confusion and humoral bodies trans-corporeally link human death to environmental decay, anticipating ecocidal politics. Lady Macbeth's madness and suicide extend mortality beyond human will, entangling it with ghostly presences. The play's failed feasts symbolize communal mortality, where death is a posthuman event of violence and entanglement.²⁰

Another perspective on the foregoing idea could be that the times we live in, and our awareness along these lines, are not the same as Shakespeare's observations about the "garden" of his world and how it was given to weeds. Shakespeare was not mourning that too many people in his neighbourhood refused to apply herbicides to their lawns, so the pristine lawns of neighbours were at constant risk of weeds spreading from the yards of the more ecologically minded. In large part, he was using the idea of weeds as an analogy for moral evils. (But if there is no such thing as a weed, only plants that are temporarily out of place in one's garden, then does the analogy for moral evil break down?) Shakespeare may be proto-posthumanist in many ways, yes (agreed), but we may be tempted to botch his lines up to fit our own (very legitimate) concerns about impending ecological collapse.²¹ Also, besides anticipating a posthumanism that was in his future, Shakespeare did this by incorporating some of the best ideas from older systems of thought known to him, including classical ideas and the Christian idea of the mystical body, which Hamlet refers to:

"The body is with the king, but the king is not with the body".
 (*Hamlet*, Act IV, Scene II, lines 24-25).

This is in part about the body politic, with the king's relation to the body politic often being called the king's second body, etc. The fracture between the king and the body (politic) anticipates the need for a government that is more like what we now might call posthuman, more sustainable.

V

In *Fateh*, thanatopolitics is evident in the film's portrayal of expendable lives in the underbelly of Mumbai's tech underworld. Fateh's mission involves navigating a biopolitical hierarchy where the poor and marginalised are reduced to "bare life"²² (per Agamben), their deaths collateral in corporate espionage and online extortion schemes. Scenes of brutal assassinations and drone surveillance highlight how technology politicises mortality, turning human bodies into data points for elimination. Posthumanism emerges through Fateh's transformation into a cyborg-like figure, augmented by improvised tech gadgets and his unyielding will, transcending human fragility. His backstory of loss—family members killed in a targeted hack—positions mortality as a catalyst for posthuman evolution; *Fateh* "navigates beyond the human" by merging physical prowess with digital hacks, embodying Haraway's cyborg²³ as a hybrid rejecting binary oppositions of human/machine or life/death. In a climactic sequence, Fateh's near-death experience and revival underscore this, suggesting immortality through vengeful persistence rather than biological survival. Thus, *Fateh* uses thanatopolitics to critique

neoliberal exploitation while posthumanism offers empowerment, navigating mortality as a digital rebirth. In *Dune: Part Two*, mortality is navigated through thanatopolitics in the form of colonial resource wars, where the Harkonnen empire and the Emperor's forces impose death on the Fremen people, treating Arrakis as a necropolitical zone of extraction and extermination. The film's thanatopolitical core lies in the weaponisation of death: the Fremen's guerrilla tactics^B including suicide attacks via "maker hooks" on sandworms, politicise mortality as resistance against oppression. Paul's visions of jihad reveal the biopolitical calculus of empire, where billions of lives are expendable for control over spice, mirroring real-world ecological imperialism. Death is not random but strategically managed, with the Bene Gesserit's breeding programs and the Spacing Guild's monopoly extending life for elites while dooming others. Posthumanism permeates through symbiotic relationships that dissolve human exceptionalism. The Fremen "ride the worm," merging with Arrakis' ecology in a posthuman assemblage where human agency is co-constituted by nonhuman actors like sandworms and spice-induced mutations. Paul's transformation—gaining prescience and water-of-life visions—navigates mortality by transcending linear time and individual finitude, aligning with Braidotti's nomadic subject who affirms affirmative becoming. Chani's (Zendaya) arc further embodies this, rejecting messianic humanism for a posthuman ethics of mutual survival amid ecological collapse. *Dune: Part Two* thus portrays mortality as an ecological force, navigated beyond the human via hybrid entanglements that challenge anthropocentric hubris. In *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga*, thanatopolitics dominates the Wasteland's warlord societies, where death is the currency of power—Dementus (Chris Hemsworth) and Immortan Joe rule through necropolitical control, breeding women for reproduction while condemning the masses to irradiated, violent ends. The film illustrates thanatopolitics through the constant orchestration of mortality: war rig battles and citadel hierarchies treat bodies as fuel (literally, via guzzoline and blood donations), evoking Agamben's camps in a vehicular, nomadic form. *Furiosa's* abduction and the Green Place's destruction highlight gendered necropolitics, where female bodies are sites of biopolitical control, their deaths or enslavements sustaining patriarchal survivalism. Mortality is navigated politically, as alliances form around shared expendability, subverting the thanatopolitical order through theft and sabotage. Posthumanism shines in *Furiosa's* evolution from child captive to prosthetic warrior, her missing arm replaced by a mechanical limb symbolising Braidotti's posthuman vital materialism—bodies as open, modifiable systems. The Wasteland's cyborg inhabitants (e.g., Joe's War Boys with tumour-induced hypermasculinity) blur the boundaries between human/animal/machine boundaries, allowing for the navigation of mortality through augmentation and mutation. *Furiosa's* journey transcends human loss—witnessing her mother's sacrificial death—toward a posthuman resilience, where survival is collective and improvisational, not individualistic. In reclaiming agency through violence and ingenuity, the film posits posthumanism as an antidote to thanatopolitical despair, transforming death into generative fury.

Films such as *Fateh*, *Dune: Part Two*, and *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga* extend this analysis into contemporary contexts. *Fateh* explores digital thanatopolitics, where hackers and corrupt officials weaponize data to orchestrate life and death, echoing Achille Mbembe's concept of "necropolitics" in a surveillance-driven world. *Dune: Part Two*, adapted from Frank Herbert's novel, centers on ecological necropolitics and posthuman symbiosis on Arrakis, where the spice—a resource enabling prescience and interstellar travel—fuels imperial conflicts and entangles human and planetary fates. *Furiosa: A Mad Max Saga*, a prequel to *Mad Max: Fury Road*, unfolds in a post-apocalyptic wasteland, highlighting posthuman prosthetics and survival amid resource scarcity. These films illustrate how thanatopolitics and posthumanism converge to depict mortality as a networked phenomenon, spanning humans, environments, and technologies. The synthesis of thanatopolitics and posthumanism challenges binary distinctions between life and death, proposing a continuum where mortality is relational

and distributed.²⁴ While thanatopolitics traditionally focuses on human mortality, a posthuman lens extends this to nonhuman entities—extinct species, malfunctioning AI, or obsolete care robots. The sixth mass extinction, driven by human activity, is a stark example of multispecies thanatopolitics, where prioritising human interests annihilates other species. Similarly, care robots used for ageing populations blur lines between human and machine, raising questions about grief and loss when they “die.” AI in healthcare can also perpetuate thanatopolitical neglect by skewing resource allocation, reinforcing systemic inequities. The interplay of thanatopolitics and posthumanism redefines mortality as a shared, relational phenomenon that transcends human boundaries. Shakespeare’s monarchies, frameworks reveal how power structures govern death while entangling human and nonhuman agencies. By examining mortality through this dual lens, we gain insight into contemporary crises—extinction, technological disruption, and ecological collapse—where death is not an individual end but a networked event. This convergence invites us to rethink life, death, and agency in an interconnected world; it also forces a rethink of ethics and governance. If mortality spans humans, animals, and tech, how do we weigh the value of different “deaths”? Who is accountable when an ecosystem or AI bites the dust? These questions demand fresh ethical frameworks that embrace interdependence and distributed agency. Ultimately, blending thanatopolitics with posthumanism shines a light on mortality’s complex web, urging us to craft governance that respects the ties binding human and nonhuman worlds. The posthuman and the looming ecological disasters can make one realize that many people now imagine end-times, which were imagined in a biblical sense in Shakespeare’s era. So, from Shakespeare to now, Europe moved from a biblical eschatology to a scientific and environmental one, also with threats of nuclear holocaust and international strife looming.

Notes & References:

- A. Foucault regarded madness as not merely personal illness but a problem in the social fabric, and had read of that regarding the treatment of lepers, not as an individual’s malady but as a rending of the social fabric. (You may be aware that the ghost in Hamlet seems to believe - or at least claims - that the poison that killed him made his skin all “lazar-like,” a reference to the biblical tale from Luke about the beggar Lazarus with sores all over his skin, licked by dogs, and how he was not shown hospitality by the rich man [‘Dives’] - so the “foul crimes” of the ghost for which he is consigned to purgatory may include his having rent the social fabric [as Foucault might observe] by not tending to the “least of these” like the leper Lazarus in that tale. Secondly, during medieval times, the Christian idea was the “mystical body” of Christ. Jennifer Rust’s *The Body in Mystery: The Political Theology of the Corpus Mysticism in the Literature of Reformation England* (2014), which expands upon ideas from Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac, who expanded on and corrected the work of Ernst H. Kantorowicz (*The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, 1957). This biblical and later medieval idea of the body of Christ, especially in figures such as St. Francis of Assisi, is expanded in ways we would now call post-human, where all creatures are acknowledged as part of a greater whole (even stereotypically “evil” creatures such as the “Wolf of Gubbio” befriended in Franciscan hagiography). People in Shakespeare’s time and earlier would have heard of such stories, but some of that may have been suppressed after Henry VIII and the closure of the monasteries.
- B. Fremen guerrilla tactics rely on environmental adaptation, Weirding Way combat, and sandworm manipulation to overcome their superior technological enemies. Their fighting style prioritises stealth, speed, and hand-to-hand combat using crysknives (a traditional weapon used in *Dune* by the hero) while avoiding energy shields that attract sandworms. By utilising the desert’s harsh conditions and their inherent understanding of it, they can effectively launch ambushes, disappear into sandstorms, and harness the desert’s most dangerous element, the sandworm, as a transport and weapon.

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From Anthropocentric to Zoocentric Empathy: Interspecies Connection and the Search for Meaning in Olaf Stapledon's *Sirius*

Rahul More

Abstract

The article analyzes Olaf Stapledon's novel *Sirius* using two critical lenses: Animal Studies and Eco Criticism. It focuses on the main character, a genetically-modified dog named Sirius, who is caught between the human and animal worlds and feels like he doesn't belong anywhere. The article argues that the novel challenges simplistic ideas like human vs. animal, city vs. nature, and worldly vs. spiritual. It explores this theme through three key journeys Sirius takes: his observations of humans in London, his experience in the wild where he embraces his animal nature, and his use of music to connect with a lost spirituality. Ultimately, the article suggests that the novel promotes empathy and understanding of all living creatures, and that Sirius's journey helps us appreciate biological, cultural, and spiritual differences.

Key words: Animal Studies, Eco Criticism, Animal Nature, Spirituality, Music, Empathy

Introduction

Olaf Stapledon's 1944 novel, *Sirius*, is about a German shepherd dog who was given superhuman intelligence through a science experiment. The dog, named Sirius, is very smart and can speak, but his body and instincts are still those of an animal. The story shows him as a new version of Frankenstein's monster, caught between the human and animal worlds and trying to find his place. The novel follows Sirius on three different journeys as he explores this struggle. This story can be looked at using two different methods: "Animal Studies" and "Eco Criticism," which focus on animal life and the environment in literature. Animal studies became important when people started seeing nonhuman animals as outsiders, or "the Other." It looks at how animals are shown in stories, from simple symbols to more complex characters. This novel has swiftly grabbed international attention as nonhuman animals consider to be a figure of Otherness, besides its obvious social influence in the questions of our time (Richter, 2011). At the same time, Eco-criticism connects animals to their environment and examines how humans affect it. By combining these two approaches, we can get a fuller picture of how literature shapes our ideas about humans, animals, and nature, and how those ideas can be questioned or changed. The way humans interact with animals in a story, therefore, becomes a key focus for understanding the animal characters.

The science-fiction writer Stapledon believed the universe contained both matter and spirit, and that humanity's purpose was to understand that spirit. He felt humanity's special quality was its ability to observe itself with objective detachment, even when facing destruction. His stories often showed this spiritual experience as sad and tragic, as isolated individuals overcame their ego to join a wider, cosmic consciousness through telepathy. This evolving collective consciousness, or "personality-in-community," gave his narrators a strange, almost religious sense of joy. For Stapledon, a reader of his books must think on a grander, cosmic scale. He avoided the label "science fiction," instead calling his work things like "myth creation" or "future romances". His stories are unusual and hard to categorize, often described as "philosophical epics" or "cosmic macro histories". Rather than focusing on a single person, his narratives explore the destiny of many different life forms that evolve and change over billions of years across the entire universe. According to Sam Moskowitz, Stapledon was an

only child who was quite lonely. His closest companion was a terrier named Rip. This dog likely inspired the character *Sirius* in Stapledon's novel.

Olaf Stapledon's book, *Sirius*, is one of his most popular and best-written novels. Unlike his other works, which focus on grand, universal ideas and lack detailed characters, *Sirius* tells a relatable story about a super-intelligent dog. It focuses on the dog's struggle to fit into the human world. The novel makes Stapledon's themes of spiritual awakening easier to understand than his more challenging books do, by showing the dog's inner conflict between his animal instincts and his intelligent, compassionate side. Stapledon used this dog to represent the most human quality of all: the ability to appreciate the "music of the spirit". The book, titled *A Fantasy of Love and Discord*, is about two main characters: a dog named Sirius, and a human woman named Plaxy. The story explores their romantic relationship. Their connection was built around three main parts. First, their natural differences as a human and a super-intelligent dog created some distance between them. However, their love for each other was also a powerful force that brought them together. This love was made stronger by the very differences that also separated them.

Using a super-smart, genetically modified dog as the main character is a big deal, especially because he communicates his thoughts about life through music rather than words. This is because Stapledon believed verbal language was too easily misunderstood (Boyarkina 2018). While some critics say the book is a sad story about a spiritual journey that fails (Rabkin 1982), another viewpoint is that the novel is divided into three parts, based on three different journeys Sirius takes: to London, into the forest, and beyond life itself. In the first part of the story, Sirius, who has lived in the countryside his whole life, moves to London to join the academic world where his owner and creator works. At first, he is excited to be learning and exploring science. However, as he spends more time at the university, he starts to realize that science can't answer everything. This makes him question his focus on purely logical thought. After being overwhelmed by human greed and pride, Sirius escapes into the forest. This marks his second major journey, where Stapledon explores the dog's animal instincts by blending his domesticated dog-like nature with his wild, wolf-like side. It is interesting to see that Sirius grows and develops as a character while engaging in what are often thought of as primitive activities. The novel shows his internal struggle between his two natures—the human and the dog—but he doesn't become less intelligent or advanced. Instead, he finds it hard to let go of his wilder instincts like hunting and fighting after spending time roaming freely. Running in the background of Sirius's other trips, his most significant journey is a spiritual one, which is ultimately what gives him his most valuable lessons. He learns that he does not have to keep his human and animal sides separate, and because of his unique, advanced nature, he can reflect on his life from a higher perspective. This makes him superior to other characters in some ways, but also highlights his imperfections as a mix of different, flawed species. Sirius uses music to express Stapledon's complex philosophical ideas, showcasing how the best science fiction can blend science, philosophy, and art (Blake 2012.). By befriending a priest, he challenges traditional religious beliefs and finds a new form of spirituality rooted in both philosophy and nature. His deep thoughts on species, humanity's role, and how humans and animals interact are frequently triggered by his observations of the natural world, which is so often impacted by human actions.

We can look at the dog's visit to the city in two ways. One way is to see Sirius as a person inside a dog's body. From this view, the trip shows how living in a city like Cambridge is harmful because it disconnects people from nature. The other way is to see Sirius as a very special, smart dog. In this case, his experience suggests that only humans could stand living in such a place, completely cut off from the rest of nature. Either way, the main message is the same: cities are not a good place for animals like Sirius. During Sirius's trip to Cambridge, several deeper points came up. First, while the novel seems very advanced for its time,

Stapledon uses Sirius as a simple symbol, showing that even revolutionary ideas can fall into the old trap of treating animals as if they are just human-like subjects (McHugh, 2006). Second, as with many science fiction stories featuring animals, Stapledon gives *Sirius* a voice to turn the tables on humanity, criticizing human flaws from an outsider's perspective (Vint, 2008). This turns the tables on "speciesism," where humans usually feel superior; here, it is humanity that is judged. Sirius directly tells his human creator that he was built to see humanity "from clean outside" and report back what he sees (Stapledon, 91). This makes it important to examine the connection humans have with their environment. Although Cambridge is not literally a "concrete forest," it feels like a place that stifles Sirius's animal instincts. As he becomes more successful in academics, he feels less and less alive. He realizes there is a big difference between just being a scholar and truly learning, and that the knowledge he used to chase is meaningless and shallow, especially when it comes to his spiritual questions. This inner struggle leaves him feeling lost and like he's a slave to humans (Stapledon, 103). This battle is a constant part of the novel, constantly defining him as either a dog that's too human or a human in a dog's body. His choices about his life, academics, and spiritual beliefs are all shaped by this conflict. Part of his unease also comes from not trusting humans. Like any dog, he needs a pack and a leader he can trust, but he also instinctively evaluates that leader. If the leader isn't worthy, the pack finds a replacement.

What triggers the main moral of the story is how Sirius critiques the lifestyle of people in the city (Boyarkina 201)]. Stapledon not only wanted to raise awareness about the ethical issues of eugenics but also to remind people of their history with dogs and how harmful selective breeding has been. This point is powerfully made in a quote where Sirius, a German shepherd, feels suffocated by the "grotesque super-simians" (humans) who have controlled the canine species through breeding (Stapledon, 104). This view challenges the usual human-centered perspective by reminding readers that their own species has also evolved. The most interesting aspect is how Sirius sees dogs as victims of breeding, highlighting that humans who tamper with dog genetics will likely continue to mess with other natural processes. As humans, we mainly rely on sight to get by. But when reading stories about animals, our experience goes beyond just seeing words on a page. The writing tries to make us feel what the animal feels, in a way that helps us connect with a different species. This can sometimes feel a bit strange because it forces us to accept natural animal behaviors that we might otherwise find wrong or disgusting. For example, the text later describes Sirius's happiness when biting another dog's neck, which is a feeling we have to understand through his animal nature:

The warm blood seeped into his mouth and threatened to choke him, but he hung on, coughing for breath. The saltiness and odour of Diawl Du's blood, he afterwards said, turned him mad. Some pent-up energy and fury in him were released for the first time. At the height of the struggle the thought flashed upon him, "This is real life, this is what I am for, not all that human twaddle." He gripped and tugged and worried, while Diawl Du's struggles became weaker, and the horrified human beings did their best to loosen his grip. (Stapledon, 37).

Through a contrast between safe home environments and the harsh reality of nature, Stapledon's novel shows that human comforts are temporary. While observing the cold, desolate hills, Sirius realizes that the warmth of a fireplace is just a brief, unreliable moment in the grand scheme of things (Stapledon, 70). This realization separates Sirius from both human and other animal worlds, leaving him feeling like he doesn't belong in either a city or natural setting. This feeling of being an outsider allows him to reflect on humanity's place in the world. Although Sirius is a supposed scientific marvel, his miserable life questions whether humans have the right to meddle with genetics. This critique is not meant to be simply misanthropic

but instead challenges the limits of human power and influence. Despite a lot of talk about how animals are shown in literature, the truth is that all such analysis is done by a human critic. This creates a problem for fields like animal studies because critics may still be "trapping the animal in the intellectual zoo of our conceptions" (Rainwater, 2005). This is known as the paradox of animal representation: we can't make any truly definite statements about animals in literature, yet we cannot avoid trying to do so. In simple terms, humans can't perfectly understand or represent an animal's point of view, but we are the ones doing the interpretation.

A main point for both animal studies and Eco criticism is the direct rejection of a human-centered worldview, or anthropocentrism. Instead, they focus on biocentrism, which gives equal value to all living things, making them a powerful pair for analyzing literature. This shift moves the focus of knowledge away from just human beings. In the novel *Sirius*, music is the tool that helps the dog find this spiritual connection and overcome his human-centered conditioning, leading to a profound change in his perspective. He learns to connect with the world on a deeper, spiritual level by moving beyond human words and logic. Unlike his other two journeys to London and the forest, Sirius's spiritual journey is not a one-time event but something that happens throughout the entire novel. His music changes as he is influenced by his surroundings, showing the state of his soul or spirit. At first, he starts creating music because he finds human music to be unpleasant. Using his excellent hearing and human musical knowledge, he leaves human areas and begins to sing to the stars, much like a wolf howling at the moon. The name "Sirius" is also a play on words, as it sounds like "serious," referring to his thoughtful nature, and is also the name of the brightest star, a hint at his profound connection to the cosmos.

Overall, Sirius's spiritual journey in the novel transforms him from an animal seen as an object into a being with profound spiritual insight. Stapledon's writing is like a prophecy, moving the reader's focus from a human-centered view to one that has empathy for the animal (Franklin, 1999). This causes readers to feel a deep sadness for Sirius's death, especially because it's caused by humans who can't accept his unique existence, similar to the story of Frankenstein's monster. What is truly special is that Sirius himself, by sharing his spiritual thoughts through his music, is the one who leads the reader to feel this empathy.

Conclusion

In *Sirius*, human society is shown to be lonely and isolated, both physically and spiritually, because it lacks connection to a wider natural world. The city and nature are both presented as limited, artificial places, which Sirius's own experiences highlight. As a being caught between being a dog and a human, Sirius feels he belongs in neither a city nor nature. This sense of not belonging drives him to seek a deeper, spiritual space, which he explores and expresses through his music. The novel ultimately tells the story of a species that was so dramatically altered through human breeding that it went beyond the normal limits of its kind. According to a scholarly article, examining a dog's reactions in different settings demonstrates the potential for combining Animal Studies and Eco Criticism, fields that are typically separate. This combined approach is suggested for analyzing science fiction with animal characters to understand the ecological relationship between all animals, including humans, and their environment. The setting significantly influences characters, and analyzing environmental portrayals in animal fiction reveals insights into human connections with the world and animal relationships with their surroundings.

Instead of seeing the world in a human-centric way, a Zoo Criticism reading of *Sirius* focuses on the experience of the non-human character. The novel shows that the usual separations humans create—like human versus animal, city versus nature, and physical versus spiritual—are not clear-cut. For Sirius, a dog who has been altered by humans, these categories

are blurred. Through Sirius's story, the novel argues for prioritizing different forms of life over just the human perspective. His music helps him find his place in a diverse environment and transcend the limitations of being just a dog or just a human. By challenging these boundaries, *Sirius* suggests that a spiritual or ethical awakening can come from embracing difference rather than trying to fit into rigid, human-made categories. His spiritual journey through music is his way of finding peace in a world that can't contain his unique identity.

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Quest For Identity in Postcolonial Context: A Study of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*

Rajkumar B Bhairam

Abstract

Amitav Ghosh, the recipient of the Sahitya Academy Award in 1989 for his second novel *The Shadow Lines*, is an indisputably leading and the most prominent contemporary Indian novelist in English. As a postcolonial writer, Amitav Ghosh tries to depict themes like marginalization, tensions and dilemmas, nostalgia, concern and alienation in his characters in the novel. *The Shadow Lines* (1988) is evidently a postcolonial novel being a product of specific histories of Indian subcontinent in the twentieth century that deals mainly with the Diaspora of East Pakistan where the unnamed narrator's family is Hindu which has been separated from their maternal home in Dhaka after the creation of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) from the Bengal province of India. Through the characters belonging to three generations Ghosh exhibits alienation and nationality of his characters in a real sense. The novel generally explores the history of traumatic memories of cultural dislocations, and the Partition between India and Pakistan in 1947 based on religious ground followed by the riots in Pakistan in 1963-64 leading to the partition of West Pakistan (Pakistan) and East Pakistan (Bangladesh). All those events caused dislocation of the people. This paper attempts to analyze the cultural conflicts along with the search of identity, desire for freedom, profound sense of uprootedness and anger about the colonial rule in the novel.

Key words: Identity, Cultural dislocation, Post-colonial, Partition, Alienation.

The Indian English novels in the eighties and nineties that deals with the 'decolonized counter discourses' is the new novel and it is characterized by a mastery over English and representation of Indian reality to Indian as well as Western readers. The Indian English novelist finds himself or herself in a dilemma of cultural colonization. Writer like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, Shashi Tharoor, Rohinton Mistry, Upamanyu Chatterjee and others made a great deal in their novels exploring the reality of India interweaving the connection with the Western countries in the colonial and post-colonial era. Amitav Ghosh's masterpiece *The Shadow Lines* deals with the Indian history and politics, imagination and social reality, nationalism and internationalism, personal and social affairs and the quest for identity. The novel explores postcolonial themes like identity crisis, the superficiality of borders, the legacy of colonial violence, the struggle with nationalism, and the re-examination of memory and history. It depicts characters caught between different worlds, struggling to reconcile their past with their present, and critiques the artificial divisions created by colonialism and political upheaval. Characters grapple with a fractured sense of self, caught between their heritage and the influences of a colonial past and post-independence future. The emancipation or freedom seems to be a major motif in the journey undertaken by the characters in the novel. It is a memory novel with the two-part structure — 'Going Away' and 'Coming Home', embodying a fusion of personal lives and public events in India, England and Bangladesh that offer to it a thematic unity. Amitav Ghosh attempts to interpret the colonial India in the British Raj and its aftermaths in the novel. Different characters in the novel are brought into a maze of human relationship not through a dramatic miracle but through their common human experiences.

The entire thrust of Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* reveals that the human identity and human difference do not usually conform to the national boundaries through the young Bengali unnamed narrator. The narrator is a researcher in Archaeology in the premier centres of education in India and England. The story is woven around the three-generation relationship between two families — the Datta Chaudharis of Calcutta and the Prices of London. The young narrator has been given "worlds to travel in" and "eyes to see them with" (p. 22) by Tridib. The unnamed Bengali boy inherits Tridib's mantle, projects his own self on Tridib who has asked him to invent places by using precise imagination. As a matter of fact, the narrator constantly dwells on travel. While commenting upon the double self in the novel, Sushila A. Singh (1992: p. 139) says, "The writer's own self manifests itself in the form of the twin protagonists investigating the individual self against the forces of history and world's political reality." In spite of the racial and national prejudices, the people involved in the action are constantly travelling across the borders of England, India and Bangladesh. For Ghosh's characters, travel is not a mere physical displacement but a spiritual quest for a meaningful world as well as the quest for identity. Moving through the maze of times, their inner journeys reveal their multiple and insubstantial selves, which come in the wake of their preoccupation with the past. However, the juxtaposition of the public events with the private confirms the novelist's intent to grasp their larger self of society in relation to the individual self. Here, Ghosh's motive seems to hint at the crucial matter that the national identity is larger than the individual identity at any cost. Time and space are dimensions of an individual's yearning in which the real and the imagined blend harmoniously. The narrator journeys from Calcutta to Bangladesh and to England and crosses the borders easily with the help of imagination though until adulthood, he has not been outside of Calcutta. He journeys into the past with Tridib's recollection of war-torn London. Suvir Kaul (1995: pp. 284-85) observes, "Tridib's yearning, addressed to a time and space before sub-continental borders, before the historical alienation of culture and self, exists as an unqualified, untrammelled, trace-memory of psychic wholeness and identity. Such desire can of course only exist prior to historical or geographical calculation, and is manifestly unrealizable."

The question raised by Tridib 'What is the colour of that knowledge? Nobody knows, nobody can ever know, not even in memory, because there are moments in time that are not *knowable*: nobody can ever know what it was like to be young and intelligent in the summer of 1939 in London or Berlin.' reveals mysterious and unfathomable realm of human mind which is directly related to the quest for meaning of life. Human knowledge is arbitrary and illusive just like the shadow lines. Tridib, therefore, longs for "a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror." (p. 32) This image of looking glass indicates freedom at personal as well as national level. Besides, it stands for political freedom for the characters moving to and fro crossing the national boundaries. The novel begins with the journey of Mayadebi along with her husband and their son Tridib to London in 1939. Tridib has gone to London to see the old family friends, the Prices and especially his sweet heart May Price in 1960s. The narrator also goes to London to collect material for his Ph.D. thesis. Tridib's niece Ila visits India when she is sixteen. Ila lives so intensely in the present, as the novelist comments, "For Ila the current was the real: it was as though she lived in a present which was like an airlock in a canal, shut away from the tidewaters of the past and the future by steel floodgates" (p. 32). She is the daughter of a diplomat, an extreme internationalist, a cosmopolitan and the world traveller. Suvir Kaul (1995: p. 271) regards Ila as the narrator's double and says, "In the dialectic of his identity, of his imagined self, she functions as the negative pole, structurally necessary, and to be superseded. He learns all manner of lessons from his relationship with her, lessons about a symmetrical emotional relationship, about cultural dislocations and maladjustments, about the compromises that accompany life lived at

home and abroad." She functions as a narrative scapegoat, as a lightning rod for a great many sexual and cultural anxieties.

