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~Editor's Note~

Dear Readers & Contributors,

The humble, yet very beautiful and significant 'neem' flower is our cover page. Drawing its inspiration, we aspire to be a more meaningful enterprise. IJELLS forges ahead bringing together a team of experts in the field from across the country and the world. Presenting from this issue onwards a Board of Advisors, Board of Editors and Board of Reviewers.

The 'Creative Writing in English' section has a poignant, stream-of-consciousness account of a young teacher, to a couple of memorable stories, one is to a call to stop the war in which lies the destruction of the whole mankind and another one which brings back to life the 'fathers' of English literature. Some papers in the other two sections, which the reader needs to focus along with everything else, on Crime Fiction, Anthropomorphic analysis of Bambi and the impact of AI on English Learners.

International Journal of English: Literature, Language and Skills – IJELLS extends its service into publishing books. We have started the enterprise IJELLS Publishing, a platform where we help authors self-publish their work. Check out our webpage to learn more: <https://www.ijells.com/ijells-publishing/>.

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~Creative Writing in English~

He Not Read Ms....He No Read

Aishwarya Kayande



Shravan* came in today.
His trustee entrusted him to me.
Let's read, I said.

There was Kanna*. Insisted that he would wait back and clean the class.
He did keep up to his words.

Shravan is a delicate baby; did I mention?
But art runs in his veins. Only that?
He got a few futile wires to the class.
Yellow and black. Tangled so; mysteries in themselves.
The magic with which he created a beautiful pattern of that electrical waste,
Was a wonder to watch.

Completely occupied was I in this process of creation.
Got back when I realized the purpose of him being there.

We tried identifying a few words and letters.
Dani barged in. The words were fairly simple for her.
She completed reading the two sides of the illustration in a jiffy.
Shravan's struggle was apparent.
Dani did I mention; is too frank and outspoken?
Cannot please others. Euphemism is too far a cry.
Also, did I mention she's the most well-groomed child of the class?
But underneath the neat plaits and dress,
Have I never seen that tear of wear?

Housekeeping is her mother's profession.
Father is a cripple. But extremely well dressed.
Uncle is the head of this family.
She is under him and doesn't speak a word when he's around.
Too outspoken? It is a wonder.

So., she said, 'He not read Ms'. 'No read- him'- pointing towards him
Bridging the gap with gestures if language falls short.
Giggles. "I read and go" I saw Shravan.
Did he understand? I think he did.
Criticisms go beyond verbal language comprehension.

Shravan looked at me. I twinkled in hope and said, let's read.
We tried again.
Kanna came near us just to quench his curiosity.
He saw the coiled wire there.
He snatched that masterpiece from Sharwin's hand.
A glitter of triumph in his eyes.
Did I tell you about Kanna?
A fist stronger than Shravan; but a kind soul.
Today he was played by his friends.
I saw him crying out of the class;
Somehow freeing himself from that huge heap of human mountain over him.
He was the prey of those monsters.
In this civilized culture of ours; rule of the jungle still prevails.

Kanna then abused Shravan a bit and hit him
When he tried to take his piece back.
He untied the pattern and crumbled it.
There was the same mess messier this time.
Kanna's creation? Or pure destruction?
Either of the two, same continuum. One leads to another.

You are either the prey or the poacher.
I saw Shravan in tears.
He couldn't read and couldn't remember what we did earlier.
'He Not Read Ms. He No Read'.

***Names have been changed; the Author recounts her experience being in an under-resourced classroom in a hostile community.**

Writers' Meet

Medha Sachdev

Shakespeare is seen on the stage speaking out the lines from his sonnet 'Time and Love'.

Shakespeare: Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea
 But sad mortality o'ersways their power.

O! What a pleasure to come back on earth again. Let me see if people remember me. What became of my poems? I promised Dark Lady that I'd make her immortal through my verses. What happened to that?

He moves ahead and happens to peep inside the window of a college nearby. The teacher is teaching one of the poems by Shakespeare.

Shakespeare: Well, I'm gratified. They haven't forgotten me.

Distressed at seeing the way the teacher is teaching.

Oh! What is he teaching about me? Abab...bcbc...cd...What is this? I never wrote a sonnet like that!

Milton enters.

Milton: Hello, Shakespeare! Glad to meet you.

Shakespeare: How dost thou?

Milton: Alright. Just came for a stroll. Wanted to see what's going on here.

Shakespeare: What a coincidence! I came for the same purpose. Thou wert small when I died. Moreover, we belong to different ages.

Milton: I just went to a college. I was distressed to see the way I was being taught by the teacher.

Shakespeare: The same case here. By the way, what happened?

Milton: The students were being told that when I got married, I wrote Paradise Lost and when my wife died, I wrote Paradise Regained. Horrible!

Marlowe enters. Shakespeare and Milton see him.

Shakespeare and Milton: Who's here?

Answers Fretfully

Marlowe: Forgot me? I am Christopher Marlowe, your senior. At least, I never expected this from my juniors.

Shakespeare: Oh! Sir Christopher Marlowe? How glad to see thee, sir!

Milton: Welcome, sir. I'm honoured to see you. I've heard a lot about you.

Turning towards Milton, Marlowe spoke.

Marlowe: You might be pardoned. But Shakespeare who took inspiration from me and my fellows – Lyly, Peele, Kyd, Nashe, Greene and Lodge –the great University Wits, should have recognized me at least. What Tragedies and Comedies they wrote! It's a different matter, however, that Shakespeare topped us all. But the source of inspiration must never be ignored.

Shakespeare: Of course, sir, of course. I haven't forgotten thee. It's just that I saw thee after a long time, that's why...

Milton: By the way, sir, how did you happen to come here?

Marlowe: I was getting bored in the grave. Wanted to move about in the open air. I saw both of you, hence came here.

Shakespeare: Milton, dost thou know I was born just two months after Marlowe? I learnt a lot from him.

Marlowe (to Shakespeare): You're the luckiest. You outlived me and made a figure in the world.

Shakespeare: Yes, sir. I never expected it. But I don't understand what way we are being taught about now-a-days! We are simply unable to understand.

Milton: It's the critics' grace. We never imagined our oeuvre would be hair-split.

Shakespeare: Yes. Even I can't understand what they're teaching.

Wordsworth enters

Wordsworth: Turn wheresoe'er I may,
By night or day,
The things which I have seen
I now can see no more.

Shakespeare: Who's this? He's speaking in a tongue I never used.

Wordsworth: Oh! Sir Shakespeare! Sir Marlowe! Sir Milton! What a luck! I never knew I'd be meeting my seniors today!

Milton: Who are you?

Wordsworth: Sir, I'm William Wordsworth. I just came to know that the people on earth have placed me in the Romantic Age. I am a worshipper of Nature. She's my mentor. She's my solace. I love beauty. (recites)

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air
And the blue sky...

Pope enters.

Pope: Who's blabbering in such common language?

Wordsworth (awestruck) : What's the matter?

Pope: How dare you break the rules of poetry? Where's the decorum, the heroic couplet, the language?

Wordsworth: Sir, I hope you're Alexander Pope. Oh, sir, that language and decorum are left behind. I've devised the language of common man. Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions recollected in tranquility...

Pope: What? I can't tolerate such disgrace of language. I won't stay here a minute. I'll go.

Pope exits.

Milton: Don't worry, sir. He's of a typical temperament. Doesn't like liberty in language. Never mind.

Browning enters.

Browning: What's the matter here? Who's being disgraced?

Marlowe: Who'r you, sir? I don't recognize you.

Shakespeare and Milton (together): Nor do we.

Browning: I am Robert Browning.

Wordsworth: I know him. I was alive when he was born.