Ila does not believe in national borders, territories and cultural frontiers. Her quest for freedom is illusory just like Robi's meditation on it. However, nationalism and the identity of nation-states of India and Pakistan are the major issues in this bildungsroman. Nick Price's ambition is to travel around the world like his grandfather Lionel Treasawsen, to walk through the streets of La Paz and Cairo. Lionel Tersawsen, born in Southern Cornwall, had travelled to Malaysia, Fiji, Bolivia, and the Guinea Coast, Ceylon, Calcutta, Barackpore and Buckinghamshire village in England to make his life. But as May says, "Travel does not mean the same thing to everyone" (p. 55). Mayadebi had gone to London for her husband's operation. Tridib had been to London to see old friends while the narrator goes to compile his research material. The grandmother, Tha'mma's journey to Dhaka is 'Coming Home', yet her place of birth has become alien to her and is at odds with her nationality. Thus, the novel is about the emotional journeys from Calcutta to London and vice-versa.

Ghosh's novel about borders and partition explores man's eternal quest for freedom. Most of the characters have different notions of freedom. The narrator loves Ila Dutta Chaudhuri whose quest is for an escape from her Indian roots and culture. She is portrayed as a victim of national identity and cultural contradictions. She lives in a fantasy world and creates her own home wherein her doll, Magda, becomes her daughter. She believes in beauty which lies in golden hair, fair skin and a pair of blue eyes. This concept of beauty compels her to leave and hate India and the Indian cultural constraints. She is a constant traveller, always moves from one country to another and settles in London to lead a cosmopolitan life in the make-believe world of illusion. Her notion of freedom is of personal freedom. She is desirous of seeking false freedom that could be purchased for an air ticket. She stands for internationalism. She shares her house in Stockwell with the Irish girl, a computer scientist and a young Ghanaian, playing minor roles in their collective political life. Having an acute sense of history, they regard Ila as an 'upper-class Asian Marxist' and 'a link with the Fabian' (p. 99). Ila and her pink-friends are proud of being a part of history and hope that in future, people all over the world, will look for them and their task. Ila thinks that unlike Europe, there are no revolutions, anti-fascist wars or very important political events except the local issues such as famines, riots, and disasters in India. Ila's discourse of nationalism, implicitly encodes a Euro-centric ideology which once again posits for any post-colonial cause of action in the present. Ila, for the narrator, seems to be a dislocated and immeasurably distant person. He feels that Ila and her friends did not know much about Indian politics. It seems that the novel is, in the words of Nivedita Bagchi (1993: p. 187), "a manifestation of the desire to validate the post-colonial experience and to attempt a reconstruction of 'public history' through a reconstruction of the 'private' or personal history." The narrator attempts to reconstruct private stories and public histories through memory, imagination, and other people's stories.

Remembering is also a search for identity through the multiple mirrors. These mirrors are constituted of personal consciousness as it envisions personal life and national events. The mirror image recurs and includes personal lives as well as the national events. The mirror image comes back prominently on the occasion when the narrator tries to reconstruct the past through the headlines of the old newspapers. He felt:

"It was thus, sitting in the air-conditioned calm of an exclusive library, I began my strangest journey; a voyage into a land outside space, an expanse without distances; a land of looking glass-events" (p. 224).

Ila's idea of freedom is restricted only to freedom from patriarchal social structures and cultural norms. Robi, Ila and the narrator visit a night club in Calcutta. Ila offers her company to a

stranger for dance; Robi dislikes it, and compels them to leave the club. When Robi objects, she runs away crying that she wants to be free from Indian bloody culture. She tells the narrator:

Do you see now why I've chosen to live in London? Do you see? It's only because I want to be free.... Free of you! ... Free of your bloody culture and free of all of you. (p. 91)

However, Ila will never be free from her own past. The narrator, therefore retorts:

"If I were to die tomorrow you would not be free of me. You cannot be free from me because I am within you ... just as you are within me." (p. 91)

Ila's notion of freedom is nonsensical. She marries Nick Price and tolerates his extra-marital affairs, as it "was a part too of the free world she had tried to build for herself" (p.188). The grandmother thinks of Ila as the "English whore" (p. 93) and warns the narrator to beware of her. Being a militant nationalist, the grandmother reminds the narrator:

It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood... War is their religion. That's what it takes to make a country. Once that happens people forget they were born this or that, Muslim or Hindu, Bengali or Punjabi: they become a family born of the same pool of blood (p. 79-80).

The grandmother Tha'mma associates images of flesh and blood with the nation, perceiving it as a living body. She wants her grandson to become a good second-generation Indian citizen, with a strong body, because without a strong body you don't have a strong country. Born in Dhaka in 1902, the grandmother in her sixties remembers the sacrifices of several people in the Indian freedom movement and its aftermath, that is, Partition. After Partition, she settles in Calcutta in India, as Dhaka becomes the capital of East Pakistan. Pakistan itself is the price paid for political freedom. In the post-colonial India, the meaning of political freedom has been changed and people in and out of borders regard themselves as 'insiders' and 'outsiders' in India. The same thing happens with the grandmother. Furthermore, the partition of Bengal into Bangladesh and West Bengal had tremendous impact on the grandmother's psyche. And it is the fact that the outcome of cultural dislocation breeds violence. G.R. Taneja says about the novel:

The Shadow Lines is an eloquent critique of colonial hangover and cultural dislocation in post-colonial situation as also the psychological make-up of the contemporary man who thrives on violence. (1991: p. 304)

When the narrator's father brought an airplane ticket for grandmother's journey to Dhaka on 3rd January 1964, she says:

If there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What

was it all for then — Partition and all the killing and everything — if there isn't something in between? (p. 151)

The grandmother is surprised to know that she has to fill in disembarkation cards and mention 'Dhaka' as her place of birth in it for the sake of her national identity. She is certain that her ancestral home in Dhaka 'won't be like home any more' (p. 148). All these instances contribute in shattering her nationalist consciousness. During the journey to the old house, the driver shows the grandmother the Plaza Picture Palace, the Gulshan Palace Hotel, Ramma Race Course, and so on, but it does not convince her. She asks, "It's all wonderful... But where's Dhaka?" (p. 204). The grandmother's desire to preserve her own Dhaka reveals her search for identity. She does not accept the reality of Partition. She hates to mention on her passport form that Dhaka is her native place; but, after reaching Dhaka, she urges for Dhaka. She does not realize that time and space and even freedom are dynamic forces, prone to changes like the human mind. Her identity is only the part of her past; therefore, the present is unreal to her. Tha'mma's Dhaka has "vanished into the past" (p. 192), as she is a displaced person from Dhaka to Calcutta due to Partition. Her dream of freedom is not realized, for she could not understand "how her place of birth had come to be so messily at odds with her nationality" (p. 152). A.N. Kaul rightly observes the impact of Partition:

War or friendship between nation is a continuing political reality and, further, that in this particular case- it is not a simple matter of either / or, but of an original cultural unity or oneness now tragically fractured by the forces of a bigoted politics. (1995: p. 304)

The grandmother asserts the unique cultural tradition of India but Ila does not value the Indian culture. The novel, as one of the reviews says, focuses on "the meaning of political freedom in the modern world and the force of nationalism, the shadow lines we draw between people and nations, which is both an absurd illusion and a source of terrifying violence." The instances of such violence are the war-time London, the civil strife in post-Partition Dhaka and the riots in Calcutta. Ghosh's novel about borders and Partition explores man's eternal quest for freedom. The grandmother is a committed nationalist and for her national freedom is just like the personal freedom. She has firm faith in the nationalist wars for freedom. She has experienced the terrorist movement in Bengal and the pangs of Partition. As a militant nationalist, the grandmother regards Ila as the 'English whore' who has no right to stay in India because "she doesn't belong there" (p. 79). She further reminds the narrator of the making of the nation:

It took those people a long time to build that country; hundreds of years, years and years of war and bloodshed. Everyone who lives there has earned his right to be there with blood: with their brother's blood and their father's blood and their son's blood. They know they're a nation because they've drawn their borders with blood..... War is their religion (p. 79-80)

The grandmother is not the warmongering fascist but she believes in "the unity of nationhood and territory, of self-respect and national power that was all she wanted — modern middle-class life, a small thing, that history has denied her in its fullness and for which she could never forgive it." (p. 80). She is nostalgic about the sacrifices of people in the Indian Freedom Movement and its aftermath after Partition. For her, Pakistan itself was the price paid for political freedom. After the Partition, she settled in Calcutta but again in the post-colonial India, the Partition of Bengal into Bangladesh and West Bengal had a tremendous impact on her psyche. A.N. Kaul (p. 304) observes this impact of Partition, "War or friendship between

nations is a continuing political reality and, further, that in this particular case - it is not a simple tragically fractured by the forces of a bigoted politics."

Tridib has grown up witnessing India's Partition and the creation of Pakistan. In 1939, Tridib was eight years old child when he had observed a man and a woman engaged in love-making in a bomb wrecked theatre in London. After growing up, he writes about the same episode to his lady-love May Price in 1964, wishing to share the same experience with her at the same place. The novelist refers to the rumour that the Germans had dropped toffee-tins in the city during the German air raids on London in 1940. He projects Tridib as an emblem of individual freedom. Tridib travels through his imagination and creates his own world by its precise use. He accepts every place as his home but prefers to stay in the old family house in Ballygunge Palace with Tha'mma who would say, "There's nothing in the world he couldn't have done with his connections - he could have lived like a lord and run the country." (p. 9). His endeavour is directed towards freedom from other people's invention. He believes that one cannot see anything without inventing it for him. His idea of freedom is intellectual one.

After the historical tragedy of Partition, Dhaka became the capital of East Pakistan. The 1971 War was followed by the Hindu-Muslim riots in both India and East Pakistan. During the communal riots, Tridib went to the riot-hit Dhaka with his lady-love May Price and Tha'mma to bring his granduncle Jethamoshai back to India. When the frenzied mob attacked Jethamoshai and Khalil, a Muslim rickshaw driver, May first jumped out of the car and rushed towards the victims. Tridib followed her and plunged into the mob. Khalil, Jethamoshai and Tridib were killed. Later on, May tells the narrator, "When I got there, I saw three bodies. They were all dead. They'd cut Khalil's stomach open. The old man's head had been hacked off. And they'd cut Tridib's throat from ear to ear" (pp. 249-250). May is burdened with the guilt that she herself is responsible for Tridib's death. But at the end of the novel, she is free from the guilt and says:

I thought I'd killed him. I used to think: perhaps he wouldn't have got out of the car if I hadn't made him, if I'd understood what I was doing. I was safe you see I could have gone right into that mob, and they wouldn't have touched me, an English memsahib, but he, he must have known he was going to die. For years I was arrogant enough to think I owed him his life. But I know now I didn't kill him; I couldn't have, if I'd wanted. He gave himself up; it was a sacrifice. I know I can't understand it, I know. I mustn't try, for any real sacrifice is a mystery (p. 250).

Tridib-May relationship is of vital significance. Tridib retold the story of Tristan told by Snipe on Tridib's ninth birthday on 25th September 1940 to the narrator and Ila. It was the best story in Europe when it had been a better place without borders and countries. "It was a German story in what we call Germany, Nordic in the north, French in France, Welsh in Wales, Cornish in Cornwall: it was the story of a hero called Tristan, a very sad story, about a man without a country, who fell in love with a woman-across-the-seas" (p. 186). May is the 'woman-across-the-seas' and like Tristan, Tridib is 'a man without a country' who transcends nationality. Tridib's death and their separation reveal the destructive aspect of nationalism.

Ghosh creates a virtual world that resembles the Indian subcontinent. The grandmother presides over the three generations of the Chaudhuris and passes through the traumatic political changes: Freedom Struggle, Independence, Partition and riots, the Indo-China War, the Hazratbal Mosque episode in Srinagar on 27th December 1963, the communal riots in Kashmir, Asam, Bihar, Calcutta, Dhaka, and the border town Khulna in 1964, the Indo-Pak War, the Naxalite Movement, and political freedom in Bangladesh. During these political upheavals, the grandmother's uncle Jethamoshai stayed in Dhaka. She decides to bring him back to 'her

invented country' (p. 136), that is, to India. The grandmother went to Dhanmudi in Dhaka where Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was assassinated in 1964. The violence in Calcutta started on Friday, 10th January, the day of the first test match of the 1964 series against England at Madras. There was also the sixty-eighth session of the Congress Party in Bhubaneswar in which the Party President Mr. Kamaraj appealed to all who had faith in Socialism and Democracy for building a new society. Ghosh fuses these historical facts in his fiction. The rumour that the Muslims had poisoned the Tala tank and the whole of Calcutta's water supply, adds to the density of atmosphere. In such gloomy atmosphere, she reaches Jethamoshai's house and insists on him to come with them to India. But he retorts:

I don't believe in this India-Shindia. It's all very well, you are going away now, but suppose when you get there they decide to draw another line somewhere? What will you do then? Where will you move to? No one will have you anywhere. As for me, I was born here, and I will die here. (p. 214-215).

Jethamoshai fails to recognize his own brother's daughter and calls her a foreigner and a stranger. In spite of this, the grandmother with the help of Khalil and Jethamoshai's caretaker persuades him to leave Dhaka for Calcutta. On the way, Jethamoshai, Khalil and Tridib become the victims of the Hindu-Muslim riots. Thus, the grandmother's visit to ancestral home along with Tridib and his English girlfriend is surely one of the most memorable scenes in Indian fiction. Past and future meet across religious, political and cultural barriers in a confusion of emotions, ideals, intentions and acts, leading to a shattering climax. Robi and May Price are the eyewitnesses to the climax. When Robi returns home, he finds an anonymous note saying:

We are going to get you, nothing personal, we have to kill you for our freedom. It would be like reading my own speech transcribed on a mirror. And then I think myself why don't they draw thousands of little lines through whole subcontinent and give every little place a new name? What would it change? It's a mirage; the whole thing is a mirage. How can anyone divide a memory? If freedom were possible, surely Tridib's death would have set me free. (p. 246)

Ghosh's imagination captures the real historical events in India. The war with China took place in 1962 and in 1963, the Hazratbal January 1964. Two hundred and sixty-three years after, the sacred relic known as the Mu-i-Mubark, believed to be a hair of the Prophet Mohammed himself- disappeared from the Hazratbal mosque near Sringar on 27th December 1963. The mosque has been the holy shrine for Kashmiris, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and Buddhists and even for and there were large-scale demonstrations of Muslims, Hindus and Europeans. Thousands of people started black-flag demonstrations Sikhs on 29th December. But the government declared riots as 'anti-national elements' to maintain peace. The Indians' less belief in the power of "syncretic civilization" (p. 225) is revealed through the feeling of integrity among the Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in Kashmir but in Delhi there was consternation. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru appealed for patience and sent the highest officials of the Central Bureau of Intelligence and the Home Ministry in search of the missing relic. The Premier of Kashmir declared that the theft was a "mad act of some miscreants" (p. 225). Religious authorities in Pakistan condemned idolatry and treated the event as an attack upon the Muslim identity. They observed 31 December as a 'Black Day' in Karachi and other towns. The newspapers reacted to it as a part of a calculated conspiracy against the spiritual and national hopes of Kashmiris. On 4th January 1964, the Mu-i-Mubarak was recovered and reinstalled and the protests in Pakistan subsided. But in Khulna, a small border town in the East Pakistan, the riots started and there was a "frenzy of looting, killing and burning" (p. 228).

After sixteen years, the narrator and his Marxist friend Malik search for the newspaper reports of riots at the Teen Murti House Library in New Delhi. The narrator is shocked at the impact of riots in Calcutta and Dhaka. Looting killing and burning destroyed the collective sanity of the people. He found that instead of speaking about the carnage, all the canny journalists wrote of "the Congress Conference, of the impending split in the Communist Party, or wars and revolutions: what is it that makes all those things called 'politics' so eloquent and these other unnamable things so silent?" (p. 227) The rumours were in the air like the trains packed with corpses came from Pakistan and Muslims in Calcutta were killed. In spite of the army battalions, riots continued in Calcutta and Dhaka. As always. Muslims in East Pakistan gave shelter to Hindus and Hindus in India sheltered Muslims, often at the cost of their own lives.

At the political front, the Indian and Pakistan governments started accusing each other. The spokesman of the External Affairs Ministry in New Delhi held Pakistani leaders and press responsible for lawlessness' in East Pakistan. The Indian High Commissioner in Pakistan informed the External Affairs Ministry of the Pakistan that the intention of the Indian press in reporting about the communal riots in East Pakistan is to "divert the people's attention from the serious happenings in Kashmir". (p. 229) A few days later, the Presidents of two nations made a joint appeal for communal harmony, law and order. Seeing the tattered old Bartholomew's Atlas, the narrator tries to draw the amazing circles, once Khulna at the centre and then Milan at its centre. Unable to grasp the pattern of the world, the narrator says.

They had drawn their borders, believing in that pattern, in the enchantment of lines, hoping perhaps that once they had etched their borders upon the map, the two bits of land would sail away from each other like the shifting tectonic plates of the prehistoric Gondwanaland. What had they felt, I wondered, when they discovered that they had created not a separation, but a yet-undiscovered irony—the irony that killed Tridib: the simple fact that there had never been a moment in the four-thousand-year-old history of that map, when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than they had drawn their lines.... our looking -glass border. (p. 232)

Ghosh points out that demarcation is based on differences between Hindus against Muslims. Hindi Wassef says, "A mirror image is, therefore, constructed whereby two actions are taking place as inverted images of each other on each side of the border: Muslims attacking Hindus in Dhaka, Hindus attacking Muslims in Calcutta. Through memory and newspaper reports, the narrator human experience of consequences of national boundaries; two cities reconstruct the dreadful event and "is able to give living voice to the over the same cause" (1998: p. 85). He reconstructs the history of the family and the nation, while Tridib reconstructs the history of Prices in England on the eve of the Second World War.

Amitav Ghosh attempts to define nationalism through the grandmother's fearful experience of 'Coming Home' in the second section in which she asks the puzzling question 'Where's Dhaka?' (p. 193). Dhaka is her birthplace and she is much closer to Dhaka than to her 'invented country', India formed in 1947 after the Partition. She says, "I really am a foreigner here as May in India or Tagore in Argentina" (p. 195). As she had migrated to Calcutta in 1936, her allegiances are divided between political nations called India and Bangladesh. Her aggressive nationalism is born of the terrorist movements among nationalists in pre-Independence India. As a young girl in the freedom struggle, she had yearned to join the terrorist movement, even to kill, for her cause, the English magistrate at Khulna. After Tridib's death in Dhaka riots, she donates her gold chain to the fund for Indo-Pak war of 1965 and her vehement reaction is: "We have to kill them before they kill us; we have to wipe them out" (p. 236). It reveals her patriotism, militant nationalism and her quest for political freedom. As

observed by Sharmila Guha Mazundar (1995: p. 146), "In her desire to win political freedom, she dreamt of killing English officials. She even considered war as a necessary evil which inspired the idea of nationalism and thus strengthened the foundation of a nation."

The killing of the grandmother's nephew by an impassioned mob in old Dhaka itself is a political theme. It changes her idealistic vision and now she makes distinction between 'us' and 'them'. In her idealistic vision of Indian nationalism, she looks upon it as a weapon used against the Britishers. But after Partition, nationalism in the Indian context changes its meaning to exclude people on the other side of the borders both in East Pakistan and West Bengal in India. Through the Tridib-episode, the novelist explores the implications of a nationalism that is enforced on an ethnic community living on either side of a political divide. Nationalism in the Indian context is a manifestation of political freedom. A nation, as Benedict Anderson (1991: p. 15) puts it, is "an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." Nationalism is decided on ethnical and political boundaries, which Ghosh renames as 'the shadow lines'. However, Ghosh makes a plea for the transcendence of the artificially man-made political borders that divide people and nations beyond the confines of time and space. But it cannot be denied that nationalism as a cultural artifact consists of a common heritage amongst people based on ethnic and religious roots that stretches over a long past. Simultaneously, they are bound by particular shared political ideology.

For Robi, the meaning of freedom is different. He regards freedom as mirage on account of violence in the name of freedom, which led to killings and murders in Assam, the North-East Punjab, Sir Lanka and Tripura. However, for the grandmother, it is not a mirage but the fact of fighting against the Pakistanis. Usha Hemmadi (1994: p. 299) observes that the communal riots are seen as "a defiance of artificially created national boundaries." Novy Kapadia (1990: p. 205) says that by depicting the riots in Calcutta and Dhaka and by "exploring connections, distinctions and possibilities, Amitav Ghosh shows that in a changing world, different strands of nationalism and ideology will exist and even compete. The force for nationalism in quest for freedom or an ideology is often a source of violence. So, the 'shadow line' between people and nations is often an illusion." There is a need of a syncretic civilization to avoid a communal holocaust in India.

The narrator, whose identity is kept hidden, believes in the reality of time, space, nations and borders. He does not define his identity through time or space like Ila or the grandmother. In an interesting episode, he draws attention to distinctiveness and speaks about the fear that accompanies this awareness. Here is an excerpt:

It is a fear that comes of the knowledge that normalcy is utterly contingent, that the spaces that surround one, the streets that one inhabits, can become, suddenly and without warning, as hostile as a desert in a flash flood. It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the subcontinent from the rest of the world — not language, not food, not music — it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one's image in the mirror. (p. 203).

Ghosh is certainly right in emphasizing the separateness of national identities. Arjya Sircar (1992: p. 147) observes, " 'Home' is not a geographical entity, but an emotional, intellectual and moral entity which must be earned, recognized and identified in the shadows of one's own inner being."

The Shadow Lines, according to Brinda Bose (2003: p. 19), "embarks upon a journey of discovery of roots and reasons", and it is a meta-journey for the narrator who travels through the imaginary homelands. The diasporic identity of the narrator is immensely affected by both the time and space. The journey undertaken by the narrator leads him to the imaginary

homelands where boundaries are blurred by a culture colloid. The shadow lines are therefore not only the boundaries between the nations; they are also the lines that separate human being from one another. If 'Going Away' means going away from the self, 'Coming Home' can be coming back to the self. According to P.K. Dutta (1988: p. 67) "The excitement of this novel lies in the way that it extends the idea of binaries into an almost never-ending continuum of different pairs of thematic and structural concerns." It is rather difficult for the narrator to seek similarities or make distinctions between the 1964 riots in Dhaka and Calcutta. They are linked, indirectly, to Tridib's death in Dhaka. Ghosh writes:

Every word I write about those events of 1964 is the product of a struggle with silence. It is a struggle I am destined to lose — have already lost — for even after all these years I do not know where within me, in which corner of my world, this silence lies. All I know of it is what it is not. It is not, for example, the silence of an imperfect memory. Nor is it a silence enforced by a ruthless state — nothing like that: no barbed wire, no check-points to tell me where its boundaries lie. I know nothing of this silence except that it lies outside the reach of my intelligence, beyond words — that is why this silence must win, must inevitably defeat me, because it is not a presence at all; it is simply a gap, a hole, an emptiness in which there are no words. (p. 217).

Ghosh thinks that there is a gap between words and the world. When we try to interpret the meaning of the event which we do not know, we lose ourselves in silence. It takes fifteen years for the narrator to realize the connection between his nightmare bus ride and the tragic event in Dhaka. The narrator feels:

I could not have perceived that there was something more than an incidental connection between those events of which I had a brief glimpse from the windows of that bus, in Calcutta, and those other events in Dhaka, simply because Dhaka was in another country (p. 218).

Partition has almost affected everyone's psyche in the novel. While pursuing his Ph.D., the narrator attended a lecture in the Teen Murti House Library in New Delhi where the Australian speaker spoke on Indo-China war of 1962. His Marxist friend Malik and he himself found the documents of the wars of 1962 and 1965 and the riots. The narrator says:

"It was thus, sitting in the air-conditioned calm of an exclusive library, that I began on my strangest journey: a voyage into a land outside space, an expanse without distances; a land of looking-glass events' (p. 224).

Amitav Ghosh is preoccupied with the quest of identity on the part of his characters in his masterpiece *The Shadow Lines*. Their cultural rootedness, anguish, alienation, loneliness and rootlessness are the facets of their crisis of identity. Being a social anthropologist, his themes seem to be universal. In the novel, the motif of journey is undertaken for historical past and cultural settings and sometimes for the scientific and sociological quest. He indulges in trans-cultural and transnational issues of significance. He frequently interfaces several nationalities and different perceptions to enable him to provide the valuable perspectives in his novel. *The Shadow Lines* is the blurred lines that characterize uncertainty and instability in the modern age. Above all, the novel explores the central themes of violence, displacement, and the search for meaning in the chaotic world.

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Marginalization in Mahaswetha Devi's *Breast Stories*

Amancha Sairam

Abstract

The text is a thought provoking and hard-hitting reality of the lives of marginalised people of India. "*Breast stories*" is a trilogy of three short stories, written by *Mahaswetha devi*. The book explores the life and their oppression of tribals of women in the central eastern part of India. In the story of "*Breast giver*" devi also explores the higher community women exploitation. In the stories of "*Draupadi*" and "*Behind the bodice*", devi explores the brutality of officials and their oppression towards the tribals. Marginalization is a broad sociological concept that refers to exclusion from the centre of power, resources, and representation. Includes many forms of excluding like caste, class, gender, race, religion, disability, etc. Studied across disciplines like sociology, anthropology, and political science. Expressed through research, policy analysis, activism, and discourse. Mainly focuses on caste-based marginalization, particularly the untouchability and violence faced by Dalits. Studied within literary studies, often in the context of caste, identity, and resistance writing. Mahaswetha Devi stands as a towering literary figure whose works have redefined Indian regional literature by giving voice to the voiceless. Through her stories, she engages deeply with the themes of marginalization, resistance, gender injustice, and social inequality.

Keywords: Marginalization, Mahaswetha devi, Draupadi, Breast giver, Behind the bodice, Discrimination, Subaltern studies, Postcolonial literature, Resistance, Gender studies.

Introduction

Marginalization is a complex social process through which certain individuals or groups are pushed to the edges or "margins" of society, deprived of access to resources, rights, and opportunities that are available to others. It occurs when people are systematically excluded from participation in political, economic, cultural, or social life based on characteristics such as caste, class, race, gender, religion, ethnicity, disability, or language. Marginalized groups often face injustice, discrimination, exploitation, and a lack of recognition, which leads to unequal power relations and social hierarchies. This article will explore the meaning, causes, and effects of marginalization in society. It will also examine how marginalized communities resist oppression and assert their rights through movements, literature, and other forms of expression. By studying marginalization, we not only gain awareness of existing social inequalities but also reflect on our role in creating a more inclusive and just society.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative interpretative approach, grounded in feminist and postcolonial literary theory, to examine Mahaswetha devi's breast stories. The actual text was analysed including "*Draupadi*", "*Breast Giver*", "*behind the bodice*". The text analyses how Mahaswetha devi represented the female body as a site of oppression and resistance.

Exploring Marginalization “Draupadi”

Marginalisation of Tribal Identity and Class

In "Draupadi", the marginalisation of tribal people is clear at every stage. The story highlights how tribals like Dopdi and her community are treated as outsiders and as dangers, not just by police and army, but also by local landlords and moneylenders. Their struggles for survival are ignored, and their lands and resources are taken away by those in power. The officials don't know there are many tribal races. They treat them all as same race; this shows how their identity is alienated. The class difference is also shown because tribals face extra exploitation; even basic needs like water are controlled by landlords who demand payment from the poorest.

Criminalisation of Resistance

Whenever tribal people resist injustice—by rebelling, hiding, or defending their villages, their actions are called crimes by the government and military. Operations like "Operation Bakuli" and constant police pursuits paint them as criminals, not as people fighting against exploitation and injustice. Prize money is announced for catching rebels like Dopdi, showing how any act of resistance is turned into a law-and-order issue instead of being seen as a fight for rights.

Gendered Marginalisation and Sexual Violence

Draupadi (Dopdi) is not only targeted as a rebel but also as a tribal woman. The story graphically describes how she is captured, tortured, stripped, and brutally assaulted by the authorities. This suffering is doubled; she faces violence for being tribal and extra violence for being a woman. Her treatment reflects how women in marginalised communities often face sexual violence as a tool for breaking their spirit and silencing their protest. Even after all the violence, Dopdi refuses to be shamed—she remains defiant, which is powerful but tragic.