Browning: But who are you all? What's the row here?

Wordsworth: I am William Wordsworth. (indicating Shakespeare) This is Shakespeare and (indicating Milton) this is Milton.

Browning: How fortunate to see you all! Please tell me the cause of trouble.

Shakespeare: Sir Alexander Pope came here. He was annoyed with the manner in which William Wordsworth was reciting a poem. He likes discipline in language whereas William likes free use of words.

Browning: So what? Haven't you heard about my poem *Prospice*? It means to look forward. It was not only my looking forward to meet my deceased wife in heaven but I was thoroughly optimistic too. One must have such an attitude in life. See, how beautifully I'm being taught in schools and colleges. They call me robust optimist. Mr. Pope shouldn't have got annoyed at the next generation's progress. One must be optimistic.

TS Eliot enters.

Eliot: Then spoke the thunder Da Da Da, Datta,
 Dayadhvam, Damyata; Shantih Shantih Shantih.
 There's nothing but degeneration here. It's a corrupt world.

Browning: Who're you? Why are you calling it a corrupt world?

Eliot: I'm TS Eliot, born in the late 19th century. You all are probably my seniors.

All: Yes, we are.

Browning (to Eliot): Why're you looking distressed?

Eliot: Why should I not be? What's there to feel happy about on earth? See the condition of modern man. How corrupt, selfish, greedy and immoral he has become! I wrote only that what I saw around me. This is truly a waste land.

Shakespeare: True you are. When I came here, I was annoyed to see myself being criticized so much.

Wordsworth: Yes. Modern man does not feel the divine love and compassion that I once experienced. Oh! the dizzy joys! The aching raptures!

Browning: Yet I feel we must have a positive outlook on life – '*Prospice*'.



Fingerprints

Rafat Farzana

The marriage rituals were about to begin. In the family's tradition, an elderly woman would imprint her fingerprints on the wall before the ceremony. Dipping her fingers in sandalwood and turmeric paste, she pressed them gently against the wall. It was believed to be an auspicious sign, a blessing that marked the beginning of a joyful occasion. Soon after, the celebrations began, and the manja ceremony followed. The bride was prepared with happiness and care.

The mother had chosen a well-educated girl for her son, an engineer. The marriage was performed with all rituals, in an atmosphere filled with joy and celebration. The bride entered the household as a well-cultured and gentle young woman. She learned the customs of the family from her mother-in-law and treated everyone with respect. The old couple, especially the mother-in-law, held a place of honor in the house. Guests were warmly welcomed, and conversations flowed in their presence. Their role in the family was central and valued. Days passed peacefully.

Gradually, however, a change crept in. The son and daughter-in-law began to distance themselves from family affairs. Their attention shifted toward their own lives and ambitions. They stopped involving the parents in matters of the household and no longer invited them to sit with guests. What once felt like presence now began to feel like inconvenience.

The daughter-in-law grew irritated by the old couple's slow movements. Even their footprints on the floor disturbed her sense of order. She began to complain to her husband, calling their presence a hindrance to the cleanliness of the house. She suggested that it would be better if they stayed confined to their room rather than moving about freely. The grandson, however, remained deeply attached to his grandparents. He spent most of his time with them – playing, listening to stories, and sleeping beside them. He noticed the change in his parents' behavior but remained silent, observing everything with quiet understanding.

As time passed, the old couple found themselves restricted to their room. The son, swayed by his wife's reasoning, accepted this change without question. The affection he once held for his parents began to fade into indifference. Though deeply hurt, the parents said nothing. They chose silence over conflict, unwilling to trouble their son. One day, the young couple entered their room with irritation. In a harsh tone, they instructed the old parents not to touch the walls while walking. They complained about the fingerprints left behind. They were told to use a walking aid instead.

The same fingerprints that were once considered sacred had now become unwelcome. The parents nodded silently. The grandson, unable to bear it, ran to them and

embraced them with affection. From that day on, the old couple avoided touching the walls. They depended entirely on the walking aid, careful not to displease their son.