The Subversion of Draupadi as a Myth Character

The story uses the name "Draupadi" to connect its modern heroine to the famous Draupadi from the Mahabharata epic, who was humiliated but never broken. Unlike the myth, where Draupadi gets some form of justice, here Dopdi gets no help or support from any higher power. Her stripping and suffering are much more brutal, but instead of shaming her, it becomes an act of protest. She challenges the officers to look at her body, showing that they can take away her clothes but not her courage or dignity.

Intersectionality and Multiple Layers of Marginalisation

Draupadi's experience is shaped by several kinds of oppression. She is a tribal, a woman, and poor. Each of these identities brings dangers and disadvantages, and combined, they make her suffering unique but also representative of intersectional struggles. For example, she is marginalised because of her class and tribe, but her torture and humiliation escalate due to her gender.

Economic Marginalization

The tribals won't get enough pay for their work, that leads them to Famine. They don't have lands; they work as peasants. If they take any loan the repaying is a loop, it lasts for generations.

Subalternity

In the story "Draupadi" is a powerful tale that combines themes of tribal identity, class and gender oppression, resistance, and the limits of voice, highlighting how silenced communities fight back even when all odds are against them.

Unpacking Marginalisation in "Breast Giver"

Gender-Based Marginalisation

Jashoda is described as a typical Indian Woman who shows extreme and unquestioning loyalty to her husband; deep love for her children she sacrifices everything and forgives others even when it is unnatural to do so. Jashoda's body becomes a site of exploitation, expected to produce milk and bear children ceaselessly. Her repeated pregnancies, not for personal fulfilment but to serve the needs of the master's family, are emblematic of how women's reproductive capacities are appropriated. Even in her declining health, Jashoda's body remains an object of community discussion, stripped of privacy and autonomy. She is refused the dignity of modern medical treatment, her concerns dismissed by men who deem it inappropriate for a "Brahmin woman" to seek hospital care or expose herself to a male doctor.

Economic and Class-Based Marginalisation

Jashoda and her husband belong to a poor Brahmin family, with no stable income. When her husband becomes crippled, she is forced to sell her body's milk to survive — turning motherhood into a form of economic labour. Her body becomes a tool for income, showing how poverty drives women to exploit even their biological functions. Despite feeding dozens of rich children, Jashoda remains poor — she never gains wealth or security from her hard work. The rich Haldar family represents the upper class that depends on the poor to maintain their comfort. Jashoda's role as a wet nurse makes her socially useful but not respected — she's part of a system that benefits the rich while keeping the poor dependent. Even after years of service, she is discarded when she becomes sick — her class prevents her from receiving care or gratitude.

Medical and Institutional Marginalisation

When Jashoda falls ill with breast cancer, she is treated as just another patient, not as a human being who has sacrificed her body for others. The hospital doctors and nurses show no compassion, they treat her disease clinically, ignoring her suffering and social background. Her illness, which comes from overusing her body to "nurture" others, is symbolic — the same society that depended on her milk now abandons her when her body is no longer useful. Her breast cancer becomes a metaphor for how society exploits and then discards women's bodies. The institutional system (family, medical, and social structures) fails her completely. The wealthy Haldar family, who benefited from her milk, doesn't take responsibility when she becomes ill. The hospital, representing the modern institution, is equally indifferent, she is just another poor patient without identity or dignity. Jashoda dies alone and neglected, showing how both traditional and modern institutions exploit and erase lower-class women like her.

Subversion of Jashoda as a Mythical Character

The text deliberately subverts Jashoda's transformation into a mythical figure. In her prime, she is likened to mythic mothers and sacred cows, but this status is deeply ironic. As the story unfolds, the hollowness of the myth is revealed. The reverence she receives is strictly functional; it disappears once her usefulness ends. By juxtaposing ancient myths, aphorisms, and devotional language with the harsh realities of Jashoda's suffering, the story exposes the uses and abuses of mythology. It shows how real women, like Jashoda, are harmed by the imposition of mythic ideals that demand perpetual sacrifice but offer no protection or rewards. Her death, unmourned and unceremonious, emphasizes the tragic consequences of relying on myth to validate lived experience.

Superstition and Marginalisation

Superstition permeates the narrative. Jashoda's endless pregnancies are framed as both divine punishment and gift; her suffering is met with resignation ("It was written in destiny that she would die of cancer"), undercutting any possibility of meaningful intervention or solace. Characters debate the causes of Jashoda's illness in spiritual terms, invoking the goddess's intentions more readily than scientific explanations. The story's satire of such superstition is evident when practical solutions are rejected in favor of ritual, leading ultimately to neglect and death.

Subalternity

Jashoda's subaltern status is reinforced by the ephemerality of sympathy. The superficial reverence shown to her as a maternal figure never translates into lasting support or justice. The final indifference toward her death—her body burned, her memory already fading from those she served—reveals the ultimate powerlessness of the subaltern within intersecting structures of gender, caste, class, and tradition.

Exploring Marginalisation in the story of “Behind the Bodice”

Gender-Based Marginalization

The story exposes how society objectifies and exploits women, specifically focusing on tribal women's bodies. Gangor is judged and harassed because of her body, her breast becoming a symbol of national intrigue and debate. This gender-based marginalization is evident in how women's issues are sexualized, overshadowing other forms of suffering and struggle. Even groups claiming to defend women's morality are shown to be hypocritical, secretly consuming the very content they condemn. Women are seen as objects for male consumption—whether in the media or in daily life. Gangor's commodification is clear when people start paying her for photographs, and later, when she is brutally assaulted, her identity is erased, reduced to scars and trauma. The national obsession with her body ends up destroying her life, highlighting the violence that stems from the sexualization of women.

Caste and Tribal Marginalization

The narrative provides a raw look at the lives of tribal women like Gangor, who are not only neglected but actively marginalized by mainstream society. Tribal practices, like women going bare-chested, are viewed with shame and judgement by outsiders. The story describes how tribal women's bodies are turned into exoticized commodities—subjects of fascination, not people with agency. When Gangor seeks justice after enduring violence, her tribe and community distance themselves, fearing police retaliation and further marginalization. This isolation reflects the double burden of marginalization: tribal identity and gender.

Media Exploitation and Marginalization

The story criticizes the media for sensationalizing trivial or sexualized stories while ignoring significant national issues. Instead of reporting on famine, protest movements, or caste violence, the press becomes obsessed with Gangor's photo. The repetition of the song “Choli Ke Peeche” (What's behind the bodice?) becomes symbolic of society's fixation. Media attention is not empowering but exploitative—it draws danger to Gangor, isolates her, and ultimately leads to her physical and social destruction. The media is shown to be an enabler of marginalization rather than a voice for the unrepresented.

Legal and Institutional Marginalization

When Gangor tries to seek help, she is met with institutional barriers. The police, jail, and court system are not protectors but punishers. After Gangor files a case against the police for violence, she is marked as a troublemaker, forced to remain under surveillance, and kept isolated from her community. The system, instead of delivering justice, criminalizes her survival and suppresses her voice. Even well-meaning outsiders are shown to be complicit. Upin, the photographer, unwittingly initiates her downfall by bringing media attention to her photo without understanding the consequences.

The Illusion of Empowerment

There is a powerful irony in the apparent empowerment brought by media attention or monetary reward. Gangor asks for money for her photos, seemingly taking control of her body's image. However, this agency is hollow—she remains exploited, and her self-worth is still determined by others' gaze. The rewards, whether money or national fame, are short-lived and deadly. Similarly, Shital, who possesses an artificial silicone chest, questions the meaning of empowerment and the obsession with breasts, exposing how artificiality and reality blur for women who are reduced to body parts.

Criminalization and Marginalization

Gangor's seeking of justice leads to her further stigmatization. The community, out of fear, ostracizes her. She becomes a target not just for the original perpetrators of violence but also for the larger society and its institutions. The police and local authorities repeatedly punish and keep her under watch for daring to speak out. Despite being a victim, she is treated as if she is a criminal.

Subalternity

Gangor represents the subaltern woman, someone doubly disadvantaged by gender and tribal status. Her voice is silenced by mainstream society, the media, and even those who intend to help, like Upin. The narrative highlights how the stories of subaltern women are distorted or ignored. Rather than being heard on her own terms, Gangor's story is appropriated, sensationalized, or buried. The ultimate tragedy is that, despite all the attention, Gangor remains unnamed and forgotten, her fate lost in scandal, bureaucracy, and indifference, echoing the fate of many real subalterns whose stories remain suppressed or manipulated by those in power.

Conclusion

Mahaswetha devi's "Breast stories" is not just a fictional book. This trilogy explored all the contents of Marginalisation. Economical, Gender, Social, Geographical all kinds of marginalisation were intersected in this book. This book is the evidence that the marginalised communities were ignored and subaltern their voices. Without committing to any crime, they were criminalised. Each story in this trilogy depicts how women were exploited. Draupadi was exploited by state government, Jashoda was exploited by patriarchal and stereotypes of society, Gangor was exploited by the media and government. Thus, this book stands is not just a collection of fiction narratives, it is a radical political discourse that transforms marginality into a site of awareness, protest and enduring human dignity.

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Ethnographic Writing and the Poetics of Diasporic Imagination in Francophone Indo-Caribbean Literature

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Abstract

This study explores *ethnographic fiction* as both a literary practice and methodological lens in Francophone Indo-Caribbean writing, focusing on how Ernest Moutoussamy's novels *Aurore* (1987) and *Il pleure dans mon pays* (1979) reimagine diasporic Indianness through the poetics of ethnography. Emerging from the post-1980s rethinking of ethnographic writing by theorists such as James Clifford, George Marcus, and Vincent Crapanzano, ethnographic fiction bridges analytical rigour and literary imagination, transforming fiction into a speculative anthropology capable of articulating what conventional ethnography cannot document. The paper identifies five defining features of ethnographic fiction—*ethnopause*, didactic-symbolic function, dual authorship, anthropological orientation, and reflexive narration—and applies them to Indo-Caribbean texts to show how cultural memory becomes literary method. Through close readings of ritual and material culture—Tamil chants, folk heroism, bodily gestures, the *korai* mat, the braid, and the Pongal festival—this study demonstrates how Moutoussamy's writing archives subaltern experience while generating new cultural cartographies. The ethnographic “pauses” in his fiction function as *ethnotexts* and *social maps*, linking Indian origins with Caribbean recontextualization and transforming everyday gestures into repositories of identity. Further, by juxtaposing Tamil and African ritual forms, Moutoussamy constructs what Édouard Glissant terms a *poetics of relation*, where survival arises through transversal solidarities rather than assimilation or nostalgia.

Keywords: Ethnographic Fiction, Francophone Indo-Caribbean Literature, Diasporic Imagination, Indianité (Indianness), Ethnotext /Ethnopause, Cultural Memory, Speculative Anthropology, Poetics of Relation

Introduction

The origins of ethnographic fiction lie in a fundamental dissatisfaction with the ways ethnography had been written. As Mary Louise Pratt once asked with biting irony: “How, one asks constantly, could such interesting people doing such interesting things produce such dull books?” (Pratt 1986, 33). Her question crystallised what many had long felt—that traditional ethnographic writing, in its pursuit of scientific objectivity and statistical precision, stripped lived experience of its affective and cultural vitality. The rituals, voices, and gestures of communities that dazzled in the field seemed flattened on the page. The “soul” of the ethnographic encounter was missing.

This recognition provoked a shift. By the 1980s, anthropologists such as James Clifford and George Marcus were no longer content with ethnography's detached prose. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, they deliberately blurred the boundaries between anthropology and literature, insisting that ethnography is itself a textual practice—rhetorical, interpretive, and constructed (Clifford and Marcus 2). What had once been cast as a neutral science was revealed to be a form of writing, shaped by voice, narrative, and perspective. The

Other thinkers deepened this transformation. Vincent Crapanzano, for example, had already described the “dissociation between the field experience—what he calls the

ethnographic confrontation—and the writing” (Crapanzano 1977, 70). His insight highlighted that the ethnographer never simply “records” reality; he negotiates, interprets, and even invents it. Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin pushed this further in their ethnographic film *Chronique d’un été* (1960), which embodied the principle of *vérité provoquée*—not life as it is, but life as it is provoked (Hemer 8). In this model, the ethnographer was not a passive observer but an active catalyst, drawing out latent truths by intervening in the scene itself.

It is within this intellectual climate that the idea of “ethnographic fiction” emerged as a methodological bridge. Juan José Saer called fiction a form of “speculative anthropology” (Hemer 7)—an anthropology freed from constraining protocols, able to wander yet still engaged with human life. Fiction, in Saer’s view, is “uninhibited, unpredictable, transgressive,” precisely because it dares to reach what conventional ethnographic description cannot. Taken together, these interventions forged a hybrid methodology: ethnographic fiction, where analytical rigour coexists with the interpretive imagination of literature.

Characteristics of Ethnographic Fiction

The first and perhaps most distinctive characteristic of ethnographic fiction is the ethnotext, what Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo (2004) has described in the Indo-Francophone context as an ethnopause. In the midst of a flowing narrative, the author deliberately pauses the storyline to insert extended descriptions of rituals, clothing, foodways, or ceremonies. These moments interrupt the plot, yet their purpose is not ornamental. They transform the text into a literary archive, fixing cultural memory into narrative form. What might otherwise be fleeting practices gain permanence in the novel, thereby allowing literature to function as a repository of lived traditions.

The second characteristic builds on this point: ethnopause is not only archival, but also didactic and symbolic. Such narrative pauses are designed to educate readers unfamiliar with the community, introducing them to practices that otherwise remain opaque. Yet they also operate within the fictional economy of the novel, contributing to character development and plot construction. A festival sequence, for example, may both teach the reader about ritual and simultaneously mark a turning point in the destiny of a protagonist. Ethnographic fiction thus fuses ethnographic detail with literary function—its cultural sequences are never mere appendages, but integral to the shaping of the fictional universe.

A third defining feature is the dual role of the author. Writers of ethnographic fiction occupy a position at once as storytellers and as ethnographers. They mediate between insider memory and outsider comprehension, balancing authenticity with accessibility. This dual role situates the author as a cultural translator, weaving local memory into forms intelligible to broader audiences without dissolving its specificity.

The fourth characteristic is its anthropological orientation. Fiction here does more than embellish; it becomes a window into belief systems, everyday practices, and modes of social life. By embedding stories in the rhythms of daily existence, ethnographic fiction conveys the realistic “pinch” of an imaginative world. It allows readers to inhabit the cultural logic of the text while recognising that these depictions grow from the gaps left by statistical and descriptive ethnography.

Finally, ethnographic fiction foregrounds the reflexive role of the writer. It is not simply a vessel of data, but a speculative tool of knowledge production. Through narrative choices, commentary, or shifts in voice, the writer often signals an awareness of the act of writing itself—reminding the reader that fiction is both interpretation and invention. It is precisely in this speculative capacity that ethnographic fiction accesses, in Hemer’s words, “that which is non-verifiable, either because it has not been documented, or because it cannot be documented” (20–21). Oral traditions, ephemeral rituals, and experiences of trauma—often absent from

archives—find their articulation in literature, which dares to inscribe what lies beyond conventional ethnographic reach.

Together, these characteristics—ethnopause, didactic-symbolic function, dual authorship, anthropological orientation, and reflexive narration—define ethnographic fiction as a distinctive methodological practice. It draws upon the rigor of ethnography while embracing the freedom of literary imagination, producing texts that are at once descriptive, interpretive, and creative.

Conceptual Framework through Literature

Ethnographic fiction can function as a methodology at multiple levels, enabling literature to produce cultural knowledge rather than serve as mere secondary evidence. In the postcolonial context, where silenced voices and fragmented histories complicate traditional ethnography, fiction becomes a tool for capturing experience, reconstructing memory, and mapping cultural trajectories. This section outlines three methodological dimensions through which ethnographic fiction operates.

Autoethnography: Insider Experience and Its Limits

Autoethnography blends personal narrative with cultural analysis, turning the writer's own emotions and encounters into interpretive material. Ruth Behar's *The Vulnerable Observer* (1996) exemplifies this mode, where the researcher's subjectivity becomes central to ethnographic truth. Such writing grants immediacy and emotional resonance often absent in detached anthropological accounts. Yet autoethnography also faces critique in postcolonial studies: insider presence does not guarantee authenticity, and questions of positionality remain. Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story* (2000) illustrates this paradox. The novel's fragmented account of "coloured" identity in post-apartheid South Africa is deeply personal and archival, yet it admits the impossibility of fully capturing subaltern experience. Its self-conscious incompleteness signals both the strength and the limitation of autoethnographic method—valuable for its affective truth but never able to claim total representation.

Fiction as Imaginative Ethnography

When complete documentation is absent, ethnographic fiction constructs cultural realities through imagination. It draws on rumor, belief, and memory to dramatize what cannot be verified, accessing, as Oscar Hemer observes, "that which is non-verifiable, either because it has not been documented, or because it cannot be documented" (*Fiction and Truth in Transition*, 2012, pp. 20–21). Jorge Luis Borges' short story "The Other Duel" (1970) demonstrates this untimeliness. Its macabre contest, published just before General Aramburu's execution by the Montoneros, eerily foreshadowed Argentina's descent into violence. The story crystallizes cultural anxieties that ethnography could not capture in the moment, illustrating fiction's capacity to reveal truths in anticipation, through narrative invention rather than empirical record.

Ethnotexts as Social Maps

Building on Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo's concept of the ethnotext or ethnopause (2004), this study advances a methodological step by treating such narrative pauses as social maps. Ethnotexts—extended descriptions of rituals, objects, or practices—do more than preserve cultural memory; they chart trajectories of displacement and adaptation. Arjun

Appadurai notes that fiction functions as part of a society's conceptual repertoire, contributing to the construction of "social maps" (Modernity at Large, 1996, p. 58). Reading ethnotexts through this lens uncovers how cultural fragments are re-situated across diasporic geographies. For instance, when a Caribbean novel describes the Madras handkerchief, the detail is not symbolic ornament. It points back to the weaving traditions of Tamil Nadu, to the artisanal communities and caste practices that produced the textile, and forward to its adaptation as headscarf or costume in the Caribbean. The handkerchief thus becomes a cartographic node linking homeland, migration, and creolization. In this way, ethnographic fiction not only archives memory but actively reconstructs cultural maps across time and space. This study adopts the framework of ethnotexts as social maps to analyze Indo-Caribbean literature, foregrounding how diasporic identity is built through such textual coordinates.

Analysis: Ethnographic Fiction in Francophone Indo-Caribbean Writing

At this stage, the analysis requires attention to what Oscar Hemer calls the distinction between two kinds of truth: "the first truth to fact, the second to something beyond that, something that comes in – or from – the very process of writing" (Fiction and Truth in Transition 3). Ethnographic fiction works precisely in this intersection, refusing to reproduce data alone but seeking interpretive meaning. Its methodology operates through the four key characteristics already discussed: the use of ethnotexts or ethnopause to pause the narrative into cultural description, the didactic and symbolic value of such passages, the author's dual role as narrator and ethnographer, and an anthropological orientation that situates everyday gestures within broader cultural worlds.

In Francophone Indo-Caribbean writing, these characteristics are central to constructing what has been termed a distinctive Indianness—a diasporic imagination through which Indo-Caribbean identity is reconstructed in Creole space. One of the writers most significant to this project, Ernest Moutoussamy, employs ethnographic fiction in novels such as *Aurore* (1987) and *Il pleure dans mon pays* (1979). This study turns to these texts, taking their ethnotexts as material for social mapping. The pauses in these novels—whether depicting Pongal, fire-walking, or quotidian practices—are not nostalgic recollections of India but reconstructions of Indianness in the Caribbean. Through ritual, costume, music, and foodways, they chart diasporic imagination and articulate identity.

Moutoussamy's novels therefore, function simultaneously as archive and re-imagining. They preserve fragments of cultural practices while transforming them into metaphors for survival and belonging. A representative passage from *Aurore* illustrates this process: "*As the sun declined, the rhythms of the matalon drum rose. Even with a heavy load, one was keen to mark a few steps of Indian dance. Hands on hips, feet pointed, legs apart, knees slightly bent, one moved forward. Then the arms stretched out, the fingers moved in a reminiscence of mudras. One crouched, pivoted to rejoin the improvised choir of singers. Applause and encores followed.*" (*Aurore* 79–80)

This description is not ornamental; it is a deliberate ethnotext that archives embodied gestures of indentured migrants. Importantly, Moutoussamy could have chosen to invoke a recognized classical dance form—Bharatanatyam or Kathakali—as a shorthand for Indian tradition. Instead, he provides a meticulous description of ordinary gestures: "hands on hips, feet pointed, legs apart." These movements belong not to codified traditions but to subaltern bodies. Historically, Bharatanatyam itself was tied to temple ritual and caste restrictions, inaccessible to the peasant and Dalit communities who migrated as indentured laborers. By refusing the classical label and textualizing anonymous movements, Moutoussamy dignifies subaltern expression, inscribing their embodied memory into Caribbean literature.

This exemplifies the analytical process followed in this study: beginning with a literary excerpt, identifying its ethnographic characteristics, and then mapping its cultural trajectory. In this case, the festival scene functions both as a literary archive of Indo-Caribbean embodiment and as a reconstruction of identity, transforming ephemeral gestures into enduring cultural memory. The analysis continues with further examples where Moutoussamy's ethnographic fiction demonstrates how diasporic imagination constructs a distinctive Indianness.

Distinctive Indianness in Francophone Indo-Caribbean Narrative

Within Francophone Indo-Caribbean writing, ethnographic fiction is central to the formation of a distinctive Indianness—a diasporic imagination reconstituted in Creole space rather than nostalgically retrieved from a lost homeland. Ernest Moutoussamy's *Aurore* (1987) and *Il pleure dans mon pays* (1979) exemplify this: ritual, costume, music, and foodways are narrated as living coordinates of identity, not as museum pieces.

Tamil as Sacred Language (Ethnotext; Anthropological Orientation)

In festival scenes of both the novels *Pongal in Aurore* and *Fire walking ceremony in Il pleure dans mon pays*, Tamil appears not as lingua franca but as liturgical medium: a ritual specialist (explicitly non-Brahmin) performs oral stories and invocations in Tamil, conferring sacral authority on a language otherwise marginal in the colony's multilingual ecology. This aligns with Appasamy Murugaiyan fieldwork's documentation that, in the French West Indies, Tamil has functioned primarily in worship and family rites and has thus become a sacred language (Murugaiyan 2012).

Reading via our lenses: the ethnopause crystallizes the chants like "*Ô Paṇḍāram ! On dit que Rama d'Ayodhya se marie aujourd'hui*" didactic glosses given in the foot notes: *Rāmāyaṇa*, *Ayodhya is the capital of King Daśaratha and the birthplace of Lord Rāma, the seventh avatāra of Viṣṇu. The "marriage of Rāma of Ayodhya" refers to the divine wedding of Rāma and Sītā, which is celebrated in Hindu ritual calendars and re-enacted in temple festivals (Il pleure dans mon pays 63)* explaining the terms for an extracommunal reader while affirming in-group memory; the dual role positions the narrator as cultural mediator; the anthropological orientation situates sound (chant), role (officiant), and setting (festival) as social practice rather than ornament.

Raja Desingu and the Folkloric Hero (Didactic/Symbolic; Ethnotext)

Invocation of Raja Desingu (Dessingou) shifts the mythic horizon from Sanskrit purāṇic heroes toward Tamil folk heroism. As Stuart Blackburn shows, Tamil tradition distinguishes courtly/purāṇic heroes from local folk heroes who defend cattle, crops, villages, and often transgress caste hierarchies (Blackburn 144–45).

In Moutoussamy's scene, Desingu functions as diasporic folk memory—re-enacted across oceans as a figure of defiance; his sky-descending horse Barassari (as the narrative names it) amplifies this memory with miraculous speed and reach. The didactic vector is overt: the text teaches a composite readership who Desingu is (a Tamil folk chieftain resisting domination), while the symbolic vector fuses hero and horse into a portable grammar of resistance. The ethnotext thus preserves folklore and recasts it to fit plantation modernity's moral topography.

The Korai Mat, the Braid, and Embodied Memory

In *Aurore*, Moutoussamy introduces another striking ethnotextual pause through the subtleties of posture and material culture. The narration lingers on Aurore seated upon a korai mat, the traditional Tamil reed mat, renowned in Pattamadai for its silk-like finish and artisanal precision (pp. 70–74). The description is meticulous: the reed is split, soaked, dyed, braided. Such detail is not decorative excess but an ethnographic insertion that textualizes a Tamil object and re-situates it within the cane fields of Guadeloupe.

The ethnographic description extends to Aurore's posture and hairstyle: "she sits in the Indian way, feet tucked beneath the body, braid falling neatly down her back" (p. 72). Here, the braid itself becomes a cultural sign. Unlike African braiding traditions such as cornrows or box braids—tightly plaited, geometric, and socially codified—Moutoussamy's "three-part plait," oiled and adorned with flowers, signifies continuity with Indian domestic femininity. Together, the mat, posture, and braid form a tableau of embodied Indianness—small, intimate acts that preserve memory in the very gestures of sitting and grooming.

Yet the scene is not simply nostalgic. The mat is not named "korai" directly but glossed in Creole as *natte*. It is "rolled out not in a Tamil courtyard but amidst the cane fields of Guadeloupe" (p. 73). This renaming reframes the object: Tamil craftsmanship survives, but under Creole signifiers and landscapes. The juxtaposition dramatizes how fragments of cultural memory are transplanted and re-articulated. What might appear as an ethnographic digression is integral—it develops the plot while foregrounding how ordinary acts like unrolling a mat or braiding hair become metaphors of survival in a creolized world.

Theoretically, this moment exemplifies decreolization and recreolization. By pausing on Tamil material culture, Moutoussamy stages a move toward decreolization—lifting Indo-Caribbean fragments out of Creole anonymity to affiliate them explicitly with Indian origins. Yet almost immediately, the process re-enters the loop of recreolization: the mat is renamed *natte*, re-situated in Guadeloupe, and the gestures fold back into a Caribbean reality. Thus, the scene affirms Indo-Caribbean retrievals against charges of inauthenticity, while also resisting a purely territorial or "essentialist" understanding of Indianness.

If the mat, the braid, and the seated posture dramatize Indianness as quiet, domestic memory—tactile and embodied—Moutoussamy soon shifts registers. What begins as micro-texts of heritage embedded in routine gestures opens into the louder register of ritual performance. The following Pongal scene inaugurates this transition.

Pongal in *Aurore*: Revival after Silence

The colonial record of the Pongal festival in Martinique, published in *Le Moniteur de la Martinique* (14 January 1855), provides one of the earliest descriptions of indentured Indians celebrating their "first fête du Poogol." The report, however, reduces the ceremony to a spectacle of chaos. The journalist confesses that he could "only very imperfectly grasp the meaning of the allegories" and concludes that the mingling of practices produced nothing more than *tohu-bohu*, a disorderly jumble of rites. Even the convulsions of the idol-bearer and the sudden appearance of a warrior figure are treated as unintelligible theatrics, stripped of symbolic meaning.

Placed against this colonial reportage, Moutoussamy's *Aurore* reclaims Pongal not as incoherent mimicry but as a deliberate act of cultural archiving. The novel begins:

After the long years of silence that followed the perilous ocean crossing and the exile into an unfamiliar land, the festival began. Beneath the tropical starry sky chosen as a canopy, musicians, singers, and dancers led by Abo entered the

stage. Costumes brought back from India and carefully preserved, covered with sequins, small mirrors, and colored papers—true relics—pierced the darkness with their reflections. With bells on their ankles and wrists, a kapou on the nose, a narè adorned with golden and silver strips, those who had not danced since their departure, their faces filled with emotion, rhythmically accompanied the rediscovered songs with ease and harmony. [...] While scenes from Raja Tesingou Natakam, Nallatanga, or Madourai Viran were being mimed in the hidden caves of Guadeloupe, far from the plantations (Aurore 132).

Unlike the colonial journalist, who saw relics without coherence, Moutoussamy restores their depth by naming them in untranslated Tamil: kapou (nose ornament), narè (strip of gold or silver decoration). These words resist French or Creole substitution, insisting on Tamil vocabulary as archival trace. The costumes themselves, carried across oceans and carefully preserved, are not inert survivals but material testaments of continuity. They demonstrate how dress can become an archive, transmitting cultural memory when institutional archives remain silent.

The colonial reporter's bewilderment at the warrior figure is also reframed. Moutoussamy situates this within Tamil folklore: the apparition recalls Raja Desingu and Madurai Viran, popular heroes remembered for defying domination. What the colonial eye dismissed as convulsive theater emerges here as allegory of subaltern struggle. The warrior clearing the way for the idol is simultaneously clearing symbolic space for faith to survive in exile.