One night, tragedy struck.

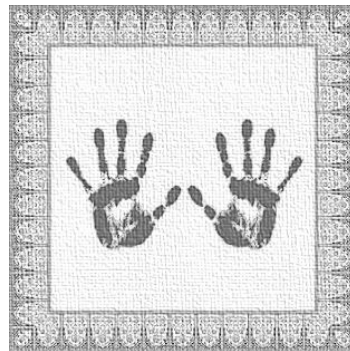
The mother woke up and reached for her walking stick, unaware that it had broken. As she tried to walk to the washroom, she lost her balance and fell. Her scream echoed through the house. The son and daughter-in-law rushed in and found her lying on the floor in pain. Her leg was fractured. The son lifted her gently and laid her on the bed. Tears filled his eyes as realization dawned upon him. He saw his mistake – his neglect, his harshness, his blindness to his parents' dignity. But the realization had come too late.

The mother became bedridden. Her health gradually declined, and she could not recover from the injury. In time, she passed away. The grandson wept deeply, unable to reconcile the love he had received with the neglect he had witnessed.

After her death, the house was prepared for whitewashing, as per custom. Painters arrived and began cleaning the walls. As they moved toward the faded fingerprints, the grandson cried out, pleading with them not to erase them. Those marks, to him, were not stains – they were memories, blessings, and love. No one could calm him.

Moved by his emotion, the painters made a promise. Instead of erasing the fingerprints, they transformed them into a delicate floral design upon the wall. The marks remained – reshaped, but not erased. They became a quiet remembrance of the grandparents, a lasting blessing for the child, and a silent testimony of regret for the parents. The grandson smiled again.

And the son, burdened with guilt, finally learned what he had failed to understand before – that respect, once lost, cannot be restored, but it can be remembered... and repented.



One War Call, Erases Us All

Sneha Viresh Bagdiya



It starts with a spark, we label defense,
Borders, blames, and fragile pretense,
Economies shatter, markets collapse,
Profits are veiled in political maps,
Gambles unfold beyond trusting walls,
One war call, erases us all...

Munitions - Tools in the hands of few,
Sold as a need, the world must pursue,
Arms are traded, alliances are drawn,
Conflicts arise before reasons are born,
Peace is the sole triumph to protect us all,
One war call, erases us all...

When weapons cloak, in virtue's name,
The soul of civilization burns in flames,
When carnage crowns itself as right,
Humanity commits its silent suicide,
None escapes when destruction calls,
One war call, erases us all...

Storms roared after the sirens cried,
Black rain fell under the burning skies,
Ships stand still, all hopes run thin,
War and nature, ferociously closing in,
Nature's fury leaves the Gulf in stalls,
One war call, erases us all...

No borders can stop, fall-outs or blame,
If atoms split, it's the end of the game,
It doesn't matter then, who won or lost,
The end of human life is the ultimate cost,
No flag unfurls after the last empire falls,
One war call, erases us all...

When nuclear weapons cause infinite pain,
Why even hold a power we cannot contain,
One single error of machine or mind,
Can erase the future, we dared to find,
Must a nuclear leash remind what history recalls?
One war call, erases us all...

All victories fade with seeds of death sown,
A harvest of human loss sits on the throne,
All honour withers in the smoke of the gun,
Victory isn't in winning a war, but preventing one,
Don't let these flashes of fire become the final pall,
One war call, erases us all...



The Lost Question, The Lost Answer

Gauri Sen, Translated from Hindi by Mahabir Prasad Yadav

I just can't believe ten years have passed, and when I try to believe, then that question freshly appears and stands before me hanging with the rise and fall in its voice.

That phone call at quarter to three at night!

With my hand bag and a back pack, I just set out for the airport.