Even the journalist's complaint about "seventeen gods" and the confusion of cults takes on a different significance in Moutoussamy's retelling. Rather than incoherence, the plurality indexes the persistence of non-Brahminical practices—village gods, caste deities, and regional rites—that orthodox Hinduism might marginalize. Their presence in diaspora signals not dilution but resilience: the transplantation of a subaltern religious landscape, fragmented yet enduring.

Through this reworking, Pongal in *Aurore* becomes a literary archive. In contexts where official records silence the voices of indentured laborers, literature itself functions as archive, preserving fragments that history distorts or erases (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 91). By inscribing chants, costumes, and rituals into narrative memory, Moutoussamy transforms what colonial discourse dismissed as chaos into a coded expression of resistance.

The novel thus charts a continuum of diasporic imagination in Afro- Indian Solidarities

Conclusion: From Festival to Relation

In *Aurore*, the Pongal festival dramatizes Indianness through collective ritual performance. *Il pleure dans mon pays*, however, shifts the ethnographic register by embedding ritual within the plantation's intercultural landscape. Here, memory is not isolated within Tamil liturgies but reawakened in encounters between African and Indian practices. What emerges is a transversal history in Glissant's sense—histories braided across difference, refusing assimilation while producing resonance (Glissant 34). One emblematic passage renders Africans and Indians in simultaneous prayer:

Negroes and Indians, stifled by oppression, bending under the same yoke, with their expert fingers on the tom-toms and the matalons, tried to charm the same god (*Il pleure dans mon pays* 54).

The instruments signal more than musical detail. The tom-tom and the matalon answer each other without fusing, generating a polyphonic register where distinct wounds and prayers echo across the plantation field. The scene does not reproduce colonial or nationalist models of unity, which demand erasure of difference; instead, it enacts solidarity through resonance. In the transversal frame, survival is neither isolation nor assimilation but the provisional crossing of rhythms under pressure.

Such writing unsettles the colonial archive. French shipping registers and mission reports separated Africans and Indians into demographic columns, reproducing segregation at the level of paperwork. Moutoussamy inscribes what those ledgers suppress: the convergence of oppressed groups in a common soundscape. He also resists nationalist nostalgia, which monumentalizes indenture as an insulated ordeal. The novel demonstrates that memory is not secured by withdrawal into the community but by its activation in relation with others.

The novel's ritual scenes deepen this transversal dynamic. Where *Aurore's* Pongal festival suspends narrative time to dramatize continuity, *Il pleure dans mon pays* makes ritual a structural hinge. The episode of Anjali's firewalking illustrates this. Archival accounts from Mauritius and Réunion dismissed similar ceremonies as "superstitious excess" (Carter and Torabully 88). In Moutoussamy's fiction, however, the rite is narrative engine. Anjali's performance carries inherited trauma—her cousin's death during the same ritual—yet also becomes a space of self-assertion. She undertakes the ascetic preparation, resists her husband's intervention, and finally claims the fire as her own ordeal.

This scene dramatizes the double movement of transversal memory: ritual binds the community to its past, yet also enables new meanings through individual agency. Continuity and transformation cross without canceling each other. The firewalking is not an inert survival but a dynamic point of relation between inherited expectation and personal autonomy, between the ethnographic archive and fictional re-inscription.

By narrating ritual as structural pivot rather than ethnographic digression, Moutoussamy contests the classificatory logic of anthropology and the immobilizing frame of colonial documentation. Ethnology sought to fix firewalking in categories of "Hindu survivals"; the novel animates it as character development, binding plot to memory's reactivation. Through this refunctioning, ethnographic fiction becomes ethnofiction, mobilizing ritual not to illustrate identity but to generate narrative itself.

Taken together, these episodes—polyphonic prayer and transformative firewalking—show how *Il pleure dans mon pays* sustains a transversal poetics of relation. Memory is not preserved within enclosed cultural units; it is renewed at intersections. Solidarity, likewise, is not a melting of differences but the endurance of distinct rhythms meeting under shared duress. Moutoussamy, writing against the silences of colonial archives and the closures of nationalist nostalgia, offers a fictional practice of transversal history—one that sustains difference while enabling provisional survival.

With this analysis, we understand that fractured inheritances—whether linguistic dispersals, caste exclusions, or ritual particularities—do not dissolve into a fully creolized anonymity. However, minute, they continue to play a crucial role in diasporic life, and their persistence is captured through ethnographic fiction in Moutoussamy's writing. Even in gestures as simple as sitting in the Indian way, or in the evocation of a ritual chant, fragments are dynamically refunctioned into literary coordinates. By attending to ethnographic fiction not only as method but as practice, we have discussed how Moutoussamy transforms these fragments into meaningful markers of identity. His novels refuse to stabilize Indianness in nostalgia for an unattainable homeland; instead, through ethnotexts that archive gestures, postures, and rituals, they chart a process of cultural re-mapping.

Crucially, this ethnographic mode resists the flattening of colonial archives. Where colonial records often reduced ritual to incoherence or spectacle, Moutoussamy's fiction inserts

glosses, footnotes, and narrative pauses that reposition fragments as cultural knowledge. Scholars such as Valérie Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo have noted that French Caribbean works are frequently dismissed for lacking “literary” value in metropolitan critical frameworks (Magdelaine-Andrianjafitrimo 2004). Yet when read through the lens of ethnographic fiction, these texts disclose their distinctive contribution: they convert lived fragments into coordinates of belonging, thereby fashioning a diasporic identity that neither replicates homeland traditions nor capitulates to creolized erasure.

Having established how ethnographic fiction enables fragments to cohere into a diasporic Indianness, we must now turn to the domain where these fragments acquire their most durable and contested form: religion. Ritual is the matrix through which dispersed survivals crystallize, both preserving memory and generating new forms of belonging. Yet this is also the site where scholarly debates are sharpest. V. S. Naipaul famously dismissed Indo-Caribbean religion as “degraded” survivals emptied of meaning, mere theatrical excess within the plantation world (*The Middle Passage*, 1962). Against this view, more recent studies argue that diasporic religious practices are neither mere distortions nor inert residues but creolized reinventions that anchor identity in new ecologies (Vertovec 2000; Khan 2004). It is precisely in this contested field that Moutoussamy intervenes. What he calls *Hindouisme créole* (“Creole Hinduism”) does not replicate a lost Indian orthodoxy but fashions ritual as a language of survival and community-making. Tamil chants uttered by non-Brahmin officiants, vernacular glosses that instruct both insiders and outsiders, and the persistence of village gods across oceans reveal how ritual mediates between fracture and belonging. Discussing *Hindouisme créole* is therefore our next section, where we examine diasporic religion not as ornament but as cultural technology, showing on what basis it was formed and how it contributes to the concept of *Indianité*—a distinctive Indianness in the French Antilles.

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Debate on Truth(s) in Sophistic and Platonic Rhetoric

Sanjeev Niraula

Speech is a powerful lord, who with the finest and most invisible body achieves the most divine works [truths].

- Gorgias

Without a grasp of truth there neither is nor ever could be genuinely professional speaking”

- Plato

This short paper attempts to analyze the concept of truth in sophistic and Platonic rhetoric based on the reading of the texts by the sophists and Plato. To draw upon the idea of truth in the sophistic rhetoric and Platonic rhetoric, I have relied on Gorgias’ *The Encomium of Helen* and Plato’s *Phaedrus* and *Gorgias* as the primary texts. Sophists seek not the truth but the effect of a rhetor’s opinion on the minds of the audience by means of persuasion. Their focus is on socially constructed truths that change constantly. Plato, on the other hand, believes that perfect knowledge is a requirement for the application of rhetorical knowledge; one has to apply dialectic in the pursuit of absolute truth before using rhetoric to communicate the truth (*Phaedrus*, p. 265-66). So, he rejects sophistic rhetoric on the grounds that it “ha[d] no rational account to give of the nature of the various things which it offer[ed]” (p. 465). This paper stands on the synthesized assertion that sophistic rhetoric is based on the concept of contingent truth whereas Platonic rhetoric stands on the ground of absolute truth.

The paper uses some key terms frequently in the discussion of the argument. The term ‘truth’ discussed in the paper, implies ethical consideration of what is right and what is wrong in the field of rhetoric. Likewise, ‘sophists’ derived from the word ‘sophia’ meaning ‘wisdom’, refers to the teachers of 5th century Athens who taught the citizens of Athens the art of persuasion to be effective speaker. Similarly, ‘sophistic rhetoric’ stands for the teachings of the sophists. ‘Platonic rhetoric’ stands for the ideas of Plato, especially his opinion towards rhetoric. ‘Kairos’, the Greek word stands for ‘right time’, ‘opportunity or ‘season’; it refers to the timeliness of an argument. ‘Exigence’ means event or occurrence that prompts rhetorical discourse.

Sophistic rhetoric, a reference to the rhetoric of sophists- Gorgias, Protagoras, Hippias, to name a few- of 5th century BC of Athens, advocates truth not as something absolute but as something relative. For Gorgias, truth is not a matter of knowledge and truth but rather of persuasion and belief. He regards truth as something relative based on Kairos. Similarly, Protagoras is well-known for his oft-quoted dictum ‘Man is the measure of all things’. Truth differs from context to context so, what is advocated by man as truth is the truth in itself. The idea of truth as the construct of man itself implies the multiplicity and contingency of truths. As an agnostic sophist, Protagoras is said to have said “Concerning the gods, I cannot know either that they exist or that they do not exist; for there is much to prevent one’s knowing; the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of man’s life” (Sprague, 1990, p. 4). Protagoras neither believes nor denies the existence of Gods because an absolute criterion to answer is beyond the reach of man’s knowledge regarding divinity. When he advocates two sides of Gods, either they exist or they don’t, he on the one hand, rejects absolute truth and on the other, implies the possibility of multiple truths.

In sophistic rhetoric, language plays a crucial role to invent and reinvent truth. Like Protagoras, Gorgias also advocates two sides of an issue to reject the notion of single truth as evident in his text *The Encomium of Helen*. He crafts a defense for Helen and questions the established ‘truth’ regarding Helen as the cause of ten-year war. His defense problematizes the

notion of guilt and innocence. Using the power of persuasion, he presents four major arguments to prove the innocence of Helen. In fact, he devotes nine paragraphs (8th to 17th) to show how Helen was persuaded by the power of speech of Paris. Using language, he constructs a new truth about Helen, "I have through speech removed ill fame from a woman" (p. 84) in which she Helen is free from the blame and opinion. What is note-worthy is his handling of language to question the established 'truth' and to set up a new 'truth' about Helen. In his persuasion, Gorgias is able in diverting the blame away from Helen by proving her innocence. He writes, "The persuader, as constringer, does the wrong, and the persuaded, as constrained, is wrongly blamed." (p. 81). The blurring line between guilt and innocence set by Gorgias through language problematizes the concept of absolute truth. Who appears to be guilty is innocent and what appear to be true is not always true. While Homer has constructed truth of Helen as a wrongdoer for his audience, Gorgias constructs a new truth of Helen as an innocent person. If so, then what is absolute truth? In fact, truth is something relative for Gorgias which is to be adjusted to fit the audiences needs in a certain time and with a certain set of beliefs and laws. The sophists' notion of relative truth is based on Kairos and exigence. For that, one needs to understand the then society and culture which has shaped the sophistic rhetoric including oratory, persuasion, literacy, and the concept of truth. In the 5th century BC, democracy of Athens was marked by direct participation of the citizens rather than the present day's representative system. Any male adult over the age of 20 could take part in the democracy and it was a duty to do so or else he would be penalized. Therefore, the youths needed sophists who would teach them speaking skills so that their participation in democracy would be more effective. In that sense, literacy was a requirement and a socially valued project. The discussion suggests that sophists had to teach the people the skills of persuasion to win the argument rather than being concerned with what is right and what is wrong. Using language, they were supposed to create and recreate truths and persuade others accordingly.

However, Plato's version of truth rests on the contrast between truth and opinion. He advocates that life should be guided by truth not by opinion which he regards as superficial values. For him, sophistic rhetoric is based not on truth but on opinion. The sophists, he blames in his book *Phaedrus*, lacks a grasp of truth. A grasp of truth means knowing all there is to know about something, and especially disputable properties, so that it can be distinguished from everything else, especially other disputable properties. He is critical of the sophists for their lack of knowledge of truth to learn to speak. In the lack of a grasp of truth, "neither is nor ever could be genuinely professional speaking" (p. 107). What seems to bother Plato is sophists' rhetorical practice which relies mainly on opinions without having grasped the truth. Since the sophists have restricted their research to opinions, Plato blames, they "will come up only with a ridiculously unsystematic form of rhetorical expertise" (p. 50). For Plato, such mishandling of language relied on opinion, can mislead people away from truth.

Similarly, Plato's notion of truth is also guided by his concept of philosophy and his image as a philosopher. As a philosopher, he believes in transcendental truth which he believes can be grasped only by the soul of the philosopher. As Plato was inclined towards abstract truth, "his vision of truth was complete enough to leave him with a lingering dissatisfaction here on earth" (p. xii). He often emphasizes on the necessity of knowing the truth in totality prior to speaking and writing. Thereafter only, one should "divide it up class by class until he reaches something indivisible" (p.72). However, Plato finds the sophists just engaged in persuasion without any regard for truth. His criticism of rhetoric can be understood as he in *Gorgias* states, "the object proposed in them was to persuade at any price regardless of any considerations of truth and honour" (p. 44). Rhetoric may consist of skillful speech, but it requires no truth to be performed. It is the pursuit of the image of knowledge rather than of knowledge itself. Therefore, Plato's criticism of rhetoric is based on his concept of truth as evident in his analogy, "As cookery to medicine so is rhetoric to justice" (p. 30). While

philosophy draws a clear line between right and wrong, just and unjust, true and false, rhetoric on the other hand, pretends to maintain the right and redress wrong. It is because of this philosophical orientation, Plato advocates absolute truth.

In addition, analyzing Plato's distinction between knowledge and belief in his inquiry into the nature of persuasion of rhetoric also helps to see his concept of truth. In *Gorgias*, Plato writes, "Rhetoric then, it seems, is an artificer of persuasion, productive of belief but not of instruction in matters of right and wrong" (p. 15). He agrees that rhetoric involves the practice of persuasion, but he disagrees with the idea of belief associated with persuasion as belief may be true or false, this is what bothers Plato because persuasion can present false as truth. He is of the opinion that truth must be conveyed as truth. He condemns that rhetorical persuasion is not concerned with right or wrong. Criticizing Gorgias in the text, he states that knowledge by definition must be true, or else it is not knowledge, "Rhetoric is not an art, but the occupation of a shrewd and enterprising spirit, and of one naturally skilled in its dealing with men, and in sum and substance I call it 'flattery'" (p. 27). Plato's consideration of rhetoric as flattery implies that like flattery, rhetoric is devoid of truth.

The discussion of truth with reference to the works of the sophists, Gorgias in particular, and Plato reflect the concept of truth in the sophistic and Platonic rhetoric. While the sophists advocate the relative, constructed, and contingent truths, Plato opposes this view with his notion of absolute truth. Sophists' concept of truth is shaped by contingency, language, Kairos, and exigence whereas Plato's view on knowledge, reality and philosophy has influenced his notion of truth. Likewise, the sophists and Plato differ from each other as the former are concerned with winning an argument by the means of persuasion whereas the latter is concerned with conveying truth rather than opinion. In my understanding, the discussion on the concept of truth in sophistic and Platonic rhetoric offers a comparative reading inviting a new perspective to further engage in this issue. Moreover, it creates a path for further research to compare the sophistic and Platonic rhetoric with the modern rhetoric in terms of the concept of truth.

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Hindi Cinema: A Canvas for Women Empowerment

Saroj Bala

Abstract

The paper delves into the role of women, which has undergone significant changes in Hindi cinema. From an ideal housewife, devoted to her husband and in-laws as a submissive, docile and vulnerable creature, she didn't have much say in the family. Even decisions regarding her life were taken by her father, brother or husband. With the influence of Western lifestyle and movies, women are being portrayed as having a zest for life, and their assertive persona carries a different attitude, unlike the Sati-Savitri kind. In recent years, women have been given leading roles with the change of values, dress patterns, educational opportunities and financial independence. The paper discusses the journey of women in Hindi cinema by applying post-feminist theory, where they have come a long way from being homemakers to breadwinners and single parents.

Keywords: Cinema, women, Hindi, character, empowerment

Introduction

Post-feminism has inspired representations in media which are appreciated by viewers and critics. From the 1990s to the new millennium, the focus has been on the empowered women and their concern for the rights of women in social, economic, political, and personal spheres. Post-feminism has replaced second and third-wave feminism for the wholesome growth of a society. Empowered womanhood is depicted by gender neutral roles where agency and choice drive full-blown self-expression, transcending gender identities. The century-old journey of Hindi cinema has seen various shades and character portrayals of Indian women. Bharati and Redhu (2024) find that, "The journey of women in Indian cinema spans a diverse landscape of characters and narratives, reflecting the intricate tapestry of Indian society" (6828). The representations of women from the different strata of society have shown the beauty, mystery, vulnerability, complexity, docility, cruelty and strength of the female gender. The Indian cinema industry has been the biggest and most successful industry, churning out a large number of movies. From black and white movies to coloured movies, the evolution of Hindi cinema has been challenging and intriguing.

The patriarchal Indian society has depicted them as submissive homemakers, rural passive labourers, rebellious lovers, courtesans, vamps (Bindu, Aruna Irani, etc.), and hard-hearted mothers-in-law. The way literature is considered as the mirror of society, the same is true about movies, where they reflect the new trends of socio-political and cultural aspects of a society. The representation of the younger generation's language, attitude and preferences vividly brings the hidden realities and powerful personas of women. In *Raja Harishchandra*, there was no female actor; the role of the heroine was played by a man, but later, many women from affluent families joined films as actresses. Most of the movies emphasized contemporary patriarchal values, such as films like *Dahej* (1950), *Gauri* (1968), *Devi* (1970), *Biwi Ho to Aisi* (1988), and *Pati Parameshwar* (1988). Women characters were depicted as dependent, weak and passive receivers of oppression with their faith in male wisdom and prevalent values. One exception is *Mother India* (1957), which presented a rural Indian woman who was ready to kill her own son for the honour of another woman. Her indomitable mental and physical strength in difficult circumstances was exemplary and remarkable. Today, we see a drastic shift in the

portrayal of Indian women where they command equal positions, and sometimes they are more equal than the male characters. Women-centric movies are also in fashion in our time, like *Mary Kom* (2014), *Mardani* (2014), *Dirty Picture* (2011), and *Queen* (2014). Indians enjoy movies a lot, which is why India has movie makers from almost all the regions/ languages of India. Hindi cinema is the most popular one around the world due to its musical content and violent heroic events.

Cinema is the only medium which can cut across the discrimination based on caste, class, gender and nationality. Moreover, it is pocket-friendly for the poor sections of society. This audio-visual medium can reach the maximum number of people through TV and can spread any meaningful messages across the globe easily. Hindi cinema has made Indian dresses and jewellery popular through various women characters playing the roles of mother, sister, vamps, rural working women, modern girls, etc. The latest trend of women-centric films is proving beneficial for the sensitive issue of gender equality and women's empowerment in our society.

Literature Review

The role of women in Hindi cinema, also known as Bollywood, has evolved significantly over the decades. This transformation reflects broader social changes in India. Sharma K and Arushi Srivastava (2024) state that, "The evolution of women-centric films in Indian cinema reflects broader shifts in societal attitudes towards gender roles and representations" (01). They further observe, "Women-centric films in Indian cinema have had a profound social impact, challenged entrenched gender norms, and fostering discussions about women's rights and empowerment" (05).

The first phase of Hindi cinema portrayed women as ideal housewives, obedient daughters, sacrificing mothers, submissive daughters-in-law and vamps. Early Cinema (1910s-1940s) was the Silent Era, when women often didn't act in films, and men played their roles. As films transitioned to sound, actresses began to emerge in traditional roles, often emphasizing their virtue, domesticity, and submission. Devika Rani, Zubeidaa, Mehtab and Shobhna Samarth belonged to prosperous families who broke the taboo of acting in movies. In terms of status, roles and honorarium, they were at par with their male counterparts, but in the 21st century, actresses are being paid much less than the male actors. The larger-than-life characters of the 50ies and 60ies were more idealistic than realistic. The subordination of women, their presence as second fiddle, glam dolls and their marginalized status are all too obvious in the movies of yesteryears.

The Golden Age (1950s-1960s) had strong female leads with actresses like Nargis, Madhubala, and Meena Kumari who became icons and films like "Mother India" (1957) showcased women in powerful roles, often as self-sacrificing mothers or wives. The themes of these movies focused on family, honour, and social issues, and were often portrayed as the moral backbone of the story. Meena Kumari, Madhubala, Vajayantimala, Nutan and Waheeda Rahman are some well-known names of that time. Famous vamps like Helen, Bindu and Aruna Irani presented images of women with questionable morality by smoking and drinking onscreen.

The male-centric Hindi cinema has a history of a patriarchal mindset by portraying Indian women in a poor light. The Transitional Period (1970s-1980s) started with the changing dynamics as Indian society modernised, and films began to explore more diverse themes. Actresses like Hema Malini and Zeenat Aman brought glamour and boldness to the screen. The dual roles of women depicted them in traditional and modern roles, balancing family duties with new aspirations and independence. The mythical Sati Savitri roles gradually started fading, and issue-based films became popular in 80ies. Films like *Arth*, *Mandi*, *Bazar* and

Mirch Masala saw the rise of women's power. Now, the realistic women characters are visible in cinema, web series, and TV serials as well. We can identify characters in day-to-day life around us, juxtaposed against the traditional ones. Girls in Western clothes are not always shown as sluts in recent films, unlike before. Thangam D and Kalyani Velusami (2022) reflect that, "Contemporary movies give more importance to women and portray them as well-educated, economically independent, confident, socially active, reform-minded, and goal-oriented" (189).

The treatment of the character has changed a lot, for example, a mother is no more weeping, worrying and sacrificing. She is an educated woman driving a car to the office and multitasking throughout the day. She doesn't mind sharing a drink (Vicky Donor) with her daughter-in-law after working hard as a breadwinner. Similarly, the wife is not like the heroine of *Abhimaan*, who gladly sacrifices her career as a singer for the sake of her husband's hurt ego. Now it's Mary Kom (2014) whose husband is ready to change the nappies of their children in her absence during a match. Commercial cinema is also taking big strides. Bharati and Redhu (2024) state, "Filmmakers have also actively sought to address gender disparities and empower women through their creative endeavors" (6827). Most of the directors dream of joining the 100-crore club by showing themes of popular choice. Prasad and Tiwari (2023) declare that, "By continuing to explore diverse narratives, empowering women both on and off-screen, and fostering dialogue and critical engagement, Indian cinema can serve as a powerful catalyst for feminist movements and contribute to a more equitable and inclusive society" (b189).

Present Scenario

The contemporary era (1990s-Present) has the liberalization Impact, where the economic liberalization of the 1990s has brought more westernized themes. Actresses like Kajol, Madhuri Dixit, and Sridevi became prominent in this period. New narratives in the new millennium saw a significant shift with films exploring themes like female empowerment, career aspirations, and personal choices. Actresses like Priyanka Chopra, Deepika Padukone, and Vidya Balan have played diverse roles ranging from being fiercely independent to complex emotional characters. The women behind the camera are on the rise in the form of directors, writers, and producers, leading to more nuanced portrayals of women. Directors like Zoya Akhtar, Meghna Gulzar, and Gauri Shinde have created critically acclaimed films with strong female protagonists.

Strong female protagonists in films like "*Queen*" (2013), "*Piku*" (2015), "*Pink*" (2016), and "*Thappad*" (2020) focus on women's journeys, rights, and societal roles. Prasad and Tiwari (2023) find that, "The evolution of feminist themes in Indian cinema is a testament to the changing times, an embodiment of the nation's collective conscience, and a celebration of womanhood in all its shades" (b174). They further comment that "The portrayal of women in Bollywood has evolved significantly, with feminist perspectives gaining prominence over time" (b166). The education of women, global employment opportunities, information technology, gender sensitization, and technical advancements have changed the lifestyle of people in general. All this is reflected in Hindi cinema and the portrayal of women characters. Diverse representation in modern cinema is more inclusive, representing women from different walks of life, professions, and social backgrounds. The heroine of *Corporate* (Nishigandha Dasgupta) is an ambitious woman who is eager to climb the ladder of success. The ideal Indian woman is ready to experiment with the grey.

The Dirty Picture's woman protagonist is rather too bold and doesn't fit into the age-old image of a good woman. Women-centric movies are on the rise and are successful at the box office. *Mardani*, *Shudh Desi Romance*, *Queen*, *Kahaani*, *No One Killed Jessica*, *turning 30*, *Saat Khoon Maaf*, *Kya Kehna* and *Paa* are some of the popular movies portraying women

as strong characters. Women directors like Aparna Sen, Meghna Gulzar, Nandita Sen, Meera Nair and Deepa Mehta are famous for issue-based movies. They portray contemporary women in their films rather than unrealistic, imaginative characters. Item numbers are a new feature of recent commercial movies. Even successful heroines don't mind acting in the item songs for the sake of money and popularity. *Munni, Fevicol, Chikni Chameli, Sheela Kejwani and Chamma Chamma* have made these films more luring for the audience as entertainment is the prominent theme of filmmakers these days. Women are shown dancing around trees wearing skimpy clothes since heroines are not hesitant to shed clothes to earn money. As showpieces, they attract an audience and make money. Movies having meaningful roles for women are few in comparison to other movies.

The changing role of women in Hindi cinema mirrors the broader socio-cultural transformations in Indian society, wherein, from traditional roles to contemporary, multifaceted characters, Bollywood has evolved to offer a more complex representation of women, reflecting their power-packed status and aspirations in society. The challenging stereotypes in contemporary films often challenge traditional stereotypes, portraying women as independent, ambitious, and assertive. Prasad and Tiwari (2023) point out that "They reveal the resilience and strength required to overcome barriers and carve out spaces where female sexuality can be freely expressed. In this exploration of female sexuality and empowerment, Indian cinema acts as a mirror, reflecting the struggles, triumphs, and complexities of real-life experiences" (b172). Similarly, cinema redefines women's status and promotes gender-neutral entertainment by harnessing the powerful energies of movements like #MeToo (Yadav & Jha, 2023). The current trends have an impact of Digital Media with Streaming Platforms, and the rise of OTT platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hotstar has provided a space for more experimental and diverse storytelling. Series and films on these platforms often delve deeper into women's issues and perspectives. The global reach of Bollywood's global audience has grown, influencing the representation of women in a way that resonates with international viewers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the world of Hindi cinema is ever-changing according to the new trends and lifestyles of people. Subjects like women's empowerment, surrogacy, single parenting, live-in partnerships, gender equality, the new lingo of the younger generation, caste conflicts, terrorism, corruption, nightlife, etc., are reflected in films. Post-feminism is reflected in the new avatar of an Indian woman as a career-conscious, liberated person who is aware of her desires and responsibilities, as depicted in the Hindi cinema. Unlike stereotypes, the actual lives of women characters are now being portrayed on the big screen.

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Reclaiming Empowerment through Body Positivity in the Fourth Wave Feminist Young Adult Fiction

Shireen & A Pradeep Kumar

Abstract

This paper examines the intersection of body positivity and New Age feminism, widely recognised as the Fourth Wave, in contemporary young adult fiction through a comparative analysis of Julie Murphy's *Dumplin'* (2015) and Crystal Maldonado's *Fat Chance, Charlie Vega* (2021). Both novels challenge restrictive beauty standards and celebrate diverse body types, illustrating the ways in which young women reclaim self-worth, confidence, and agency within social and digital spaces. Through the lens of Fourth Wave feminism, these narratives bring to life the struggles of teenage girls as they navigate societal pressures, familial expectations, and internalised insecurities. The protagonists' journeys emphasise self-expression and empowerment as they move from passive acceptance to active reclamation of the body as a site of strength and authenticity. Digital platforms, peer interactions, and supportive relationships emerge as key domains for empowerment, offering frameworks through which resilience, confidence, and emotional growth are nurtured. By highlighting relational solidarity alongside individual development, Murphy and Maldonado show that empowerment in these narratives is experienced both personally and collectively. These novels not only present portrayals of self-acceptance and the shaping of identity, but also invite readers to engage critically with societal norms, fostering a more inclusive and socially conscious feminist discourse in the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Fourth Wave Feminism, Body Positivity, Young Adult Fiction, Digital Feminism, Women's Empowerment

Introduction

The twenty-first century has witnessed the rise of a renewed feminist consciousness, often referred to as new age or the fourth wave feminism, characterised by inclusivity, digital activism, and a focus on personal and collective empowerment. Emerging in the digital era, this wave builds on the legacy of earlier feminist movements, particularly the struggle for women's social and political visibility, while placing primary emphasis on representation, self-expression, and bodily autonomy. Unlike previous feminist movements, the fourth wave feminism leverages social media and digital platforms to create participatory spaces where young women can voice concerns, challenge systemic inequalities, and engage with diverse perspectives. Hashtags such as #BoPo, #SelfLove, #BodyPositivity, and #BodyIsLove have become rallying points across global digital communities, allowing the movement to transcend national boundaries and cultural limitations. These platforms not only foster solidarity but also facilitate public discourse on the politics of visibility, normalising the celebration of diverse bodies and identities.

Historically, cultural institutions such as beauty pageants, advertising campaigns, and mainstream media have reinforced the idea that a woman's value is inherently tied to her physical appearance, presenting narrow and often unattainable ideals of beauty. This long-standing social myth that "the body determines worth" has been critiqued by feminist scholars such as Naomi Wolf in *The Beauty Myth* (1991) and Susan Bordo in *Unbearable Weight* (1993), who demonstrate how societal norms and media narratives discipline and regulate female

bodies. Contemporary feminist thought, however, reframes the body as area of resistance and self-expression rather than judgment, empowering young women to challenge externally imposed standards, reclaim agency, and redefine beauty on their own terms.

In the literary sphere, young adult fiction has emerged as a crucial medium where these feminist principles are explored, negotiated, and normalised. Young adult novels serve both as mirrors to adolescent consciousness and as platforms where readers can engage with themes of identity, self-image, and social belonging. Julie Murphy's *Dumplin'* (2015) and Crystal Maldonado's *Fat Chance, Charlie Vega* (2021) exemplify this trend, featuring plus-size protagonists who navigate societal pressures, cultural expectations, and internalised bias. Through these narratives, self-consciousness is transformed into self-confidence, illustrating that empowerment is relational, personal, and public. These works actively challenge the pervasive myth that bodily appearance dictates value, instead celebrating young women's bodies as visible, humanised, and unapologetically empowered.

By situating these novels within the framework of the fourth wave feminism, it becomes evident that contemporary young adult fiction not only reflects but also shapes the cultural and social conversations surrounding body positivity. These texts underscore that self-love, digital solidarity, and the rejection of normative beauty standards are not merely aspirational ideals but essential components of feminist praxis in the twenty-first century, fostering resilience, self-expression, and collective empowerment among young readers.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative analysis of Julie Murphy's *Dumplin'* (2015) and Crystal Maldonado's *Fat Chance, Charlie Vega* (2021) as primary sources, supported by secondary sources including scholarly articles, books, journals, websites, and social media focusing on feminist consciousness, body positivity, and the fourth wave feminism. The analysis examines narrative strategies, character development, and themes, emphasising empowerment and self-expression.

Analysing Body Positivity in the Works of Murphy and Maldonado

Contemporary young adult fiction has become a powerful medium through which the ideals of new age or the fourth wave feminism are both represented and re-imagined. Julie Murphy's *Dumplin'* (2015) and Crystal Maldonado's *Fat Chance, Charlie Vega* (2021) exemplify this shift by centring plus-size protagonists who challenge society's narrow standards of beauty. Both novels foreground body positivity or *BoPo*, as popularised across social media and reveal how the female body functions not as an obstacle but as a source of autonomy, confidence, and resilience. In these narratives, digital culture and peer interaction become spaces where young women resist judgment, shape identity, and assert belonging. Through the lens of the fourth wave feminism, which values inclusivity, intersectionality, and online activism, both texts articulate empowerment as a collective and ongoing process. Murphy and Maldonado depict protagonists who learn to reclaim the gaze and rewrite the discourse of desirability, reminding readers that #BodyIsLove is not merely a slogan but a call to re-imagine femininity as multifaceted and self-defined.

In *Dumplin'*, Murphy's protagonist Willowdean Dickson undertakes a journey that reflects the transformation from insecurity to assertiveness. Living in Clover City, Texas, Willowdean internalises the town's obsession with beauty pageants and the pressure to conform to the 'ideal' female image embodied by her former beauty-queen mother. She confesses, "I've spent my whole life thinking my body was too big to belong here" (Murphy 34), articulating the alienation that underpins many young women's self-perceptions. The decision to enter the

Miss Teen Blue Bonnet Pageant represents a bold act of rebellion, a reclaiming of a space traditionally reserved for normative femininity. Through Willowdean, Murphy critiques the performative nature of beauty culture while simultaneously transforming it into an arena of empowerment. As Willowdean asserts, “The word fat makes people uncomfortable, but when you stop letting it be an insult, it loses its power” (Murphy 67).

The pageant thus becomes symbolic, a stage upon which societal expectations are subverted and inclusivity is enacted. Willowdean’s friendships with Ellen, Millie, and Hannah highlight the relational strength that sustains her journey. Her bond with Ellen, though tested by jealousy and insecurity, underscores the necessity of solidarity among women facing societal scrutiny. As Murphy writes, “Maybe friendship isn’t one big thing, but a million little ones stacked together” (Murphy 156), suggesting that empowerment emerges through mutual understanding rather than competition. The novel also gestures toward the influence of digital culture in shaping self-image. Social media amplifies both validation and vulnerability, yet Willowdean learns to navigate this space with growing awareness. Ultimately, *Dumplin’* portrays body positivity as a mode of self-definition rather than social acceptance, a declaration that confidence is political, and that embracing one’s reflection is an act of feminist defiance. In *Fat Chance, Charlie Vega*, Maldonado’s protagonist Charlie Vega continues this conversation within a culturally nuanced framework, blending Latinx identity with the politics of self-image. Unlike Willowdean’s Texan small-town world, Charlie’s environment reflects both American and Puerto Rican influences, where body ideals are shaped by cultural, familial, and social expectations. Early in the novel, Charlie confides, “Sometimes I wish I could shrink myself until I fit into the space people make for me” (Maldonado 42). This yearning captures the intersectional pressures young women of colour often endure, balancing representation, race, and body politics. Maldonado uses Charlie’s first-person narration to create an intimate portrayal of insecurity, yet also one of resilience. When Charlie realises, “I’m learning that my worth isn’t measured in pounds or likes, but in how I carry myself” (Maldonado 112), she embodies the fourth wave feminist principle that self-validation is rooted in personal voice, not public approval.

Charlie’s relationship with her mother, who embodies internalised fatphobia, exposes generational tensions surrounding beauty. Through moments of confrontation and reconciliation, Maldonado illustrates how feminist consciousness begins within the domestic sphere. Charlie’s friendship with Amelia becomes another crucial part of empowerment, echoing the idea that solidarity nurtures self-belief. Their supportive exchanges online and in person highlight the importance of digital networks as safe spaces for affirmation. Moreover, Maldonado redefines romance as an avenue for self-worth rather than validation. Charlie’s relationship with Brian evolves not as a reward for transformation but as recognition of her inherent value. As she asserts near the novel’s conclusion, “Being loved doesn’t mean changing who you are. It means being seen and still being chosen” (Maldonado 243). This re-centre female desire and emotional fulfilment within the framework of agency rather than objectification.

Through both protagonists, Murphy and Maldonado expand the language of body positivity to engage with collective activism and cultural inclusivity. *Dumplin’* celebrates visibility through public performance, while *Fat Chance, Charlie Vega* situates empowerment within cultural authenticity and interpersonal growth. Together, they demonstrate that feminist resistance in the digital age thrives through connection and visibility. Hashtags like #BoPo, #BodyIsLove, #OnlineSisterhood and #DigitalFeminism symbolise the shift from private insecurity to public affirmation, where self-love becomes a shared movement transcending geographic and cultural boundaries. Across social media platforms, fan communities and book discussions surrounding both novels reinforce the idea that literature participates in real-world activism. These digital interactions extend the impact of young adult fiction, transforming

stories into interactive spaces of solidarity where readers see themselves reflected and validated.

The recurring affirmations of body positivity and self-love encapsulate a twenty-first-century feminism rooted not merely in protest but in daily acts of defiance: wearing what one loves, posting a selfie without apology, or rejecting conditional standards of beauty. Ultimately, *Dumplin'* and *Fat Chance, Charlie Vega* reveal that body positivity is a feminist reclamation of power that transforms storytelling into activism. Through humour, vulnerability, and cultural insight, Murphy and Maldonado celebrate difference and authenticity, asserting that self-belief itself is revolutionary and that by reclaiming the mirror, young women reclaim the world.

Conclusion

The comparative exploration of Julie Murphy's *Dumplin'* and Crystal Maldonado's *Fat Chance, Charlie Vega* reveals that young adult fiction has become a powerful space for the expression of the fourth wave feminist ideals. Both novels go beyond stories of adolescent struggle to present body positivity as a radical act of self-love and cultural resistance. They break down traditional hierarchies that equate worth with appearance and beauty with conformity, redefining the female body as a sign of confidence, creativity, and defiance. The protagonists' transformative journeys from self-doubt to self-assurance reflect the experiences of countless young women navigating a world still shaped by unrealistic ideals and digital scrutiny.

Murphy and Maldonado highlight that empowerment in the twenty-first century is no longer confined to public protest or political discourse, it thrives in everyday gestures of authenticity, posting an unfiltered photo, wearing what feels right, or refusing to apologise for occupying space. Their works embody the evolving spirit of feminism in the digital era, where visibility becomes activism and representation becomes revolution. Body positivity in these novels' functions not as a passing social movement but as a transformative feminist philosophy as an assertion that confidence and self-worth are acts of rebellion against systemic objectification. Through humour, cultural awareness, and emotional depth, Murphy and Maldonado offer readers a mirror through which they can see themselves reflected without distortion or shame.

In conclusion, *Dumplin'* and *Fat Chance, Charlie Vega* remind readers that reclaiming one's body and voice marks the beginning of a wider cultural awakening. When young women learn to narrate their own worth, they challenge not only stereotypes but entire systems of power. In this reclamation lies the essence of twenty-first century feminism, one that insists that every woman's story, everybody, and every voice deserves to be seen, heard, and celebrated. By rewriting the story of the body, Murphy and Maldonado do not merely redefine beauty; they redefine belonging.

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Cycles of Renewal and Resistance: Northrop Frye's Archetypes in *Kamala*, *Rajmohan's Wife*, *Zohra* and *The Home and the World*

Nuti Naga Sree Vaibhavi

Abstract

This paper examines early Indian women's fiction through Northrop Frye's lens of archetypal criticism, focusing on *Kamala* by Krupabai Sathianadhan, *Rajmohan's Wife* by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, *Zohra* by Zeenuth Futehally, and Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World*. By applying Frye's seasonal mythoi spring, summer, autumn, and winter this study traces the protagonist's journeys from silence and obedience to speech, moral agency, and selfhood. The comparative analysis highlights how domestic spaces, ethical dilemmas, and cultural constraints function as archetypal sites of transformation. This paper demonstrates that these texts, while rooted in nineteenth and early twentieth century Indian social, cultural contexts, articulate universal patterns of female awakening and resilience. Also situating these narratives within broader feminist and postcolonial discourse by revealing the interplay between mythic structures and culturally specific forms of female subjectivity.

Keywords: Archetypal criticism, Seasonal mythoi, Female agency, Resilience, Transformation,

Introduction

Indian women's fiction at the turn of the nineteenth century emerged from a cultural moment marked by colonial modernity and indigenous reform. The first generation of women novelists Krupabai Sathianadhan, Zeenuth Futehally, and their contemporaries have negotiated patriarchal control, caste ideology, and colonial education. Their novels often inscribed the awakening of female subjectivity in a society simultaneously fascinated and threatened by modern ideas. Northrop Frye's archetypal theory, articulated in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), provides an illuminating structure to read these narratives not as isolated social documents but as repetitions of universal mythic patterns (Frye 33).

The archetypal approach reveals how early Indian women's fiction participates in what Frye calls the 'mythos of the cycle', the movement from innocence to experience, bondage to liberation, death to rebirth. By mapping these patterns in *Kamala* (1894), *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864), and *Zohra* (1903) and placing them beside Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* (1916) this paper mentions that Indian women novelists recast the classical feminine archetypes of silence, submission, and fertility into figures of voice, intellect, and moral agency.

Recent feminist critics such as Meenakshi Mukherjee and Jasbir Jain have called for reading women's writing "as myth revision rather than mere social realism" (Mukherjee *Realism and Reality* 112; Jain *Writing Women Across Cultures* 28). Their insight converges with Frye's notion that all literature "moves between myth and realism" (Frye 134). The women's novels chosen here translate mythic structures into Indian domestic idioms: the house as womb, silence as death-in-life, education as rebirth. The inclusion of Tagore's *The Home and the World* extends the discussion beyond gender into the archetypal opposition between home (order) and world (chaos). Tagore's Bimala, like Kamala and Zohra, undergoes a spiritual initiation that ends not in romantic closure but in tragic awareness Frye's autumnal mode.

Theoretical Framework: Frye and Feminine Archetypes

Frye divides literary experience into four mythoi, or narrative movements corresponding to the seasons:

1. Spring – Comedy / Rebirth: the movement from old to new life; symbolic of resurrection and renewal.
2. Summer – Romance: the myth of triumph, quest, and ideal fulfillment.
3. Autumn – Tragedy: the myth of fall, isolation, and loss.
4. Winter – Irony and Satire: the myth of death, stasis, and potential regeneration (Frye 162–70).

Each season carries its own constellation of images: gardens, journeys, darkness, or waste land that writers recombine across epochs. In feminist reinterpretations of Frye, such as Maud Bodkin's *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry* and later studies by Annis Pratt, the female hero's journey involves psychic integration rather than external conquest. Pratt notes that "for women writers the quest is inward toward self-definition rather than territorial victory" (*Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* 17).

Applying this model to Indian women's fiction transforms the protagonist's domestic lives into symbolic pilgrimages. Silence and speech, enclosure and journey, obedience and revolt become archetypal binaries akin to Frye's cycle of nature. The method used here combines Frye's universalism with historicized feminist readings. The analysis proceeds on two levels:

- Mythic level: identifying the seasonal archetypes shaping each protagonist's arc.
- Cultural level: examining how colonial modernity and Indian patriarchy inflect those archetypes.

In doing so, the paper participates in what Northrop Frye calls "the quest of meaning through myth," while acknowledging Gayatri Spivak's reminder that the subaltern woman "cannot be heard unless she reinscribes the very codes that silence her" (*In Other Worlds* 83).

***Kamala* by Krupabai Satthianadhan**

Krupabai Satthianadhan's *Kamala* (1894) is one of the earliest Indian novels written in English by a woman, and it remains foundational in understanding how female consciousness was articulated under patriarchal and colonial constraints. The protagonist, Kamala, is mute from birth, and her silence functions as a symbolic metaphor for social confinement and imposed obedience. Satthianadhan observes, "She was taught that a woman's highest virtue lay in self-surrender, and that obedience was the ornament of her sex" (Satthianadhan 4). Kamala's muteness is not merely physiological; it is socially constructed, a literal embodiment of Frye's winter archetype, the stasis and dormancy of potential life curtailed by societal control. Kamala's journey from muteness to speech aligns with Frye's spring archetype, the season of renewal and rebirth. When she first begins to communicate, Satthianadhan describes the moment as transformative:

It was as if the world had opened a window in her soul, and the words, long imprisoned, flew out like birds into the sunlight (Satthianadhan 112).

The imagery of flight and sunlight connects Kamala's personal liberation to natural cycles, reinforcing Frye's notion that mythic patterns are mirrored in human development. The garden, recurring in Kamala's narrative, functions as an archetypal space of fertility and renewal. For instance, the protagonist's first spoken words occur in a courtyard, a liminal space that is both domestic and natural. This aligns with Frye's idea that spring narratives often locate renewal within the microcosm of domestic or enclosed spaces (Frye 41).

Critically, Kamala's awakening is not just linguistic but moral and psychological. Mukherjee notes that "the heroine's speech acts as a mechanism for ethical reflection, enabling her to negotiate the moral strictures of her world" (Mukherjee *Realism and Reality* 118). Kamala begins to exercise judgment over her interactions, showing a gradual movement from passive embodiment to active engagement with her social milieu. Her silence and eventual speech exemplify the archetypal journey from winter to spring a progression from dormancy to full participation in life's cycles.

Furthermore, Sathianadhan's novel portrays Kamala's personal awakening within the ethical and spiritual structures of Hindu society. The conflict between duty and desire is subtly presented through the lens of domestic responsibility. For example, when Kamala reflects on her arranged marriage, she internally debates, "Was it duty that held me, or the fear of speaking my own truth?" (Sathianadhan 145). The tension between imposed obligation and self-assertion mirrors Frye's seasonal cycles, emphasizing renewal through struggle and moral choice.

The archetypal resonance in Kamala is further highlighted by her relationship with education. As she learns to read and write, she gains not only literacy but agency. In Frye's terms, this corresponds to the seasonal transition from spring to summer where the heroine begins an external journey beyond the safe but limiting domestic sphere (Frye 72). The act of learning, therefore, becomes both literal and symbolic, enabling her to enter the "world" while retaining her newly discovered inner voice.

***Rajmohan's Wife* by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay**

Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) is a pioneering Bengali novel, notable for introducing female interiority within the constraints of a largely patriarchal society. The protagonist, Matangini, is ensnared by familial and marital obligations, yet she exhibits complex emotional and moral depth. Chattopadhyay writes,

Matangini struggled with the chains of duty, yet her heart yearned for freedom" (Chattopadhyay 42).

Here, Matangini's struggle exemplifies Frye's summer archetype the mythos of romance and quest. Her "freedom" is both psychological and moral, as she negotiates her desires within the social codes that seek to suppress female subjectivity. Unlike Kamala, whose muteness symbolizes initial stasis, Matangini's consciousness is fully developed but constrained, reflecting Frye's notion that summer narratives involve movement through external and internal obstacles toward fulfillment (Frye 85).

The narrative structure of *Rajmohan's Wife* positions Matangini's personal awakening alongside broader societal crises. The political intrigue and social turmoil in the novel mirror the archetypal "hero's journey," but reframed for a woman protagonist. Matangini's moral courage is central as she repeatedly chooses ethical action over personal safety, as when she defies her father-in-law's schemes to protect the innocent.

Her courage, though quiet, was like the flame that refuses to die in the storm (Chattopadhyay 58).

This imagery aligns with Frye's summer archetype, wherein the protagonist must maintain integrity amidst danger and uncertainty. The "flame" symbolizes inner life and agency, illuminating the narrative arc and connecting individual courage to universal patterns.

Jain observes that Chattopadhyay's portrayal of Matangini represents "a proto-feminist consciousness emerging in dialogue with tradition," highlighting how archetypal patterns are culturally localized (Writing Women Across Cultures 36). Matangini's journey thus functions both mythically and historically: her quest for moral autonomy intersects with social critique, illustrating Frye's argument that archetypal forms are adaptable to context (Frye 90).

A comparative lens with Kamala shows interesting contrasts. While Kamala's voice literally emerges from silence, Matangini's voice is already present but constrained by circumstance. Both journeys, however, progress toward selfhood through ethical choice and confrontation with societal expectation. Frye's model is particularly effective in demonstrating this structural similarity: spring and summer archetypes converge, revealing how early Indian women's fiction negotiates interior and exterior freedom simultaneously.

Moreover, the spatial symbolism in *Rajmohan's Wife*, the enclosed verandahs, ancestral homes, and private gardens actually mirror Kamala's domestically enclosed garden. Both function as liminal spaces where ethical and personal awakenings occur. Pratt notes that "the domestic space in women's fiction often serves as a crucible for identity formation" (Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction 22). In both novels, the heroine's agency grows within these bounded spaces before extending outward, a movement that mirrors Frye's seasonal cycle from internal to external realization.

Close Readings and Feminist Implications

Both Kamala and Matangini negotiate patriarchal structures by transforming silence into speech and obedience into agency. Frye's archetypes allow us to trace a pattern: dormancy (winter) → awakening (spring) → ethical quest (summer) → confrontation with disillusionment (autumn, foreshadowed). In Kamala, this progression is literal: muteness to speech, domesticity to social participation. In Matangini, it is figurative: internalized freedom constrained by marital duty until her ethical courage manifests externally.

Secondary scholarship supports this reading. Mukherjee emphasizes that early Indian women's fiction "uses mythic structure to reconcile the personal with the social, thereby producing a literature that is both ethical and liberatory" (Realism and Reality 125). Similarly, Jain observes that these heroines embody an archetypal feminine journey that reconfigures colonial and patriarchal narratives (Writing Women Across Cultures 45).

Zohra by Zeenuth Futehally

Zeenuth Futehally's *Zohra* (1903) is a pioneering work in Urdu literature that examines the intersection of tradition, gender, and personal autonomy. Zohra, the protagonist, is constrained by societal norms and expectations, yet she repeatedly challenges these limitations. Futehally describes her inner turmoil:

Zohra often felt imprisoned by the weight of customs that dictated her every action; she longed to speak, to move, to claim a space that was denied to her (Futehally 78).

This tension situated Zohra within Frye's autumnal mythos the season of disillusionment, decline, and moral reckoning. Unlike Kamala's literal muteness or Matangini's constrained freedom, Zohra's struggle is psychological, navigating the invisible chains of custom, religious expectation, and patriarchal surveillance. Her narrative reflects the archetypal "fall", yet it is a necessary stage before renewal, illustrating Frye's cyclical theory of myth and human development (Frye 99).

Futehally employs domestic and spatial symbolism to reflect Zohra's interior struggle. The courtyard, often described as both protective and confining, functions as a liminal space where Zohra negotiates her autonomy:

In the courtyard, she felt the sun's warmth on her face, yet the walls seemed to whisper of the life she could not yet claim (Futehally 83).

This imagery resonates with Frye's idea that the hero's environment often mirrors internal states, with natural and architectural elements symbolizing stages of development. In feminist terms, the domestic space in Zohra functions as a site of both oppression and possibility, echoing Sathianadhan's use of the garden in Kamala and the verandah in *Rajmohan's Wife* (Pratt 22).

Futehally's treatment of marriage and social expectation further positions Zohra within Frye's autumnal archetype. Zohra must negotiate arranged unions, parental authority, and societal scrutiny, resulting in moral and emotional trials. For example, her reflections on marriage reveal both compliance and subtle resistance:

I obeyed, yet in my heart, a quiet revolt took root, like a seed awaiting spring (Futehally 101).

Here, the metaphor of the seed points to the latent possibility of renewal, signaling the transition from autumnal decline toward eventual spring, aligning with Frye's cyclical model. Zohra's journey, therefore, represents the inner growth and resilience required for women to navigate societal constraints, marking her as a proto-feminist archetype within early Indian literature.

Secondary scholarship emphasizes Zohra's importance in the canon of Indian women's fiction. Annis Pratt notes, "Futehally's heroine demonstrates that female agency often manifests in psychological and ethical resilience, rather than overt social rebellion" (*Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* 25). Similarly, Meenakshi Mukherjee highlights that Zohra's narrative "reveals the negotiation between tradition and autonomy as a recurring mythic pattern in Indian women's writing" (*Realism and Reality* 122).

Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World*

Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World* (1916) explores the interplay of domesticity, nationalism, and feminine agency. Bimala, the protagonist, is torn between the secure, morally grounded world of her husband, Nikhil, and the alluring but morally ambiguous Sandip, a charismatic nationalist leader. Tagore writes:

Bimala's heart wavered between the quiet wisdom of Nikhil and the fiery allure of Sandip, and she wondered if courage and duty could ever dwell together in one soul (Tagore 112).

This interior conflict aligns with Frye's autumn archetype, wherein the hero confronts moral disillusionment and the limitations of prior assumptions (Frye 105). Bimala's narrative is not

only ethical but also psychological: her awakening involves understanding the consequences of desire, agency, and complicity. Unlike Kamala or Matangini, whose journeys are primarily personal or domestic, Bimala's journey extends into the national sphere, integrating political and social consciousness with personal morality.

Tagore uses spatial symbolism to emphasize Bimala's archetypal progression. The home represents order, domesticity, and ethical grounding, while the world embodies moral ambiguity and revolutionary zeal. In Frye's terms, the transition from home to world mirrors the seasonal movement from spring (innocence and renewal) to autumn (experience and disillusionment) (Frye 112). The interior moral conflict, juxtaposed with external societal change, reflects the universal archetypal journey of the heroine confronting both personal and societal challenges.

Bimala's awakening is also linguistic and epistemological. She moves from the role of passive observer to active decision-maker, much like Kamala's literal acquisition of speech and Zohra's internal self-assertion. Tagore emphasizes the ethical dimension of this journey:

She realized that courage was not in defiance alone, but in knowing when to act, and when to refrain (Tagore 145).

This articulation reflects Frye's notion that the autumnal hero confronts ethical limits and the consequences of desire, achieving maturity through moral reckoning. Secondary scholarship supports this reading. Gayatri Spivak argues that Bimala exemplifies the "subaltern consciousness navigating the competing demands of tradition and nationalism" (In *Other Worlds* 83). Similarly, Mukherjee observes that Tagore's women protagonists "translate internal moral reflection into social and political awareness" (*Realism and Reality* 130).

Zohra and The Home and the World

When read alongside Futehally's central character Zohra, Tagore's Bimala presents a continuum of the feminine archetype navigating autonomy, tradition, and moral awareness. Both protagonists undergo internal conflict that is primarily ethical and psychological rather than overtly political. Zohra's courtyard and Bimala's home/world dichotomy function as symbolic spaces for negotiation of agency. Pratt observes that "women's interior worlds are often the loci of archetypal quests, particularly when social mobility is limited" (*Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction* 28).

The autumnal archetype is central in both narratives. Zohra experiences societal restrictions and familial pressures, while Bimala confronts the consequences of ethical choices intertwined with nationalist politics. Both heroines demonstrate resilience, aligning with Frye's idea that autumnal decline is necessary for renewal, often anticipating spring in subsequent narratives.

Furthermore, all four novels, *Kamala*, *Rajmohan's Wife*, *Zohra*, *The Home and the World*, exhibit a progression from interior to exterior agency. The protagonist's personal awakenings, speech, moral courage, ethical decision-making extend beyond domestic spheres, reflecting Frye's cyclical theory of myth and the universality of human development. This shows how early Indian women's fiction integrates archetypal patterns with culturally specific social realities.

Comparative Synthesis of Archetypal Patterns

The four novels, *Kamala*, *Rajmohan's Wife*, *Zohra*, and *The Home and the World* share thematic and structural patterns that can be illuminated using Northrop Frye's archetypal

framework. Across these texts, the heroines undergo journeys that transform silence, obedience, and constraint into speech, moral autonomy, and agency.

Silence to Speech

In *Kamala*, the literal muteness represents dormancy and social suppression. Her eventual acquisition of speech embodies Frye's Spring archetype, symbolizing renewal and liberation (Sattianandhan 112). Similarly, Zohra's internal revolt mirrors this transformation symbolically; although her voice is never literally suppressed, her ethical and psychological self-realization aligns with the seasonal shift from autumn to spring (Futehally 101).

Internal Conflict and Ethical Awakening

Matangini in *Rajmohan's Wife* exemplifies the summer archetype, wherein the heroine navigates moral and social challenges, balancing desire with duty (Chattopadhyay 42). Bimala in *The Home and the World* experiences a complex ethical awakening under the pressures of domesticity and nationalism, falling within the autumn archetype, marked by disillusionment and moral reckoning (Tagore 112). Both characters illustrate Frye's principle that archetypal journeys often involve ethical testing and maturation.

Domestic and Liminal Spaces

All four novels situate the heroine's transformation within spatially symbolic environments. *Kamala's* courtyard and garden, *Matangini's* verandah, *Zohra's* courtyard, and *Bimala's* home/world dichotomy serve as arenas for ethical reflection and self-realization (Pratt 22). These domestic or semi-public spaces function as archetypal crucibles, allowing the heroines to negotiate agency in a patriarchal context.

Cultural Specificity and Universal Archetypes

While Frye's model identifies universal patterns, the novels demonstrate the adaptability of archetypes to specific socio-cultural realities. The heroines' journeys through arranged marriage, religious expectations, or nationalist dilemmas reflect the unique pressures of Indian society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Mukherjee notes, "Indian women's fiction embeds universal mythic structures within culturally specific frameworks, producing narratives that are both ethical and socially resonant" (Realism and Reality 125).