"Come madam! Please come, we were waiting for you only. We have to leave from here straight to the cremation ground. After collecting the dead-body from Mortuary, rest of the office people are just reaching there."

I yearned to wail and lament openly but the tears did not accompany me. With my pensive and lonely eyes, I kept gazing at the dead body of my lone son being mingled and lost with the five elements of the universe.

Sujoy and Roma had come to receive me at the Delhi Airport.

"Mumma, Roma takes care of me so well! She herself has done the complete decoration of my residential flat. It is altogether a very separate thing of Sujoy. As a matter of chance, both of them are Bengalis."

Anurag, my son, used to tell me all about these on the phone.

Anyway, after completion of these essential formalities of the last rites and rituals, I desired to spend some time all alone in Anurag's flat. Therefore, I did not consent to go either to the home of Roma or Sujoy, despite them insisting upon me again and again. Roma's mother sent me some food along with Roma.

"Aunty! Tomorrow, we would be organizing a condolence meeting of our office people in the honor of Anurag and we want you to join us there."

"Okay Roma! I will certainly come. Tell me Roma, that as you were such good friends of his, you must be knowing very well. Please tell me very clearly and very honestly as to what, after all, had really happened, with him, yesternight."

"Aunty! yesternight in the office party, he drank a little too much. He drank heavily and drove in the murky night all alone to his home in an inebriated condition, and then the way it all happened....."

Roma did not want to break in front of me.

“But Roma, you and Sujoy were his such close friends, how did you people allow him to drive all alone to home in such a murky night, and that too, in such a drunken condition? You could have stopped him, Isn't it?”

“Yes aunty, we told Anurag again and again that he himself should not drive for home in such a drunken condition, but he did not heed us at all.”

This time, Roma burst out into tears bitterly.

I placed my hand on her shoulder, “Okay my darling daughter, just tell me, in which place did this accident happen? Do you know? Actually, I want to spend some time over there. If possible, let it be so today in the evening itself.”

Roma nodded in consent with, “But let us postpone it today aunty! Tomorrow, I will certainly take you there while on the way back from the office condolence meeting.”

I discovered that the people of Anurag's office were really friendly, and for Anu they were quite emotional as well. How could they help themselves? After all, it was the office of 'creative people'. After the condolence was over, they all kept conversing with me on the terrace and Sujoy introduced them all to me one by one.

“Okay Sujoy, you must be busy in your office work, but if you don't mind, may I just spend a little time in my Anu's cabin?”

“Oh sure, why not Ms. Mukerjee? Off course, you can.”

Sujoy grasped my inhibitions and he escorted me towards Anu's cabin. Roma also accompanied for some distance, “My table is here aunty. If you need anything, please call me.”

I found Anu's cabin was exactly the same way well-arranged as he used to describe it to me. Once or twice, he had also video called me.

I turned my gaze to Sujoy and said, “How cheerful he was, after getting his promotion! For showing me his office and for getting me to interact with each one of his colleagues, how restless he used to be! But I kept avoiding. I would assure him that not only two to four days, but the next time, I will spend my long leave with him. Unfortunately, I was not getting any time for that from my office. I very often would tease him saying that, first, like some girl and then call me to meet her.”

Sujoy left me in Anu's cabin with his memories and went to his room. I was looking for too long at his pen-stand, paper-weight, table-calendar and everything. I lapsed into a flashback and thus continued living with his memories turning things upside down in his cabin. Roma came and then it somehow snapped my somnolence.

"Just hear me Roma, now I recall that Anu used to keep one of my photographs in his office table-drawers. So, I was just thinking whether I should take with me that photograph of mine, some of his personal papers and his other belongings placed in his office-table-drawers."

"Just a moment aunty, please let me ask Sujoy and confirm from him all about this."

Sujoy came at once with Roma.

"Sorry Ms. Mukerjee. Please allow 24 hours for me to think about it!"