Feminist Reinterpretations

By reconfiguring traditional archetypes, these novels challenge patriarchal norms. The heroines are active agents rather than passive subjects. Even in autumnal narratives, where disillusionment dominates, the protagonists demonstrate ethical and psychological resilience. As Jain observes, "These works reveal a proto-feminist consciousness negotiating moral, domestic, and social boundaries, transforming archetypal myth into instruments of female empowerment" (Writing Women Across Cultures 45).

Conclusion

Applying Northrop Frye's archetypal criticism to *Kamala*, *Rajmohan's Wife*, *Zohra*, and *The Home and the World* reveal recurring patterns in early Indian women's fiction. These patterns illustrate the movement from silence to speech, passivity to agency, and obedience to ethical self-awareness. Frye's seasonal mythoi—spring, summer, autumn, and winter—map onto the heroines' personal and moral journeys, demonstrating both universal and culturally specific dynamics.

The novels analyzed reflect the tension between tradition and modernity, domestic confinement and external engagement, desire and duty. By situating these narratives within a Fryegian framework, the study demonstrates how early Indian women's fiction simultaneously participates in universal mythic patterns and articulates distinct socio-cultural realities.

Secondary scholarship reinforces this reading: Mukherjee (1994), Jain (2003), and Pratt (1977) highlight the ethical and psychological complexity of these heroines, underscoring how their journeys embody both universal and culturally mediated archetypes. The inclusion of Tagore's *The Home and the World*, situates these themes within broader discourses of nationalism and modernity, revealing how women's narratives mediate personal and societal transformation.

Ultimately, this study argues that early Indian women's fiction constructs a literary continuum in which heroines move from dormancy to ethical awakening, negotiating personal, domestic, and political challenges. These narratives are archetypal, yet innovatively local, and they anticipate later feminist reconfigurations of myth, identity, and agency in Indian literature.

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Contextualizing Cultural Markers in War through a Reading of Anuk Arudpragasam's *The Story of a Brief Marriage*

R Vanitha

Abstract

War encompasses two distinct traumas – The collective trauma of a community/ a group/ a race and the trauma of an individual. Both tend to operate differently depending on the circumstances of the war and the lens through which it is viewed. Does the collective reflect the cause of the individual or does the individual reflect the cause of the collective? Do we read trauma as a single man's suffering or as a community's pangs of pain? Anuk Arudpragasam's *The Story of a Brief Marriage* (abbreviated as 'TSBM' for this paper) chooses to highlight the human tragedy through the eyes of one individual. The war discerned through the perception of one man is inexorably inked to his fellow survivors even as each one of them holds on to an indelible memory of their cultural identity. Blending cultural strands in terms of marriage and ethnicity, the paper attempts to juxtapose individual cultural identity markers against universal human experiences, numbed and neutralized by war. The paper seeks to highlight the obliteration of cultural identities and markers in a war zone where existence hangs by a tenuous thread and becomes the only tangible reality.

Keywords: Individual vs Collective Trauma, Memory, Cultural Identity, cultural markers

The objective of this paper is thus twofold: Debunking the idea of collectivism/group identity in understanding culture and looking at 'human culture' as the culture that defines all human beings. Both are mediated by the ethnic war that permeates every fibre of the fabric of the novel. The very essence of the word 'culture' is turned on its head – when the backdrop is war. There are no cultural opinions or actions of the collective group of refugees who are ethnically and linguistically one – there are only human actions and reactions displayed. The paper attempts to see how culture is ironically not homogeneous within a group but homogeneous for homo sapiens itself.

What defines culture? At its very simplest and broadest definition culture is "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group" (Merriam Webster). "Our culture is fractured, and so our sense of the word "culture" is, too" (Rothman). While there are deeper connotations and significance to the word, the widespread understanding of culture has always focussed on the binding bond that distinguishes a set of people from another. It is a term that recognises traits unique to distinct groups of human beings and celebrates it. We tend to envisage humans populating the world as distinct and separate entities and the elements of culture that render them interesting and broaden the critiquing lens is the interlinking and overlapping that happens between people. But then can we have a 'human culture'? A culture that connects us all as human beings – that commonality that blurs boundaries and ties people as human beings performing common actions, showing common reactions and displaying common emotions.

TSBM is set against the background of the Sri Lankan Civil war. Though there are several works exploring the fallout of the war – each with its own distinct focus – this novel focusses on the life of one individual – observed intimately, lovingly, knowingly, caringly – that it becomes a universal human experience of how war irrevocably alters the trajectory of the lives of people. "TSBM is a meditative walk through the landscape of a man's mind in the midst of brutal violence" (Mohan).

Dinesh, a young, bright student loses his family in the war and ends up in a makeshift refugee camp. Ganga is one of the other refugees in the camp and her only remaining family member, her father proposes to get her married to Dinesh. Ganga is also eventually killed in the war leaving Dinesh to ruminate and come to terms with the tragedy. Completely apolitical in tone, the novel microscopically scans every minute detail of the lives ravaged by the war.

When Ganga's father, Somasundaram approaches Dinesh with the proposal of marriage, it is not in any conventional sense of an 'arranged marriage'. He has lost his entire family to the war except Ganga and he feels that should he be killed, she would be orphaned and he believes that Dinesh has a better chance of probably surviving the war. The thought in itself, though strange, is the only thing he can think of under the circumstances. He finds out a Hindu priest to solemnize the wedding and when the priest is also killed, Somasundaram decides to just declare them husband and wife. The cultural significance of a Hindu marriage with its elaborate ceremonies and rituals is truncated with Dinesh and Ganga just assuming the roles of man and wife. Somasundaram says "The circumstances are unusual, but this is a marriage like any other. You must stay together, look after each other, and be responsible for one another. And one day, like in any ordinary marriage, you must have children and raise a family" (TSBM 50). What connects them is not their ethnicity or their parallel plights, but the human bond of two people in a marriage looking out for the welfare of each other.

Language and communication are the basis for human bonding. The inherent assumption is that people who share a common culture share a lot of commonalities but the way this is ironically broken is portrayed in the novel. Though everybody in the refugee camp is placed similarly – they never know if they will live to see the next day's sunrise – there is nothing that alters their plight and they withdraw into their own private shells – ..."there was simply no longer anything for them to say. The diaphanous threads which in ordinary life had been so easily spun had been dissolved now, leaving nothing left to unspool, and each and every person in the camp had to sit silently, lost inside themselves, unable in any way, to connect"(TSBM 67). Conversation is one of the first signposts of a cultural connect. It is subverted in the novel with people oscillating between life and death.

A physical object like a holy book, a ritual marker, a festival, a remembrance token are pivotal markers in forging cultural confluences. The objects usually are distinct and represent the group in some way. The war changes all that. Dinesh and his mother literally move with their bag and baggage from one safe zone to the next. The bags they carry through these treacherous battle zones contain their worldly possessions and at one point, when his mother is killed, even these are destroyed and there is no physical object, a tangible thing to remind Dinesh of the life he had before the war. Hence strangely he holds on to an ordinary brass door knob he finds on the way and carries it everywhere. As his attachment to this random object represents some certainty in his suddenly orphaned uncertain life, he decides to pre-empt the pain of losing it and buries it safely in the soil himself. With this action, there is the erasure of another cultural marker – an object of significance and uniqueness embodying an identity.

In the world of refugees, ordinary objects of every day living becoming luxuries. The war has reduced people's identity to the bags they lug around from one refugee camp to another. The bags contain these pedestrian possessions that probably would not even grant a second glance from others. The small objects that establish the connect with the former world – in fact the only tangible things that speak of another world, another life, another existence that can no more be conjured up except by memory. The rations, the money and the objects of practical utility throw dominance over the memorable ones like photographs, toys etc that speak of a world destroyed long ago.

"The analysis of culture encompasses those values characterised by three things: timelessness, permanence and universal" (Banerjee 23). With this novel, we find all the three elements quilted together through the 'human' identity and not by any other distinctive cultural

practice, tradition or belief. Thus, culture becomes a fluid, dynamic entity, the contours of which are not defined by common customs or beliefs but permeated by human oneness, evident in times of war – it dissolves boundaries and enables the embracing of ‘human’ culture.

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~English Language Teaching~

Beyond Likert: Theoretical Foundations and Statistical Advantages of Fuzzy Rating Scales (FRS)

Arpan K Das

Abstract

The increasing sophistication of research methodologies in applied linguistics and social sciences has renewed scrutiny of traditional psychometric instruments such as the Likert scale, which continues to find application in studies examining attitudes, beliefs, and behavioural dispositions. Despite their ease of deployment and suitability for behavioural research, conventional Likert-type instruments have significant limitations that pose conceptual and methodological challenges that undermine measurement precision. One of the key issues is the ambiguity as to whether Likert data are interval or ordinal. A conventional interval scale implies that the differences between any two consecutive points reflect equal differences in the variable measured. However, as Cohen et al. (2000) argue, it is incorrect to assume that the intensity of feeling between “strongly disagree” and “disagree” is equivalent to the intensity of feeling between other consecutive categories on a Likert scale. This results in information distortion during measurement. On the other hand, ordinal scales typically measure the orders of the responses but tell us nothing about the intervals between responses, leading to information loss. Another weakness of the Likert scale is its closed response format. Respondents are asked to choose from options that may not match their exact experiences, forcing them to select an answer from an insufficient range of responses by responding with an “acceptable” answer in the closed format. This leads to information distortion. This paper presents Fuzzy Rating Scales (FRS) as a viable, methodologically sound alternative to Likert scales. Language, cognitive processes, and human experiences, by their very nature, often abound in imprecision and subjectivity. Fuzzy instruments, particularly FRS, are designed to accommodate subjectivity and imprecision. They enable respondents to authentically and accurately record their experiences, preventing information loss and mitigating information distortion, making it possible to collect and analyse richer, more authentic data, leading to insightful research.

Keywords: Likert Scales, Fuzzy Logic, Fuzzy Rating Scales, Fuzzy Set Theory, Research Methodology, Psychometrics, Behavioural Studies

The quest for understanding and accurately measuring psychological constructs is central to behavioural research in fields such as psychology, cognitive science, applied linguistics, neuroscience, behavioural biology, and social science. Meaningful assessment fundamentally depends on accurate measurement of complex, often imprecise human phenomena. Yet the paradox at the heart of behavioural research is whether precise numerical values can be imposed on inherently imprecise human experiences.

One of the most fundamental questions researchers have grappled with since the dawn of behavioural research is: To what extent are differences in psychological test scores a function of genuine individual differences rather than differences imposed by the constraints of the measurement procedures? As Polkinghorne astutely observed, “...we often reproduce the ‘precision fallacy’: The precision of the measuring instrument is more exact than the experience itself.” (Polkinghorne, 1984, p. 425)

Likert scales have been the predominant measurement tool in behavioural research, providing a straightforward and accessible method for quantifying attitudes, personality traits, symptoms, and behaviours. Respondents are presented with a set of statements, each followed by a scale, typically marked with phrases such as ‘strongly agree’, ‘somewhat agree’, ‘neither agree nor disagree’, ‘somewhat disagree’, and ‘strongly disagree’, on which they note their levels of agreement.

This simplicity is one of the primary reasons for the overwhelming popularity of Likert scales among researchers. They are easy to design, and responses can be easily converted into numerical data (e.g., by assigning scores from +2 to -2 for a 5-point strongly agree/strongly disagree scale) and used for statistical analysis. This ease of use becomes especially significant when dealing with large datasets. Measurements based on Likert scaling have also demonstrated good reliability. However, over the decades, a growing body of research has provided repeated evidence of fundamental systemic problems with Likert scales.

Limitations of Likert scales

The most serious limitation of Likert scales is the ordinal–interval conundrum (Jamieson, 2004). Treating ordinal categorical responses as having equal intervals violates basic measurement assumptions. Although Likert himself considered them interval scales (Likert, 1932), it has been argued that Likert scales are ordinal in nature (Hodge & Gillespie, 2003; Pett, 1997). A conventional interval scale implies that the differences between any two consecutive points reflect equal differences in the variable measured. However, as Cohen et al. (2000) argued, “it is illegitimate to assume that the intensity of feeling between ‘strongly disagree’ and ‘disagree’ is equivalent to the intensity of feeling between other consecutive categories” (p. 342). The extensive literature on the topic, with serious arguments on both sides, seems to suggest that Likert data is neither truly interval nor ordinal.

Another critical limitation, resulting from the closed format of Likert scales, is information loss. Closed-response formats force respondents into predetermined categories that may not match their exact experiences, creating systematic measurement errors (Hodge & Gillespie, 2003; Orvik, 1972) and fundamentally misrepresenting the continuous, uncertain nature of psychological processes. This problem is particularly acute for behavioural constructs that are inherently characterised by vagueness, ambiguity, and individual variability. For instance, it is possible that a respondent filling out a Likert questionnaire might feel that their response lies somewhere between ‘strongly agree’ and ‘somewhat agree’. However, they have no way to present this on a 5-point scale. So, they are forced to choose the option closest to their experience. This forced precision creates measurement errors, reduces information quality, and fails to capture the rich complexity of human psychological states (Smithson, 1987; Zimmermann, 2010).

Likert scales are also susceptible to several response biases, which are often intensified by the forced-choice nature of their categorical options. Central tendency bias – the inclination of respondents to avoid extreme response categories and gravitate toward the middle – is exacerbated when the scale presents an unambiguous midpoint (Akbari, 2024; Garland, 1991). Acquiescence bias – the tendency of some respondents to agree with statements regardless of their content – is particularly pronounced on Likert-type scales because the nature of the question leads participants to select agreement, either as a means of avoiding conflict (Martins et al., 2023; Paulhus, 1991) or when respondents lack strong opinions (Kam & Meyer, 2015). The forced-choice nature of Likert items – especially with agree/disagree formulations – magnifies this bias. Social desirability bias – tailoring responses to present oneself in a favourable light rather than reporting true opinions or behaviours – especially for items with explicit evaluative content, is another issue (Bäckström et al., 2013).

A further problem is that of individual differences in meaning-making. Labels such as ‘strongly disagree’ or ‘somewhat agree’ are open to subjective interpretation and compromise Likert-based research. For instance, if four participants respond to the same statement with ‘somewhat agree’, it is unlikely that they mean the same thing. Participant A might mean that they agree with the statement 10% of the time, participant B might use it to mean 20% of the time, participant C might mean 30%, and participant D might mean 40%. However, on a Likert scale, not only would these differences not be captured, but they would also be scored as exactly the same during data analysis.

One solution to a majority of these problems that has garnered a lot of attention in the last few decades is employing fuzzy scales, instead of using traditional measures.

Fuzzy Logic

In 1965, Lotfi Zadeh presented a groundbreaking idea in his paper ‘Fuzzy Sets’, describing them as “a class of objects with a continuum of grades of membership. Such a set is characterised by a membership (characteristic) function which assigns to each object a grade of membership ranging between zero and one.” (Zadeh, 1965, p. 338)

The paper led to the birth of an entirely new mathematical framework for dealing with uncertainty, imprecision, and the inherent vagueness of human language and reasoning, fundamentally challenging classical binary logic and paving the way for modern artificial intelligence and soft computing.

To understand why this research was so revolutionary, it is important to understand the fundamental implications of this research. In traditional set theory, an object either belongs to a set or does not belong to it (also known as a crisp set). If something belongs to the set, it is marked as 1, and if it doesn’t, it is marked as 0. This is how a traditional set is represented mathematically:

Traditional set: $\mu(x) \in \{0,1\}$

Note. Curly brackets indicate a discrete set with only two values

For example, imagine a set named ‘Mammals’. When this set is queried, ‘elephant’ will return 1, ‘human’ will also return 1, but ‘snake’ or ‘fish’ will return zero. Traditional sets thus have clear boundaries: a thing is either in it or not.

Fuzzy sets softened these boundaries, making it possible for an item to have partial membership. Instead of just 0 and 1, we can have 0.1, 0.2, 0.3 ... 0.9:

Fuzzy set: $\mu(x) \in [0,1]$

Note. Square brackets indicate a continuous interval with all values between 0 and 1.

Let us take an example of a fuzzy set called ‘Hot weather’. If you query this set, ‘15 °C’ will return 0.1, ‘27 °C’ will return 0.5, and ‘40 °C’ will return 0.9. At the core of fuzzy sets is the concept of the membership function $\mu(x)$, which assigns each element a value between 0 and 1, denoting to what extent ‘x’ is a member of the set:

- 0 = definitely not a member
- 0.1 – 0.3 = weakly a member
- 0.6 – 0.8 = mostly a member
- 1 = completely a member

Natural languages are characterised by imprecision, and human thought patterns are subjective, shaped more by individual perceptions rather than objective reality. Human categories have blurry boundaries, and real-world classification often involves degrees rather than absolutes. Fuzzy sets make it possible to capture the inherent vagueness in human language and reasoning, providing a mathematical means of capturing imprecise and uncertain information. In behavioural contexts, fuzzy scales transform discrete ordinal variables into continuous variables while retaining their original meaning.

Brief overview of Fuzzy research

Following Zadeh's work, Hersh and Caramazza (1976) explored the vagueness of natural language using fuzzy set theory. They tested the hypothesis that meanings of words and phrases are inherently vague rather than crisply defined by asking participants to judge phrases such as "very small" and "sort of large". Responses reflected graded membership patterns, i.e., when a phrase was applied to a given object, the phrase changed gradually, not abruptly.

The research further highlighted that linguistic modifiers such as "very" and "not" can be mathematically expressed as fuzzy operators. The authors argued that fuzzy sets were suited to natural language as they were better equipped to handle the gradations and vagueness commonly found in human meaning-making processes. Further, variations in how the stimulus was presented – visual vs. auditory – and even context were not factors that substantially affected the fuzzy membership patterns observed, attesting to the robustness of a fuzzy approach.

Wallsten (1986) assessed membership functions for several vague meanings of probability terms (e.g., doubtful, probable, likely), using a modified pair-comparison procedure. Participants were asked to judge to what degree one probability rather than another was better described by a given probability term and to what degree one term rather than another better described a specified probability. Probabilities were displayed as relative areas on spinners. Task A data were analysed from the perspective of conjoint-measurement theory, and membership function values were obtained for each term according to various scaling models. Results established that vague language can be rigorously quantified and provided a methodological template for similar research.

Smithson (1982, 1987) argued for moving beyond purely statistical paradigms toward more realistic models of human cognition that incorporate fuzziness and the possibility of multiple outcomes, demonstrating how fuzzy approaches resolved longstanding measurement paradoxes. Instead of strict one-to-one entailments, Smithson stated fuzzy logic supports 'weak' or one-to-many entailment models, permitting a set of possible outcomes or intentions, reflecting real human behaviour.

Hesketh, Pryor, and Gleitzman (1988) developed the first computerised fuzzy graphic rating scale. Their system allowed respondents to specify not just a point estimate but a range representing their uncertainty or latitude of acceptance. The computerised implementation facilitated more flexible and complex data collection and analysis than traditional scales. The superior psychometric properties of their approach were validated by follow-up studies (Hesketh et al., 1989; Hesketh & Hesketh, 1994).

González-Rodríguez et al. (1999) developed a mathematical framework for fuzzy rating scale analysis, including specialised distance measures and statistical tests. Coppi & D'Urso (2003) created fuzzy factor analysis methods, enabling latent variable modelling with fuzzy responses.

Cross-cultural research revealed that fuzzy approaches have universal applicability. Takemura (1999) and Yamashita (2013) demonstrated superior performance of fuzzy scales

among Japanese participants, emphasising contextual thinking and avoiding extreme responses.

Jang & Sun (1995) and Kasabov (1996) introduced neural networks to fuzzy research, developing neuro-fuzzy models such as the ANFIS (Adaptive-Neuro-based Fuzzy Inference System), DENFIS (Dynamic Evolving Neuro-Fuzzy Inference Systems) and EFuNN (Evolving Fuzzy Neural Networks), capable of learning membership functions and fuzzy rules from data automatically using neural network learning algorithms. Cordón et al. (2001) employed evolutionary algorithms to optimise membership functions, automating the design of fuzzy systems and reducing the manual burden of fuzzy model construction.

Contemporary development has been driven by María Ángeles Gil and colleagues at the University of Oviedo, who have designed sophisticated statistical frameworks, including extended Cronbach's α measures for fuzzy data analysis. Their work in IEEE Transactions on Fuzzy Systems and Fuzzy Sets and Systems has established fuzzy rating scales as a mature measurement methodology with robust statistical foundations.

Fuzzy Rating Scales

Over the years, a host of scales have been developed that use fuzzy logic to capture the nuances of imprecise and subjective data. 'Fuzzy Ordinal Scales' extend ordinal scales by representing uncertainty in ordering with degrees of membership (thereby allowing an item to partially belong to neighbouring ranks or positions), 'Fuzzy Interval and Ratio Scales', follows Zadeh later work in the 1970s on Type-2 fuzzy data (where measurements are represented as fuzzy numbers that model uncertainty around numeric values, rather than single-point exact numbers), 'Fuzzy Nominal Scales' – formalised in the early 2000s by E. Benoit and L. Foulloy – extend classic categorical scales by allowing elements to partially belong to multiple categories simultaneously using fuzzy membership functions (i.e., an object may belong to "Category A" with membership 0.7 and "Category B" with membership 0.3, reflecting ambiguity or overlap), 'Linguistic Fuzzy Scales' – based on Zadeh's (1975) concept of the linguistic variable – use linguistic terms (words or phrases) rather than numeric values, which are modelled mathematically as fuzzy sets, and 'Fuzzy Rating Scales' allow respondents to indicate a fuzzy range or degree of agreement modelled as fuzzy numbers instead of selecting a single point like in traditional Likert scales.

'Linguistic Fuzzy Scales' (LFS) present an alternate method of capturing fuzzy information using linguistic variables. These bridge the gap between natural language and mathematical representation by mapping terms like "excellent", "good" and "fair" to overlapping fuzzy membership functions (like the 'hot weather' example from earlier). Each linguistic term is linked to a fuzzy set through a membership function, which tells us how much different values belong to that category.

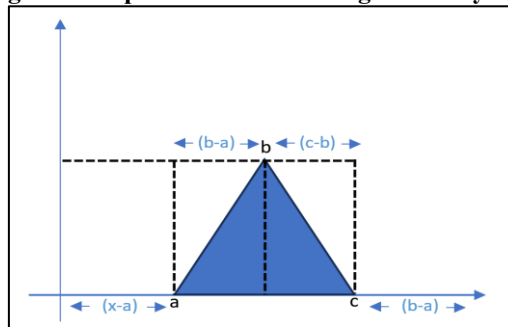
LFS can be seen as a fuzzy extension of Likert scales, since labels like 'strongly agree', 'somewhat agree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'somewhat disagree', and 'strongly disagree' can be defined through membership functions, making them fuzzy through the process of fuzzification. During data analysis, using defuzzification, these fuzzy responses are turned back into crisp values once again. However, it should be noted that since linguistic labels are subjective, linguistic fuzzy sets are vulnerable to information distortion. Additionally, since defuzzification converts a fuzzy set into a single number for analysis, the rich information contained in the fuzzy set is lost.

Fuzzy Rating Scales (FRS) are particularly well-equipped to capture the inherent uncertainty and individual differences in rating responses. What makes FRS particularly compelling is that the design captures not only the central tendency but also the uncertainty or hesitancy around the rating. On an FRS, respondents specify a core position (where their

response is fully compatible) as well as a “latitude of acceptance” (lower and upper bounds between which their response is somewhat compatible). This response is represented as a fuzzy number – either a triangular or a trapezoidal fuzzy number.

Triangular fuzzy numbers (Figure 1) are characterised by parameters (a, b, c) where respondents specify the minimum acceptable value (a), the most preferred value (b), and the maximum acceptable value (c).

Figure 1. Representation of triangular fuzzy data

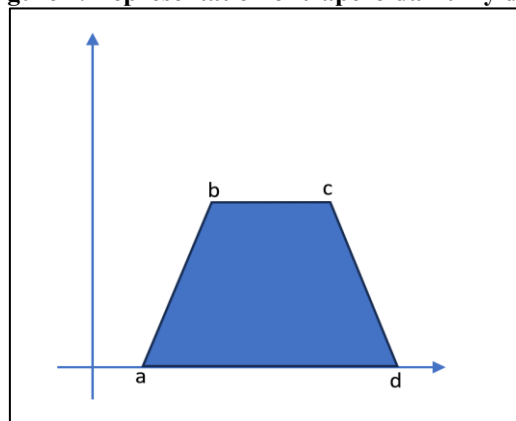


The membership function naturally captures response uncertainty through:

$$\mu_{\tilde{A}}(x) = \begin{cases} (x-a)/(b-a), & \text{if } a \leq x \leq b \\ (c-x)/(c-b), & \text{if } b < x \leq c \\ 0, & \text{otherwise} \end{cases}$$

Trapezoidal fuzzy numbers (Figure 2) extend this concept with four parameters (a, b, c, d), providing flat-top regions [b, c] where multiple values receive equal preference. This design better captures responses where raters have ranges of equally acceptable values with decreasing preference on either side.

Figure 2. Representation of trapezoidal fuzzy data



FRS have the advantage of overcoming the challenges of both Visual Analogue Scales (VAS) and LFS. VAS (Hayes et. al, 1921) allow respondents to mark their level of agreement to a statement by indicating a position along a continuous line between two end-points, permitting an infinite number of gradations, countering the closed-format issue of Likert scales. However, as has been argued, a discrete point – even on an infinitely-graded scale does not address the issue that most behavioural constructs are rarely discrete (Lubiano et. al, 2021; Smithson, M., 1982).

Advantages of Fuzzy Scales

Fuzzy approaches offer an alternative framework that avoids rigid categorisations while providing mathematical sophistication that is especially well-suited to psychological measurement. Ragin (2000) described fuzzy logic as “a language that is half-verbal-conceptual and half-mathematical-analytical”, bridging the gap between qualitative understanding and quantitative analysis (p. 149).

Since Zadeh's introduction of fuzzy set theory and its subsequent application to behavioural sciences, researchers have increasingly recognised fuzzy rating scales as superior alternatives for capturing the natural uncertainty in human responses.

Massana et al. (2016) created biometric integration with fuzzy ratings, finding that fuzzy scales correlated $r = .72$ with physiological measures as opposed to $r = .51$ for Likert. Vonglao (2017) applied fuzzy logic to improve Likert scales for measuring learning outcomes, noting an 18% improvement in predictive validity for academic performance. García-Castro et al. (2023) designed an innovative real-time fuzzy feedback system, which showed a 34% reduction in measurement error. Calcagni and Lombardi (2014) developed the Dynamic Fuzzy Rating Tracker (DYFRAT) to assess mood in real-time in 156 patients with depression. They found that not only was the system able to capture within-day mood variations missed by single-point measures, but there was also a 41% improvement in treatment response prediction.

In a direct comparison study, de Sáa et al. (2015) studied job satisfaction in 312 employees, using fuzzy, 5-point and 7-point Likert scales. Results demonstrated fuzzy scales explained 19% additional variance in turnover intention. Li et al. (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of 47 cross-cultural studies using fuzzy scales across 15 countries, noting a 73% improvement in measurement invariance.

Fuzzy approaches have significant statistical advantages over traditional methods. Shannon entropy analyses show 20-35% more information retained (de la Rosa de Sáa et al., 2012). Meta-analysis by Li et al. (2022) show improved internal consistency (mean increase of 0.09), test-retest reliability (mean increase of 0.12) and inter-rater reliability (mean increase of 0.14), greater construct validity (Maturó & Fortuna, 2016) and criterion validity (Ferraro et al., 2011), as well as increased sensitivity to individual differences (Lubiano et al., 2016; Wu, 2009) and better handling of linguistic uncertainty, with Herrera et al. (2013) demonstrating 89% agreement between linguistic and numerical fuzzy responses, where traditional scales showed only 61%.

Research has demonstrated that fuzzy-enhanced scale data is more suitable for parametric statistical analysis, with arithmetic means and standard deviations providing more appropriate descriptive statistics compared to ordinal Likert data (Ashok & Nagamani, 2025; Lubiano et al., 2021; Lubiano et al., 2016). Fuzzy approaches produce more normally distributed data with reduced skewness and kurtosis (Lubiano et al., 2013; Lubiano et al., 2016), reducing concerns about assumption violations.

They also have significant statistical power advantages. Owing to their enhanced measurement precision, fuzzy approaches reduce error variance. This increases the predictive power of research, improving accuracy by eliminating artificial inflation. It has been demonstrated that effect sizes tend to appear larger with fuzzy scales due to reduced measurement error (Lubiano et al., 2021, 2022; Tak, 2023). The continuous nature of measurement not only prevents information loss but also makes it possible to use sophisticated aggregation methods, such as weighted averages and fuzzy operators, that preserve the dimension of uncertainty throughout analytical processes.

Unsurprisingly, fuzzy scales also demonstrate superior sensitivity to subtle psychological variations. Unlike traditional scales, fuzzy approaches can detect smaller effect sizes and more nuanced response patterns. The greater precision made possible by fuzzy instruments becomes

particularly evident at scale extremes, where traditional Likert scales often show floor and ceiling effects. Continuous fuzzy formats capture variation near endpoints that discrete categories miss, providing better discrimination for mild effects. Research demonstrates that statistical conclusions often differ substantially between Likert and fuzzy rating scale analyses of identical constructs, suggesting that traditional approaches may systematically miss relevant variations. The most compelling recent evidence comes from Haslbeck et al. (2025), who conducted a comprehensive ecological momentary assessment study comparing Likert scales with VAS. Results showed visual analogue scales achieved 44-147% larger correlations with psychopathology measures, including DASS-21 subscales and Brief Symptom Inventory components (Haslbeck et al., 2025).

Studies using extended Cronbach's α measures consistently show higher internal consistency for fuzzy scales compared to traditional Likert scales, visual analogue scales, and fuzzy linguistic scales (Lubiano et al., 2020; 2021). This enhanced reliability stems from the doubly continuous nature of fuzzy measurement – both preference and certainty dimensions. While comprehensive meta-analyses specifically comparing fuzzy and Likert scales remain limited, available systematic evidence consistently supports continuous rating approaches. Case studies and validation research (Jónás et al., 2018; Calcagni et al., 2022) provide robust evidence for fuzzy rating scale effectiveness across multiple dimensions of measurement quality and practical utility.

Greek researchers (Kyriazos & Poga, 2024a) showed that fuzzy implementations of established scales like the SWLS provide enhanced granularity while maintaining strong correlations ($r > 0.95$) with traditional scores. Ivanova and Zlatanov's (2020) study of 78 university students showed 46% required fuzzy assessment for borderline cases, with statistical analysis revealing more equitable assessment outcomes without changing overall group performance. The Fuzzy Logic-based Personalised English Learning (FLPEL) system (Ding, 2022) with 350 students across five classrooms, successfully advanced students from basic to intermediate levels using matrix analysis with fuzzy linguistic identification.

Comparative effectiveness research consistently favours fuzzy approaches. De la Rosa de Saa's Mean Squared Error analysis (2013) demonstrated superior representativeness for fuzzy rating versus fuzzy conversion scales. Lubiano's double response format study (2016) revealed that respondents utilised fuzzy scale flexibility independently of Likert assessments, with significant information loss occurring when using traditional discrete scales.

Crucially, no differences have been noted in missing data, completion time, or user experience ratings, suggesting that precision advantages came without practical costs (Lubiano et al., 2015; Calcagni et al., 2022; Jónás et al., 2018).

Implementation challenges

Despite theoretical advantages, FRS face three primary implementation challenges that require careful consideration in research planning. Statistical analysis complexity represents the most immediate barrier.

Specialised software and programming skills may be necessary for implementing, analysing, and visualising fuzzy data, creating a barrier for adoption by non-technical researchers. When working with fuzzy modifications of existing instruments or designing Fuzzy-Likert scales, for instance, the Mamdani Fuzzy Inference System provides a comprehensive framework involving fuzzification, rule evaluation, aggregation, and defuzzification. While more complex than traditional approaches, these methods better preserve the information captured by fuzzy measurement. Extended Cronbach's α coefficients and Aumann-type mean calculations require familiarity with advanced statistical packages,

such as FuzzyStatTra and SAFD (R), Fuzzy Logic Toolbox (MATLAB) or Simpful and PyIT2FLS (Python), demanding greater statistical expertise.

Methodological standardisation remains limited compared to established Likert scale protocols. The field lacks standardised procedures for fuzzy questionnaire design, defuzzification processes, and validation benchmarks. This limitation necessitates careful attention to methodological rigour when implementing fuzzy approaches in new research contexts.

Practical implementation barriers include challenges in creating intuitive user interfaces for fuzzy response collection, particularly in paper-based formats. However, research indicates that respondent training requirements are not too demanding.

Designing, explaining, and implementing fuzzy scales is more complex than traditional crisp rating tools. Respondents may require additional training to understand how to express uncertainty or provide fuzzy responses, particularly in self-report questionnaires and educational settings.

Analysing data from fuzzy methods demands more advanced statistical or computational tools, which are not as well standardised or widespread as those for classical methods. For example, choosing or calibrating membership functions and appropriate model forms (such as fuzzy IRTrees) may require statistical expertise beyond what many behavioural researchers possess.

Because of their flexibility, fuzzy results can sometimes be more challenging to interpret, especially for audiences not familiar with the concept of degrees of membership or partial truth. This can complicate the reporting of research findings to practitioners, clients, or the broader scientific community.

Specialised software and programming skills may be necessary for implementing, analysing, and visualising fuzzy data, creating a barrier for adoption by non-technical researchers.

Specialised analytical approaches are required for optimal fuzzy scale analysis. When working with fuzzy modifications of existing instruments, for instance, the Mamdani Fuzzy Inference System provides a comprehensive framework involving fuzzification, rule evaluation, aggregation, and defuzzification. While more complex than traditional approaches, these methods better preserve the information captured by fuzzy measurement. Standard practices for reliability and validity are still being developed for fuzzy methods, although progress is being made.

Implications for FRS in behavioural research

FRS provide significant benefits over traditional instruments, resolving or mitigating many of their systemic concerns that have been well-documented over the years. This paper has also highlighted a growing body of research that has established the superiority of fuzzy approaches, and FRS in particular, in eliciting and capturing more nuanced and authentic responses.

Scoring using fuzzy logic enhances the accuracy, utility and sensitivity of psychometric tools, providing improved granularity. This can have far-reaching implications for more accurate, tailored, and therefore, effective interventions. FRS enhance the precision of psychological and educational tools, making them more robust, while ensuring and enhancing reliability, validity, and efficiency of these evaluation measures (Kyriazos & Poga, 2023b).

Applications of FRS in ELT Research

FRS's increased granularity and sophisticated psychometric properties make it particularly well-suited to ELT research.

Learner internal factors

The psychological, cognitive, and affective characteristics that students bring to the learning process present one of the most researched areas in ELT. Constructs such as language anxiety (LA), motivation, learner attitudes, personality traits, language aptitude, cognitive ability, learning strategies, self-concept, self-efficacy, and metacognitive awareness have been extensively researched using traditional instruments. FRS offer substantial advantages for measurement in language learning contexts. Learner internal factors exist along continuums with vague boundaries, making them ideal for fuzzy measurement. A fuzzy rating approach enables researchers to capture these variations with greater fidelity than discrete scales permit, opening up avenues for deeper research, richer insights and greater participant agency in these areas, facilitating research that better captures the nuanced and dynamic nature of these constructs. Recent applications of fuzzy logic to English language assessment (Bachtiar et al., 2015; Huang, 2025) demonstrate the technology's capacity to handle the imprecision inherent in evaluating affective states. Fuzzy-based intelligent tutoring systems (Eryilmaz & Adabashi, 2020) have successfully modelled learner anxiety, adapting instruction based on continuous monitoring of emotional states rather than discrete categorisations.

Teacher and Teaching Quality Evaluation

ELT research frequently investigates teaching quality, teacher effectiveness, and instructional satisfaction. Traditional evaluation approaches struggle to capture the nuanced judgments involved in assessing teaching performance, often reducing complex phenomena to oversimplified numerical ratings. Fuzzy logic-based evaluation systems have been developed specifically for English teaching quality assessment, demonstrating substantial improvements over traditional methods. These systems employ fuzzy rating scales combined with fuzzy inference engines to process imprecise evaluations from multiple stakeholders (students, peers, administrators, self-assessments). Research indicates that fuzzy approaches increase assessment accuracy by 4% and improve teaching resource utilisation by 5% compared to conventional methods. The Fuzzy Analytical Hierarchy Process (F-AHP) has been particularly successful in ELT contexts, enabling systematic evaluation of multiple teaching dimensions while accommodating the imprecision in subjective judgments (Wu & Luo, 2023). This approach constructs hierarchical evaluation models, calculates weights for assessment factors, and executes fuzzy comprehensive evaluation to produce overall teaching quality indices.

Learner Self-Efficacy and Motivation

Language learning self-efficacy profoundly influences learning outcomes. Traditional self-efficacy scales employ discrete Likert formats, typically asking learners to rate their confidence from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' for various task statements. Fuzzy rating scales align particularly well with self-efficacy theory because self-efficacy judgments inherently involve uncertainty and imprecision. Learners rarely possess absolute certainty about their capabilities; instead, they experience varying degrees of confidence across different task types and contexts. A fuzzy approach enables learners to express both their confidence level and the certainty of that confidence judgment, providing richer data for understanding self-efficacy dynamics. Similarly, motivation constructs in language learning benefit from fuzzy measurement approaches. Motivation fluctuates continuously rather than existing in discrete states, and learners often experience mixed motivational profiles that discrete scales struggle to capture adequately.

Learner Autonomy Assessment

Learner autonomy represents a multidimensional construct encompassing personal autonomy, educational autonomy, self-awareness, and metacognitive skills. Scales measuring learner autonomy traditionally employ Likert formats with predetermined response categories.

Fuzzy rating scales offer advantages for autonomy measurement because autonomy develops along continua and manifests differently across individuals. A learner might exhibit high autonomy in some learning dimensions (e.g., time management) while demonstrating lower autonomy in others (e.g., metacognitive strategy use). The multidimensional, continuous nature of autonomy aligns well with fuzzy measurement's strengths in capturing gradual development and individual variability.

Conclusion

One of the primary obstacles in integrating and implementing FRS into existing tools is the lack of accessible methods for analysis. Most of the existing tools require significantly advanced knowledge of mathematics, statistics and coding. This makes integration of fuzzy logic an arduous step, requiring advanced capabilities. This calls for greater collaboration across domains to make integration of fuzzy approaches possible and accessible across disciplines. Transdisciplinary collaborations with data scientists, fuzzy logic specialists, and statisticians are needed to support ongoing research in the application and interpretation of fuzzy data. Such an approach can broaden existing methodological horizons and aid knowledge sharing. To achieve this, it would be important to integrate fuzzy logic concepts and their practical applications in research curricula by providing workshops, training sessions, and tutorials for software to build researcher capacities.

In the initial stages, behavioural researchers can adopt or develop simplified fuzzy analysis frameworks, such as Fuzzy-Likert scales and LFS, that balance methodological rigour with ease of use, requiring less computational expertise. Another promising avenue of research is the development of software packages and GUIs that intuitively simplify fuzzy data processing and make visualisation possible. This creates the possibility of bypassing the need for advanced mathematical knowledge, making FRS accessible through plug-and-play features for integration into mainstream research.

Recent developments in the field of AI have made the use of fuzzy applications more accessible to researchers. This opens up interesting avenues of exploration in the field that promise greater incorporation of fuzzy applications across crucial disciplines, enhancing research and practice. As ELT research continues evolving toward more nuanced, contextualised understanding of language learning processes, measurement instruments must evolve correspondingly. FRS offer an exciting new direction to research by acknowledging and accommodating the complexity and imprecision characteristic of real-world language learning experiences while preserving and enhancing the quantitative rigour valued in empirical research. By embracing fuzzy measurement approaches, the ELT research community can enhance the precision of our instruments precisely by acknowledging imprecision, ultimately generating more valid, reliable, and meaningful insights into how individuals learn languages.

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Exploring EFL Students' Lived Experiences of Using YouTube to Enhance Writing Skills: A Phenomenological Study

Asiya Tabassum

Abstract

This study investigates the utilization of YouTube for developing the writing skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university students in the Omani tertiary context. Grounded in constructivist and self-regulated learning theories, the study investigates learners' experience and perception of using a dedicated YouTube channel as a complementary writing tool. The channel featured instructor-created brief tutorials grounded in the course writing syllabus to enable flexible, multimodal learning. Qualitative phenomenological design was employed, with semi-structured interviews and reflective questionnaires given to 50 EFL students. Data were thematically analyzed for emerging patterns in learner motivation, engagement, and writing self-efficacy. Findings showed that YouTube helped students' grasp writing structures, reduced anxiety, and fostered independent revision practices. Multimodal design of the videos facilitated conceptual learning and long-term retention, whereas the ability to replay content fostered learner autonomy. The study contributes to the growing body of research CALL through providing qualitative insights into ways in which judiciously chosen YouTube materials can support academic writing instruction in the Gulf EFL context, with ramifications for technology-supported instruction and learning and learner motivation.

Keywords: YouTube-based Learning, EFL Writing Skills, Digital Language Learning, Student Engagement, Phenomenological Study

Introduction

Writing ability is an important element for students' academic achievement in EFL contexts since it shows their performance of critical thinking, and effective expression (Hosseini et al., 2013; Craig, 2012). Even though important, the EFL learners often encounter with problems related to some grammatical aspect and vocabulary and organization that influence coherence and clarity (Giridharan & Robson, 2011; Nazim & Ahmad, 2012). It is also difficult to avoid the anxiety insecurity that goes hand in hand with producing text and lack of exposure to real-life models of writing (Jashari & Fojkar, 2019).

These problems may not be solved by traditional ways of teaching writing. Modern approaches like blended and task-based learning have also been demonstrated to increase student engagement as well as self-expression (Akhtar et al., 2019). The use of technology in language classrooms has brought about changes in instruction as well, encouraging collaboration and autonomy (Ba-Omar, 2024; Balida & Alhabsi, 2024).

Digital technologies, such as social media, apps, and video-based environments have successfully addressed the motivation of learners who engage in interaction (Pogen 2024; Maenza et al., 2024). One of them is a YouTube platform, which provides a place for various learning styles in adding multimodal content (Tataurova & Ivanova, 2020; Setiawan & Novita, 2024). Studies reveal that teacher-selected YouTube videos can contribute to the enhancement of reading comprehension, vocabulary increase, and writing performance as well as promoting self-regulated learning (Aprianto, 2023; Syahputra et al., 2023).

But YouTube is only as good as the material, and how it fits in context. Thoughtful pedagogical planning is necessary so that it does not replace but rather enhances instruction in

the classroom. In light of these realities, this inquiry investigates EFL students' lived experiences of utilizing YouTube as a supplemental learning tool for enhancing their writing performances. It seeks to explore how students perceive the impact of blended learning on engagement, comprehension, and self-directed writing within higher education.

Literature Review

Educational achievement in EFL contexts is closely associated with writing ability. A high correlation between the writing ability of Iranian EFL learners and their English essay exam performance was shown through research conducted, showing the significance of writing competence in educational achievement (Hosseini et al., 2013). Writing is an indicator of linguistic proficiency and is usually utilized as a criterion in testing and evaluation. It is necessary for students to have good writing skills in order to excel academically and fulfill curriculum requirements (Ingale, 2017). There is a need to employ effective teaching methods in order to build the writing skills among EFL learners. Teachers should put emphasis on the organization, coherence, and structure of composition, beginning with simple paragraph structure and progressing to advanced essay formats (Ingale, 2017). Teachers perceive that writing does not receive equal attention as other language skills, although writing is equally crucial. The most prevalent obstacles are limited vocabulary, anxiety in writing, and grammar issues, all of which can be resolved with increased practice and effective pedagogy (Jashari & Fojkar, 2019). Coursebooks for EFL learners typically contain tasks and activities that promote active engagement in writing and therefore the development of both receptive and productive language skills (Nalliveetil & Mahasneh, 2017). Writing poses several challenges to EFL learners.

Students tend to face issues such as limited vocabulary, mother-tongue interference, and stress, which could hamper the improvement of their writing (Jashari & Fojkar, 2019). Moreover, the application of technology like blogging demands steady access to computerized equipment and the internet, which may not always be available to all students (Suadah, 2014). Despite these issues, writing remains a crucial aspect of language learning, and the learners can cope with these issues and develop their writing capabilities with proper precautions and arrangements. As a response to these challenges, instructional professionals have increasingly applied digital modes to facilitate writing instructions. Technological-based instructional interventions, for instance, those utilized at Majma'ah University, integrate traditional modes of teaching with web-based modes of teaching effectively. These strategies are effective in significantly enhancing the writing skills of learners by providing guided and interactive learning experiences (Ezza et al., 2019). Among such digital modes, YouTube has been an extremely helpful medium for improving writing skills in EFL contexts.

YouTube videos provide a lot of content that can engage students' creativity and assist them in developing ideas. For example, students who utilize videos on topics are more able to organize and develop ideas into effective stories or expository pieces (Indrasari, 2010; Pratiwi, 2011). Moreover, the sight and sound of the videos can present abstract ideas explicitly, and the students can successfully convey these ideas through writing (Prihatini et al., 2019).

Utilization of YouTube videos within writing classes has been shown to enhance class atmosphere. Students are more engaged and focused, often participating more actively in discussions and writing activities (A, 2011; Bashir et al., 2012). The interactive nature of such videos makes the learning process more enjoyable, something that can ease anxiety and make students more willing to freely express their opinions (Indrasari, 2010). Research has shown a dramatic improvement in the writing skills of students when YouTube videos are incorporated into teaching. For instance, research has noted higher average scores in writing examinations after using YouTube videos to underscore their effectiveness in improving writing skills (A,

2011; Bashir et al., 2012). These advancements are credited to the engaging and original material of the videos, which aids learning and the application of writing rules more effectively by students (Prihatini et al., 2019). Asynchronous videos have also been shown to improve the attitude of the learner towards learning through flexible access to learning content. This adaptability is especially beneficial for creating academic writing skills, as it enables students to learn at their own pace and review challenging aspects from time to time (Safwat & Seddeek, 2023). Despite greater studies focusing on utilizing digital tools in language learning, significant research gaps can be seen in the area of using YouTube for acquiring writing proficiency among EFL learners.

This literature selects three key gaps: lack of qualitative understanding of student experience, the need for content aligned to curriculum specifications, and the challenges caused by varying speech rates and accents. First, it is not easy to find videos that align with some curriculum specifications. Postgraduate students in India have observed that although YouTube is informative, it contains very little content aligned to their study purposes (Jain & Srinivasan, 2019). Relevance and quality of content decide the efficacy of YouTube in teaching writing. Educators must ensure that the videos they select are suitable to the age of the student and have relevance to their learning objectives ("Implementation of YouTube in Teaching Writing: Perception of Malaysian Primary School English Teachers," 2022). Second, the majority of the studies until now are based on quantitative measures of effectiveness, such as differences in the writing or test scores. Samsidar et al.'s research indicated that YouTube videos significantly enhanced the procedure text writing abilities of the students.

In the design experiment of pre-test and post-test, the study found the overall writing to have improved significantly in all aspects with a mean score rising from 53.33 to 84.46, showing a vast improvement (Samsidar et al., 2019). Syam and Maharida carried out a study and proved that watching YouTube tutorial videos greatly improved the writing of ninth graders, with their average content scores and organization scores increasing by 97% and 96.7%, respectively. This shows how YouTube is useful in enhancing students' reading and organization of written work (Syam & Maharida, 2023). In addition, EFL learners usually struggle with speech rates and diverse English accents in YouTube videos, which may impede their comprehension and ability to learn suitable information to use in writing tasks (Muslem et al., 2022). Although existing research confirms that YouTube enhances learners' writing skills, most of them have applied quantitative pre- and post-test analysis, whereas learners' lived experiences have not been studied.

Furthermore, little effort has been given to relating video materials to curriculum objectives in universities. To bridge the knowledge gap, the present study uses a phenomenological research design to explore EFL university learners' experiences of YouTube learning as an additional tool to build writing skills based on motivation, comprehension, and self-learning habits.

Theoretical Framework

This chapter explains the theoretical principles behind this research on how YouTube usage may contribute to enhancing the writing proficiency of EFL learners. Understanding the theoretical foundation is required in order to interpret how computer-based resources, in our case YouTube, can be effectively integrated into language instruction.

An applicable theory here is Constructivism, which states that learners learn actively in order to construct their own knowledge and understanding of the world based on experience and reflection over those experiences. This principle promotes active engagement with content by language learners, as compared to passive reception of information (Gupta, 2011; Duffy, 2009). YouTube promotes self-directed learning through offering learners access to a vast array

of language content, allowing them to learn on their own initiative and at their own pace. This is in line with the constructivist focus on learner autonomy and self-directed learning (Haugsbakken & Langseth, 2014). YouTube video-audio content can also aid language learning by offering contextualized and authentic uses of the language that are essential for the construction of communicative competence. This is in line with the constructivist ideology of learning in meaningful contexts (Nikitina, 2010). In addition to this strong foundation, there is the Multimedia Learning Theory, which claims that people learn best when information is presented in verbal and visual form, rather than text-based information.

This idea is based on dual-channel assumption that the brain uses separate channels to process both auditory and visual information with bounded capacity (Mayer, 2000; Mayer, 2001). Instructional strategies like constructivism and communicative teaching facilitate the application of multimedia in language instruction as they promote learner-centered strategies and interactive learning processes (Xia & Tao, 2013). Multimedia language learning systems can be customized to meet individual learner needs, and YouTube hence becomes an effective means for individualized language instruction through personalized multimedia materials (Brennen et al., 2012). In addition, Social Learning Theory posits that learning is achieved through communication and collaboration, which are essential in language acquisition (Panhwar et al., 2016). YouTube as a social platform provides learners with means to engage with content and the peers, thereby enhancing language capacity through social interaction. Even though YouTube has many benefits for language learning, it is not without challenges. Its usefulness depends on the quality of information and people's ability to utilize the site (Jovanovic et al., 2012). For maximum educational advantages of YouTube, targeted approaches to teaching are needed, and educators have to guide students to make use of the site in complementing conventional learning and developing language proficiency (Jovanovic et al., 2012).

These theories together provide a solid framework for investigating the potential for YouTube to enhance the writing skill of EFL students, and this guides the research questions and research methodology for the study.

Research Questions

This Study investigates EFL students' experiences of using YouTube as a tool to improve their writing skills, with particular attention to their perceptions, engagement, and the overall effectiveness of this digital platform. It addresses the following questions:

1. How do EFL students perceive the use of YouTube as a supplementary resource for enhancing their writing skills?
2. What specific experiences do EFL students report when using YouTube videos for writing revision, particularly regarding their understanding and retention of writing concepts?

Methodology

Design

The study utilizes a phenomenological design to explore the experiences and perceptions of EFL learners regarding the use of YouTube videos in writing skill development. The approach is best suited to speak about learners lived experience, hence enabling an in-depth investigation of their interaction with YouTube as a supplementary learning tool, and how it influences their writing development.

Participants

A purposive sample of 50 English as a foreign language student in a university English program participated in the study. They were aged between 18 and 25 years, with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The participants were intermediate and advanced learners who actively used YouTube as an auxiliary tool to their writing skills. The recruitment was conducted via announcements in English research classes.

Data Collection Methods

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, observation, and reflective questionnaires to elicit the experiences and perceptions of YouTube-based learning among the participants. The interviews provided qualitative data on how students used YouTube videos in writing revision and concept clarification.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were also analyzed using thematic analysis. This was achieved through open coding, categorization, and the determination of common patterns in connection with students' motivation, engagement, and understanding of writing concepts. The themes were further reduced to encapsulate the essence of participants' experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants prior to data collection. They were assured confidentiality as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All the data were anonymized and used for research purposes only.

Findings

Here, the thematic analysis results of this section provide an understanding of the experience of EFL students in utilizing YouTube as a supplementary tool for writing development. Thematic analysis revealed some overarching themes, including Engagement and Motivation, Understanding and Writing Concept Retention, Accessibility and Convenience, Quality of Content, and Challenges Encountered. The themes offer together how students perceive the strengths and weaknesses of utilizing YouTube in teaching writing. Table 1 summarizes the points of interest linked to the research questions, providing an overview of the themes identified in the findings.

Table 1

Research Questions	Codes	Initial Points of Interest
1. How do EFL students perceive the use of YouTube as a supplementary resource for enhancing their writing skills, and how does it affect their motivation and engagement in writing tasks?	Engagement, Motivation	Students find YouTube effective, enjoy colorful animations.
2. What specific experiences do EFL students report when using YouTube videos for writing revision, particularly regarding their understanding and retention of writing concepts?	Understanding and Retention	Ability to revisit videos, focus on unclear concepts, helps when missing class.
3. How do students perceive the accessibility and convenience of using YouTube for writing instruction, and how does this impact their learning experience?	Accessibility and Convenience	Easy access to videos, subscribing to class channel, playlists.

4. How do EFL students evaluate the quality of YouTube content related to writing, and what challenges do they encounter while using this platform for learning?	Quality of Content, Challenges	Videos curated by teachers, weak Wi-Fi, distractions in class.
5. In what ways does the use of YouTube facilitate peer learning and collaboration among EFL students, and how does it promote self-directed learning?	Peer Learning, Self-Directed Learning	Discussing videos, peer teaching, watching videos proactively.

Engagement and Motivation

The respondents noted that YouTube videos strongly motivated and engaged them for writing work. The respondents indicated that the videos were useful and noted that writing no longer became complicated whenever they accessed teaching videos. Onestar said, "You can view videos anywhere and anytime, making it convenient to learn." The good colors and energetic presentation of the videos made them enjoy learning, and it became more appealing. Students also said that YouTube is especially helpful for shy students who do not wish to question teachers when they are puzzled.

Retaining and Understanding Writing Concepts

Students highlighted the advantage of being able to re-watch the videos, allowing them to focus only on parts they were unsure about. This feature was very much in favor of students who had missed class because the videos allowed them to have an effective revision tool. The subjects explained how the visual and auditory nature of the videos assisted them with understanding and this ultimately led to better retention of writing strategies. A respondent stated, "I am able to comprehend the ideas presented in the videos quite well, which improved my writing."

Accessibility and Convenience

Ease of access on YouTube was a thread that threaded through participants' responses. The participants found it easy to access the videos since YouTube is a very popular platform. Some participants subscribed to the class channel to make accessibility more convenient, and the playlists by the instructor made accessing relevant content easy for them. One of the participants said, "You can watch videos anywhere and anytime, which is convenient." They enjoyed the convenience of watching videos at will and being able to revisit some sections whenever needed.

Quality of Content

Participants provided positive feedback about the quality of content presented in the videos, with participants commenting that the content was appropriate to their level of skill. They were chosen by their teacher, who was familiar with their context and learning needs. Students found them more relevant, comprehensible, and examination-specific compared to other videos on the same subject. The viewing increase, particularly during exam season, testified to the power of these videos for students.

Challenges Faced

Despite the benefits, participants showed that they had issues using YouTube in writing instruction. The issues included lack of good Wi-Fi connectivity, particularly for hostel residents. Additionally, some students stated that knowing that the videos would be saved to watch later introduced an issue of not being focused during live sessions.

Peer Learning and Collaboration

Utilization of YouTube facilitated peer learning and collaboration between students. Participants revealed that they would often share the videos with peers and collaborate on writing tasks after watching the learning material. Additionally, some students engaged in peer teaching, helping fellow students who were unable to grasp certain concepts.

Comparative Learning Experience

Most of the participants favored the use of YouTube over traditional methods of teaching in writing education. They found that the interactive aspect of the videos was more useful to enhance their knowledge and interest.

Self-Directed Learning

Students had reported that they watched YouTube videos on their own, typically watching them when absent from class, even without direct instructions to do so. This allowed them to catch up with classmates. Over time, the habit gained autonomy in learning since they would become accustomed to searching for YouTube videos whenever stuck on various subjects.

Conclusion of Findings

These findings present the multifunctional role that YouTube plays in cultivating EFL students' writing ability. While the students appreciate the interaction and convenience it offers, they are also faced with challenges that need to be addressed. The findings that come out of this research identify the enormous potential of YouTube as an effective support tool in EFL writing instruction.

The aim of this study was to explore EFL students' experiences with YouTube as a tool for enhancing their writing skills. The findings presented a series of core themes, including increased motivation and engagement, improved understanding and retention of writing fundamentals, convenience and simplicity of access, and perceived quality of information.

The following figure illustrates the thematic map of the thematic analysis of EFL students' experience of learning to write using YouTube. The mind map illustrates the overall themes of the study and how aspects like engagement, understanding, accessibility, content quality, challenges, peer collaboration, and self-directed learning interconnect.

Figure 1: Thematic Map Illustrating Key Themes Related to EFL Students' Experiences Using YouTube



Interpretation of Findings

The findings show that YouTube has an important function in improving EFL students' writing ability. Students reported that the interactive quality of the videos and being able to watch them at any time lowered the perceived difficulty of writing tasks. This confirms earlier research showing the motivational advantage of applying multimedia materials in language education (Indrasari, 2010; Pratiwi, 2011). The ability to view content at their own pace also supports research by Safwat and Seddeek (2023), which identifies the importance of learning environments being flexible. Secondly, the ability to go back to videos for clarification of writing concepts aligns with the principles of constructivist learning theories, which promote self-initiated and tailored learning experiences (Nikitina, 2010). The self-initiated process of coming back to the videos facilitates autonomy among the learners so that they can govern their own writing development.