"But only! I just want his personal belongings. What is the need for completion of any official formalities for that? Otherwise also, I would not be able to sojourn here for more days. So, if possible, give me those things now or...."

Sujoy was exasperated, "What is so hurry madam! I just told you, isn't it? Please let me have time till tomorrow!"

I did not like Sujoy's behavior.

"Just leave it all. I don't want anything. You will not understand a mother's feelings."

Roma ran after me saying, "Please wait, aunty wait. I am also coming with you."

According to her promises, Roma escorted me to the place where the accident actually happened that night. We both were feeling somewhat uncomfortable after the office incident.

I broke the silence, "Why has Sujoy's behavior changed so suddenly? He is in a senior position in the office and he needs 24 hours for deciding about such a small thing. You must know, after all, what the matter is actually about?"

"Ooh, yeah, means no, could be something!"

Roma looked away. Roma was trying to hide something. Perhaps, I was feeling very bad that Anu's best friend had insulted me this way.

But what could be the reason behind it all? I was not able to understand all that.

“Don’t think so much aunty, please don’t overthink, I say!”

“Look Roma, I had to come back from Anurag’s office this way. I am just feeling bad to think about it. Therefore, I just want to know the reasons of Sujoy’s changed behavior. That’s all! Please tell me if you know anything. If the reasons are genuine, I would apologize to Sujoy and....”

Roma took out her handkerchief and wiping my eyes, her eyes too flooded up with tears.

“Aunty please don’t compel me please or else you....”

But this time when I insisted and then, she said, “Aunty it seems to me that Sujoy didn’t want you to know anything about the relationship he and Anurag had with each other.”

That girl said it all in a single breath.

“Which relationship? Just that they were good friends. Isn’t it?”

She couldn’t have restraint on her voice, “Aunty why aren’t you trying to understand what I am saying? Both of them were in love with each other and they fervently desired to spend life with one another. Anurag just wanted to tell you all this, but probably he couldn’t muster up adequate courage to do so.”

I just held my head. Within the last 48 hours, the many stark realities I was just forced to face, was incredible. It was surprising, that I just couldn’t believe all these things happening in the society, in any way.

“No, no, this seems to be some kind of a conspiracy hatched against my lone son.”

Roma retorted at once, “Not only your Anu, even the entire office knows how fervently I yearned for Anurag! Oh, who could be more unfortunate than me, to unravel these truths to you in this manner?”

It seemed as if the thick gloomy night fell heavier. The sleep had fled from my eyes. What else could I have done than accusing myself and cursing my fate? I was a single parent of my lone son for the past fifteen years. Anu’s father never bothered about him after our divorce. I am the only one who sometimes informed his father about Anu’s achievements.

Abruptly I recalled that Anu is no more in this world and so this too, I will have to intimate his father about. Next morning, the doorbell rang.

When I looked at the face of Sujoy on the door bell screen, I first didn't feel like opening the door, but he said that he had come to handover certain important things.

"Sujoy, today I am going back to Kolkata. But before going, I want to know from you this much, that, was my only son available for you to mislead him on the wrong path and no one else?"

Absolutely lost in state of trance, he kept gazing at me with his concerted eyes. Then, breaking the long silence, he proceeded ahead to state with long pauses, "Otherwise also, what difference does it make now. I would like to clarify that, it was first your son, who proposed to me."

I couldn't control myself at that juncture. I couldn't find anything for support, and hence, I just held my head, and tears kept rolling, on and on. He gave me some water to drink and to compose myself. When I felt relaxed and had a little control over myself, he looked straight into my eyes and asked, "Ms. Mukerjee, please forgive me, but I am just not able to understand that which thing has hurt you most? The thing that your lone son is no more in the world? Or the other truth and reality of his life?"

The question was lost; the answer was too!