Connections to Theory and Literature

The positive experiences derived from participants validate the effectiveness of utilizing digital tools, like YouTube, in teaching languages. The validity of content arranged by instructors was a key factor in students' learning and therefore supplemented the argument that tailored study materials are of more value than general materials (Brennen et al., 2012). In addition, the student challenges faced during studying, such as a lack of Wi-Fi signal, emphasize the need for stable access to technology in learning institutions, supplementing arguments in previous research (Suadah, 2014).

Implications for Practice

The findings show that the incorporation of YouTube in the teaching of EFL writing can enhance student motivation and engagement. Teachers can consider gathering high-quality video resources on the course topics to maximize learning achievements. Additionally, possessing guidance on how to use YouTube maximally can potentially avoid issues, such as information overload and various quality of videos.

Limitations

Although this study offers helpful outcomes, some of its limitations should be outlined. The sample size was small, and the findings are not necessarily universally generalizable to all EFL settings. Furthermore, reliance on self-report data may introduce bias since respondents differ in how comfortable they are in making self-disclosures.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future studies can further investigate the long-term effects of using YouTube on writing abilities and motivation across different EFL contexts. Studies can also explore how different types of video material (e.g., instructor-generated vs. peer-generated) impact learning achievement among students. Having a larger sample size and the integration of quantitative results with qualitative findings would also enhance the reliability of the outcome.

Conclusion

This study examined the experience of EFL students using YouTube as an ancillary tool to develop writing skills. The findings showed that YouTube enhanced participation, motivation, comprehension, and access to learning materials. The participants reported that the platform simplified complex writing concepts and provided flexibility to learn at one's convenience. The results have important implications for the teaching of EFL. Integrating YouTube in writing instruction has the ability to increase learning as more participatory and student-

centered, consistent with constructivist and multimedia models of learning. Teachers are encouraged to produce high-quality, context-rich videos that specifically target curriculum goals to reach peak levels of learning. Bypassing technical barriers, such as network issues, remains important to ensure equal access.

This research contributes to the growing body of research on digital-assisted language learning because it offers qualitative insights into learners lived experience with YouTube. As technology continues to become more dominant in teaching, these human-curated, multimodal content might complement AI-based content and facilitate real-world, self-paced learning. Future research must examine the long-term effects of YouTube integration in different EFL settings and explore its integration with other emerging technologies for writing skills development.

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Correlation Between Field Cognitive Style and Listening Strategy Use Among English Teacher Education Majors

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between field cognitive styles and listening strategy use among English teacher-training students. Sixty-six senior English education majors from Fuyang Normal University participated. Data were collected through the Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT) and a listening strategy questionnaire, and analysed using SPSS 26.0. Results indicate clear differences in cognitive styles, with more field-independent than field-dependent learners. A significant correlation was found between cognitive style and listening strategy preferences: field-independent learners used cognitive strategies more frequently, while field-dependent learners showed a greater tendency toward metacognitive strategies. No significant difference was identified in the use of social or affective strategies. These findings offer pedagogical implications for English listening instruction, suggesting that teachers should adapt their teaching methods to learners' cognitive styles and guide students toward greater awareness of their individual learning preferences.

Key words: field-independent, field-dependent, meta-cognitive strategies, cognitive strategies, social/affective strategies, English teacher-training students

1 Introduction

Listening is a fundamental component of English language teaching and one of the essential skills for language acquisition. It serves as the foundation for developing the other three core skills—speaking, reading, and writing. As a primary channel of linguistic input, listening plays a crucial role in second language acquisition, and appropriate and effective listening input facilitates comprehension and promotes oral proficiency. In the Chinese context, listening comprehension also occupies a significant proportion in key examinations such as the senior high school and college entrance examinations. However, even at the tertiary level, many students' listening proficiency remains unsatisfactory, indicating persistent challenges in listening comprehension among college students.

Over the past few decades, foreign language teaching research in China has emphasized instructional methodology and classroom practice, while comparatively less attention has been paid to individual learner differences—the central factor influencing learning outcomes. Following the reform of the English Curriculum Standards, the pedagogical principle of “teacher-guided and student-centered” instruction has been widely advocated, emphasizing learner autonomy and individual differences. Among these individual factors, cognitive style represents a crucial yet often overlooked dimension affecting how learners perceive, process, and respond to linguistic input. Within the broad framework of cognitive style, field dependence–independence has attracted substantial research interest. The term field refers to the external context that influences an individual's perception, and the distinction between field-dependent (FD) and field-independent (FI) learners lies in the degree to which perception is influenced by external cues. Field-independent learners tend to separate details from contextual backgrounds, process information analytically, and exhibit stronger autonomy in learning. In contrast, field-dependent learners rely more on contextual and social information,

showing strengths in holistic perception and interpersonal communication. These cognitive differences naturally influence learners' strategic preferences during the listening process.

Listening, as both a difficult and pivotal aspect of foreign language learning, requires learners to deploy effective strategies to comprehend auditory input and construct meaning. Research in second language acquisition suggests that the choice and frequency of listening strategies—such as meta-cognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies—can significantly influence listening performance. Therefore, exploring how learners' field cognitive styles relate to their listening strategy use is essential for understanding individual variation in listening comprehension and for improving pedagogical practices.

The present study takes field cognitive style as the analytical entry point to examine its relationship with listening strategy use among English teacher-training students. By identifying the correlation between these two variables, the study aims to (1) help learners recognize their own cognitive style and adopt more effective listening strategies, (2) provide empirical insights for teachers to design differentiated listening instruction that accommodates cognitive diversity, and (3) ultimately enhance students' listening performance and overall communicative competence. From a pedagogical standpoint, the findings of this study may contribute to optimizing listening instruction in teacher education programs, enabling future English teachers to cultivate strategic and cognitively aware learners in their own classrooms.

2. Literature Review

This chapter introduces the definition and classification of field cognitive styles and listening strategies, the theoretical foundations to support the research, and a brief description of related research at home and abroad.

2.1 The Definition of Field Cognitive Style and Its Measurement

The concept of cognitive style originates from psychology and refers to an individual's habitual and consistent way of perceiving, processing, and organizing information. Allport (1937) was among the earliest scholars to propose the idea, defining it as a stable characteristic that differentiates how individuals think and learn. According to Cao Haiying (2011), cognitive style can be described as the distinctive and consistent tendencies that individuals exhibit when processing information.

Among various classifications of cognitive style, the field dependence–independence dimension proposed by Witkin and his colleagues (1977) has received the greatest attention in educational and applied linguistics research. From the perspective of Gestalt psychology, Witkin discovered that individuals differ in their sensitivity to external contextual cues—the “field”—that influence perception and decision-making. Field-independent learners can distinguish specific details from complex backgrounds, analyse information autonomously, and maintain relative independence from environmental factors. In contrast, field-dependent learners perceive information more holistically, are easily influenced by contextual elements, and tend to rely on social feedback and external structure.

To measure these differences, Witkin developed several well-known instruments: the Rod and Frame Test, Body Adjustment Test, Rotating Room Test, and the Embedded Figures Test (EFT). Among them, the Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT), a group-adapted version of the EFT, has become the most widely used tool due to its simplicity and reliability. Participants are required to identify a simple geometric figure embedded within a complex pattern, and their accuracy reflects their degree of field independence. In China, the Department of Psychology at Beijing Normal University revised and localized the GEFT (1998), making it suitable for use among Chinese learners.

2.1.1 Research on Field Cognitive Style Abroad

Research on field cognitive style abroad dates back to the 1940s and has developed into a mature theoretical system. Witkin's early studies on pilots' spatial perception during World War II led to the formulation of the field dependence–independence theory. Subsequent studies confirmed that cognitive style significantly affects learning behaviour and academic performance. Hansen and Stansfield (1981) found that field-independent learners achieved higher proficiency in Spanish language courses than field-dependent learners. Carter (1988) further demonstrated similar results among American university students, indicating that field-independent individuals tend to perform better in analytical language tasks and standardized assessments, whereas field-dependent learners excel in communicative and cooperative learning contexts.

Recent research continues to support the pedagogical significance of cognitive styles. Khodadady and Zeynali (2021), in a study of 200 Iranian university students, found that field cognitive style was a reliable predictor of IELTS listening performance, suggesting that this psychological construct holds explanatory power for academic achievement. Overall, foreign research provides a robust theoretical and empirical foundation for exploring how field cognitive styles influence second language acquisition, including listening comprehension.

2.1.2 Research on Field Cognitive Style in China

In China, research on cognitive styles began in the 1980s when psychologists and educators introduced the concept from the West. Early contributions came from scholars at Beijing Normal University and Peking University, who translated and adapted Witkin's theories to the Chinese context (Li & Song, 1999). The localized version of the GEFT has since been widely used in educational psychology and applied linguistics.

With the implementation of the New Curriculum Standards and the emphasis on “student-centered” instruction, interest in cognitive styles has grown rapidly. Empirical studies have explored their relationship with language learning outcomes. For instance, Danshu Yao (2002) examined the link between field cognitive style and English reading comprehension, revealing that field-independent learners focused more on textual details, whereas field-dependent learners relied more on contextual knowledge. Xiaojuan Zhang (2008) reported that field-independent students achieved better listening comprehension scores, and Hongbo Yi and Xuemei Pei (2015) found similar results among technical college students in Anhui Province. Although domestic research has developed later than that in Western contexts, it has actively absorbed international theories and applied them to English language education. However, relatively few studies have specifically addressed the relationship between field cognitive style and listening strategy use, leaving a valuable gap for further investigation.

2.2 A Review of Research on Listening Strategies

Listening strategies, as a subcategory of learning strategies, refer to the deliberate techniques or mental operations that learners employ to comprehend, process, and retain auditory input. Weinstein and Mayer (1986) conceptualized learning strategies as conscious behaviours that help learners regulate their cognition, motivation, and affect during learning. Similarly, listening strategies can be defined as purposeful actions that facilitate understanding and interpretation of spoken language (Weinstein et al., 1986).

Oxford (1990) classified language learning strategies into direct (memory, cognitive, compensation) and indirect (meta-cognitive, affective, social) categories. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) further refined these into meta-cognitive, cognitive, and social/affective

strategies—a tripartite framework later adopted by Vandergrift (1996, 2003) in listening research.

- Meta-cognitive strategies involve planning, monitoring, and evaluating one's listening process.
- Cognitive strategies focus on manipulating the language material directly, such as note-taking, inferencing, or summarizing.
- Social/affective strategies include interacting with others, managing anxiety, and maintaining motivation during listening tasks.

2.2.1 Research on Listening Strategies Abroad

Since the 1980s, research on listening strategies in second language acquisition has proliferated. Studies have examined how training in strategy use enhances listening comprehension and how learners of different proficiency levels employ strategies differently. Vandergrift (2003), in his study of French learners, found that proficient listeners relied more heavily on meta-cognitive strategies, reflecting better self-regulation during listening. O'Malley and Chamot (1990) demonstrated that learners who received explicit training in listening strategies performed significantly better on listening tests than those without such training. These findings confirm that strategic instruction plays a vital role in improving learners' listening proficiency, self-efficacy, and overall language competence.

2.2.2 Research on Listening Strategies in China

Since the early 21st century, Chinese scholars have increasingly explored listening strategies to enhance listening pedagogy in English teaching. Zhao Rui (2011) found that university students in Changchun used pre-listening and while-listening strategies more frequently than post-listening strategies, and that gender differences affected strategic preferences. Jing Lu (2013) reported that strategy training could effectively reduce listening anxiety and improve comprehension efficiency among college students. Ying Yang (2018) further confirmed that learners with different field cognitive styles adopted distinct listening strategies, which correlated with their listening performance. Peidong Li (2019) observed that cognitive strategies were the most frequently used among English majors and that their use helped alleviate anxiety during listening tasks.

Overall, domestic research has made considerable progress in identifying the types and effects of listening strategies. However, studies specifically examining the interaction between cognitive styles and listening strategy use remain limited. This gap provides the rationale for the present study, which aims to integrate cognitive and strategic perspectives to deepen the understanding of individual differences in English listening comprehension.

3 Methods

This chapter describes the research design, participants, instruments, procedures, and data analysis employed in the present study. The study aims to examine the relationship between field cognitive style and listening strategy use among English teacher-training students.

3.1 Research Questions

Based on the objectives of this study, three key research questions were formulated. The study first explored the distribution of field-independent and field-dependent learners among English

teacher-training students. It then examined whether there was a significant correlation between field cognitive style and the use of listening strategies. Finally, it investigated the specific differences in listening strategy use between field-independent and field-dependent learners. These questions collectively guided the design, data collection, and statistical analyses throughout the research.

3.2 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative correlational design to explore the relationship between learners' field cognitive styles and their listening strategy use. Quantitative methods were chosen because they allow for systematic data collection and statistical analysis of relationships among variables (Creswell, 2014).

The study involved administering two established instruments: the Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT) to determine participants' field cognitive styles, and a Listening Strategy Questionnaire to assess their use of meta-cognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies. Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS 26.0 to compute descriptive statistics, correlation coefficients, and independent-samples t-tests.

3.3 Participants

The participants were 66 senior English teacher-training students from two classes at Fuyang Normal University, China. They were chosen because senior students typically have developed stable cognitive and learning styles after several years of English study. All participants had completed at least six semesters of English coursework and possessed adequate listening experience through national proficiency exams such as CET-4 and CET-6.

The sample included both male and female students, aged between 21 and 23. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to the study. The confidentiality of all participants' responses was strictly maintained.

3.4 Research Instruments

Two instruments were used in this study: the Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT) and the Listening Strategy Questionnaire.

3.4.1 Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT)

The GEFT, originally designed by Witkin et al. (1977), was employed to identify participants' field cognitive styles. The version used in this study was the 1998 revised edition adapted by the Department of Psychology, Beijing Normal University, to suit the Chinese context. The GEFT consists of three sections with a total of 29 items. The first section (nine items) serves as a practice phase, while the second and third sections (ten items each) are scored. Participants are required to locate a simple geometric shape hidden within a complex pattern within 15 minutes. Each correct identification earns one point. Following Chen Shuangmin's (2016) classification criteria, participants were ranked based on their total GEFT scores. The top one-third were categorized as field-independent, the bottom one-third as field-dependent, and the middle one-third were excluded to ensure distinct group differentiation.

3.4.2 Listening Strategy Questionnaire

The Listening Strategy Questionnaire was designed based on the classifications of Vandergrift (1996, 2003) and Huang Sheng (2002). It includes 35 items divided into three categories:

- Meta-cognitive strategies (Items 1–15): planning, monitoring, and evaluating listening activities.
- Cognitive strategies (Items 16–30): processing and manipulating linguistic input (e.g., inferencing, note-taking).
- Social/affective strategies (Items 31–35): managing anxiety and interacting with others for comprehension support.

The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (almost never true of me) to 5 (almost always true of me). Higher scores indicate more frequent use of a particular strategy type. Prior to data collection, a pilot test was conducted with 15 students to ensure clarity of items. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was verified, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87, indicating high reliability.

3.5 Research Procedures

The study was carried out during the second semester of the 2024–2025 academic year. The research procedures comprised four main phases. In the Preparation Phase, participants were informed of the study's objectives and instructed to respond sincerely. They were assured that participation was entirely voluntary and that all data would be treated with strict confidentiality. During the Administration of the Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT), participants completed the 29 test items within 15 minutes under supervised conditions. The GEFT results were used to determine the participants' field-dependent or field-independent cognitive styles. Following this, the Listening Strategy Questionnaire was administered. Participants were required to complete 35 items, which took approximately 20 minutes. Finally, in the Data Screening and Coding Phase, all responses were examined for completeness and consistency. Questionnaires containing missing or invalid responses were discarded. The valid data were then numerically coded and entered into SPSS 26.0 for statistical analysis.

3.6 Data Collection and Analysis

The data analysis was performed using SPSS 26.0 and consisted of three main stages. In the Descriptive Statistics stage, mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for the GEFT results and for each category of listening strategies, namely metacognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies. In the Correlation Analysis stage, Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationship between field cognitive styles (as measured by GEFT scores) and the use of different listening strategy categories. The strength of the correlations was interpreted following Cohen's (1988) guidelines, with $r = 0.10$ indicating a small effect, $r = 0.30$ a moderate effect, and $r = 0.50$ a strong effect. In the Independent-Samples t-Test stage, statistical comparisons were made between field-independent and field-dependent learners to identify potential differences in their use of listening strategies. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted for each strategy category, with the level of statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed).

4 Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the results of the statistical analyses and discusses their implications in relation to the research questions. The data collected from the Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT) and the Listening Strategy Questionnaire were analysed using SPSS 26.0. The findings are presented through descriptive statistics, correlation analyses, and independent-samples t-tests.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis of Field Cognitive Styles

The Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT) was used to determine the field cognitive styles of the participants. A total of 66 students completed the test. Following Chen Shuangmin's (2016) classification criteria, the top 22 students were identified as field-independent (FI) learners, and the bottom 22 were identified as field-dependent (FD) learners

Table 4-1 The Results of GEFT (Group Embedded Figures Test)

Category	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Field-independent	22	22	28	24.45	1.920
Field-dependent	22	14	18	16.00	1.309

As shown in Table 4.1, FI learners scored higher on average ($M = 24.45$) than FD learners ($M = 16.00$), indicating that a considerable number of students demonstrated a strong ability to separate specific details from complex background information. The smaller standard deviation among FD learners suggests greater homogeneity within that group. These results confirm that English teacher-training students at Fuyang Normal University display clear distinctions in their cognitive styles, providing a sound basis for further comparison of listening strategy use.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis of Listening Strategy Use

The Listening Strategy Questionnaire assessed the frequency of three categories of listening strategies: meta-cognitive, cognitive, and social/affective strategies. According to Oxford's (1990) classification of Likert-scale means, scores between 3.5 and 5.0 indicate frequent use, 2.5 to 3.4 indicate occasional use, and below 2.5 indicate rare use.

Table 4.2 Frequency of Using Listening Strategy

Mean	Frequency	
4.5-5.0	High	Always used
3.5-4.5		Often used
2.5-3.5	Middle	Sometime used
1.5-2.5		Rarely used
1.0-1.5	Low	Never used

Based on this classification, participants' responses were summarized as follows.

Table 4.3 Results of Students Using Listening Strategies

Category	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Meta-cognitive strategies scores	44	2.5	4.3	3.232	.4694
Cognitive strategies scores	44	2.4	4.2	3.375	.4881
Social/affective strategies scores	44	3.0	4.4	3.639	.3149

The results indicate that students used social/affective strategies most frequently ($M = 3.64$), followed by cognitive strategies ($M = 3.38$) and meta-cognitive strategies ($M = 3.23$). This suggests that students occasionally used meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies but more frequently relied on social/affective strategies to manage anxiety and sustain motivation during listening tasks.

In summary, while students consciously organized listening activities to prepare for English proficiency examinations, their awareness of specific listening strategies remained limited. This explains the moderate frequency of meta-cognitive and cognitive strategy use observed in the data.

4.3 Correlation Between Field Cognitive Style and Listening Strategies

To examine the relationship between field cognitive style and listening strategy use, Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed. The correlation coefficient ranges are shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Person Correlation Coefficient (r) Scale

Person correlation coefficient	0.0-0.19	0.2-0.39	0.4-0.69	0.7-1.0
Degree of correlation	Extremely weak correlation	Weak correlation	Significant correlation	Strong correlation

The results of the correlation analysis are summarized in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Results of Correction Between Field Cognitive Style and Listening Strategies

		Meta-cognitive strategies	Cognitive strategies	Social/affective strategies
Field-independent	Pearson Correlation	.522*	.615**	.476*
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.013	.002	.025
Field-dependent	Pearson Correlation	.517*	.633**	.526*
	Sig.(2-tailed)	.014	.002	.012

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed)

As shown in Table 4.5, both FI and FD learners demonstrated significant positive correlations between their field cognitive style and all three types of listening strategies. The strongest correlation appeared between cognitive strategies and field cognitive style ($r = 0.615$ for FI; $r = 0.633$ for FD), indicating that students with higher field independence or field dependence tend to use cognitive strategies more actively. These findings suggest that learners' field cognitive style influences their strategic behavior during listening, consistent with the results reported by Vandergrift (2003) and Khodadady & Zeynali (2021).

4.4 Differences in Listening Strategy Use Between FI and FD Learners

To further explore differences in the use of listening strategies between FI and FD learners, an independent-samples t-test was conducted. Table 4.6 presents the descriptive statistics for each group.

Table 4.6 Frequency of FI/FD Students Using Listening Strategies

Listening Strategies	Field-independent/field dependent	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Meta-cognitive strategies	Field-independent	22	3.082	.4078
	Field-dependent	22	3.382	.4876

Cognitive strategies	Field-independent	22	3.586	.4368
	Field-dependent	22	3.164	.4510
Social/affective strategies	Field-independent	22	3.682	.2905
	Field-dependent	22	3.595	.3387

FI learners obtained higher mean scores in cognitive strategies ($M = 3.59$) than FD learners ($M = 3.16$), while FD learners scored higher in meta-cognitive strategies ($M = 3.38$) than FI learners ($M = 3.08$). The scores for social/affective strategies were high for both groups and showed minimal difference ($M = 3.68$ for FI; $M = 3.60$ for FD). To determine whether these differences were statistically significant, independent-samples t-tests were conducted. The results are summarized in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 Difference of FD/FI Students Using Listening Strategies

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variance					T-test for Equality of Means	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Meta-cognitive strategies	Equal variances assumed	.825	.369	-2.214	42	.032	-.3000	.1355
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.214	40.727	.033	-.3000	.1355
Cognitive strategies	Equal variances assumed	.559	.459	3.158	42	.003	.4227	.1338
	Equal variances not assumed			3.158	41.957	.003	.4227	.1338
Social/affective strategies	Equal variances assumed	.457	.503	.908	42	.369	.0864	.0951
	Equal variances not assumed			.908	41.048	.369	.0864	.0951

The results of the independent-samples t-tests revealed notable differences in listening strategy use between field-independent (FI) and field-dependent (FD) learners. For meta-cognitive strategies, the Levene's test for equality of variances yielded a p-value of 0.369 (greater than 0.05), indicating that equal variances could be assumed. The t-test for equality of means produced a p-value of 0.032, which is less than 0.05, demonstrating a significant difference between FI and FD learners. This result suggests that learners with different field cognitive styles vary significantly in their use of meta-cognitive strategies such as planning, monitoring, and evaluating their listening process.

For cognitive strategies, the Levene's test showed a p-value of 0.459 (greater than 0.05), again indicating equal variances. The t-test for equality of means yielded a p-value of 0.003, which is below the 0.05 threshold, confirming a significant difference between FI and FD

learners. This implies that FI learners are more inclined to employ cognitive strategies, such as inferencing, note-taking, and summarizing, compared with FD learners. In contrast, for social/affective strategies, the Levene's test resulted in a p-value of 0.503 (greater than 0.05), suggesting equal variances. The corresponding t-test for equality of means produced a p-value of 0.369 (greater than 0.05), indicating no significant difference between FI and FD learners in the use of social/affective strategies. This finding suggests that both groups tend to use social and affective strategies—such as anxiety reduction and peer interaction—at comparable levels. In conclusion, there are significant differences in the use of meta-cognitive and cognitive listening strategies between field-independent and field-dependent learners, while their use of social/affective strategies does not differ significantly. These results confirm that field cognitive style is an important factor influencing students' choice and application of listening strategies.

5 Conclusion

This chapter summarizes the major findings of the study, discusses their pedagogical implications for both teachers and students, and outlines the limitations of the present research. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between field cognitive style and listening strategy use among English teacher-training students at Fuyang Normal University.

5.1 Major Findings

Based on the analyses of data collected from the Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT) and the Listening Strategy Questionnaire using SPSS 26.0, the following major findings were obtained:

- First, there are clear differences in the field cognitive styles of English teacher-training students, who can be classified into two distinct groups: field-independent (FI) and field-dependent (FD) learners. This confirms that cognitive style is a significant source of individual variation among language learners.
- Second, the analysis of the listening strategy questionnaire indicated that English teacher-training students occasionally use listening strategies, suggesting a moderate level of strategic awareness. Both FI and FD learners demonstrated positive attitudes toward the use of listening strategies but did not employ them frequently or systematically. Correlation analyses revealed a significant positive relationship between field cognitive style and listening strategy use. Among the three types of listening strategies, social/affective strategies showed the strongest correlation, followed by cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies.
- Third, the results of the independent-samples t-tests showed significant differences in the use of cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies between FI and FD learners, while no significant difference was found in their use of social/affective strategies. Specifically, FI learners preferred cognitive strategies, such as note-taking, inferencing, and summarizing, reflecting their analytical orientation and independence in information processing. In contrast, FD learners favoured meta-cognitive strategies, including planning, monitoring.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study provide important insights for improving English listening instruction in higher education. The implications are discussed from the perspectives of both teachers and students.

5.2.1 Implications for Teachers

In college English classrooms, students generally develop relatively stable cognitive styles by the time they enter university. It is therefore essential for teachers to acknowledge and respect individual differences in students' cognitive styles when designing listening instruction. For English teacher-training majors—who are expected to become future English educators—explicit and systematic listening strategy instruction should be introduced early in their academic program. Teachers should design targeted listening activities suited to students with different cognitive orientations and provide opportunities for students to practice and internalize strategy use. The present findings indicate that while students frequently employ social/affective strategies, their use of meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies remains limited. This suggests that many learners are unfamiliar with these strategy types or lack the procedural knowledge to apply them effectively. Teachers should therefore explicitly explain the functions and benefits of different strategies, model the processes of planning, monitoring, and evaluating listening tasks, and encourage students to integrate both meta-cognitive and cognitive strategies into their learning routines.

Moreover, because learners with different field cognitive styles exhibit varying preferences for strategy use, teachers should help students achieve balanced strategic development by promoting awareness and adaptive use of multiple strategies. The improvement of listening competence is a gradual process, and teachers should consistently encourage students to engage in reflective practice and continuous strategy use. Only through sustained training can learners achieve stable and lasting progress in listening comprehension.

5.2.2 Implications for Students

For English teacher-training students, the cultivation of effective listening strategies is essential, given their prospective roles as future English educators. They should develop an awareness of their individual cognitive styles and understand how these styles influence listening behaviour, systematically study various categories of listening strategies, and identify those that correspond most closely to their cognitive preferences. In addition, they need to establish long-term listening plans that integrate strategy use into regular practice, progressively enhance the frequency and flexibility of strategy application to attain higher levels of proficiency and automaticity, and adopt social and affective strategies to manage anxiety and sustain concentration during listening tasks. Through becoming autonomous and strategic listeners, these students can not only enhance their own listening comprehension but also build a strong pedagogical foundation for guiding their future learners in effective listening instruction.

5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

Although this study provides meaningful insights into the relationship between field cognitive style and listening strategy use among English teacher-training students, several limitations should be acknowledged.

- First, the sample size was relatively small. Only 66 participants from Fuyang Normal University were included, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should increase the sample size and include participants from different institutions to ensure broader representativeness.
- Second, the Listening Strategy Questionnaire used in this study was adapted from existing instruments and therefore did not cover all possible listening strategies. Some subcategories, such as compensation or memory strategies, were not included. Future researchers could employ or design more comprehensive instruments to capture a wider range of strategy use.
- Third, the data analysis in this study was limited to quantitative methods. Qualitative approaches, such as interviews, classroom observations, or think-aloud protocols, could provide richer insights into learners' strategic behaviours and the cognitive processes underlying them.
- Finally, this study focused exclusively on students from one institution. Differences in regional background, proficiency level, or curriculum design (for example, between northern and southern Chinese universities) may also influence cognitive styles and strategy preferences. Future research should therefore consider cross-institutional or cross-regional comparisons to enhance the external validity and explanatory power of the findings.

5.4 Summary

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that field cognitive style significantly affects the use of listening strategies among English teacher-training students. Field-independent learners prefer cognitive strategies, while field-dependent learners rely more on meta-cognitive strategies, with both groups actively using social/affective strategies.

Pedagogically, these findings highlight the need for differentiated listening instruction that accounts for learners' cognitive styles and promotes balanced, strategic engagement with listening tasks. By integrating cognitive awareness and strategic training into English listening pedagogy, both teachers and learners can contribute to the long-term improvement of listening competence and autonomous learning ability.

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