Translated from Hindi by Dr Mahabir Prasad Yadav

As we learn from the Braille Magazine *Jigyasa* of which Ms. Gauri Sen was the Editor, that she was born in Lucknow, State of Uttar Pradesh in India in the year 1986. She researched on Nagarjun's Hindi novel *Balchanma*, on interrelationships in literature and society. She obtained her M. Phil. degree in Hindi from Lucknow University. Currently, she is employed as Private Secretary in Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO), Ministry of Defense, Government of India.

Functioning beyond her visual disability, Gauri Sen has played an active role in the accomplishment of her official as well as social duties with a sense of responsibility and sensitivity. She has made valuable contributions in the Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR) Project of All India Confederation of the Blind, for the upliftment of the persons with visual disability, in the rural regions of the nation, enabling them to lead a life of independence and dignity. She has written in Hindi the stories of those marginalized who remain invisible in the mainstream of the nation and society.

Gauri Sen's first collection of Hindi stories *Tamanna* was published in 2020 and the second titled as *Tamas Ki Lau* was published in 2023 by All India Confederation of the Blind, Delhi which delineates with the theme of community rehabilitation of persons with visual disability or blindness.

The aforementioned two published books of Gauri Sen have paramount significance for the study of disability discourse in literature and society. Some of her Hindi stories have also been published in such women's Hindi magazines as *Grihshobha*, *Mukta*, *Sakhi Jagran*, *Kal Ke Liye*, and DRDO Hindi magazines *Maitri* and *Udaan*. Gauri Sen is recipient of the best story award for her story publication in the magazine *Kahani Kunj*. She has also been honored with 'Louis Braille Role Model' by Drishti Institute Chitrakoot, UP, India. Gauri Sen is former Secretary of All India Confederation of the Blind and she is the Founder Nominee of this national level organization. Gauri Sen also represents Asian Blind Union (ABU).

The story in Hindi titled as "Sawal Gum Jabab Gum" authored by Gauri Sen first appeared in Hindi Braille magazine *Jigyasa*, Sep-Oct, 2025 on Pp 43-51 which I was inspired to read and thus I decided its translation and publication for my pleasure and for the enrichment of Indian Literature in English Translation.

The sole objective for its translation and publication is actually the transmission of author Gauri Sen's name, fame, social contributions, her educational and professional achievements and her literary contributions to literature of the target language readers for further research on disability discourse in Indian Literature in English Translation. Eventually, I am highly indebted to Gauri Sen and express my profound gratitude for her for promptly giving her consent to me for English translation and publication of the aforesaid story.

~English Literature~

Constitutional Promises and Postcolonial Realities: Legal Critique in Contemporary Fiction

Anand Bhushan Pandey

Abstract

This paper explores how postcolonial literature examines the persistent gap between constitutional ideals and the realities faced in postcolonial societies, focusing on Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999), and Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008). The analysis argues that these literary works expose the enduring influence of colonial legal structures on postcolonial jurisprudence, despite the achievement of formal independence. The texts illustrate that the constitutional promises of equality and justice remain unfulfilled for marginalised communities, as inherited legal frameworks perpetuate structural inequalities. Furthermore, the paper investigates the critique provided by postcolonial literature regarding the dual role of media, which functions both as an instrument of state power and as a potential site for resistance. This study examines the intersections of constitutional politics, legal reform, and media discourse, demonstrating that postcolonial fiction serves as a vital space for juridical imagination, revealing the shortcomings of legal systems and envisioning alternative futures.

Keywords: Postcolonial Literature, Constitutional Politics, Legal Reform, Colonial Legacies, Justice, Media Manipulation, Human Rights

Introduction

Postcolonial literature provides a distinct critical perspective for analysing the political, legal, and media landscapes of newly independent nations. In the wake of decolonisation, writers have established a platform to scrutinise the intersections of law, politics, and media, revealing ongoing discrepancies between legislative promises of justice and their often corrupt or inadequate implementation. These works explore themes of national identity, state power, and social transformation, offering not only critiques of colonial legacies but also insights into the complexities involved in nation-building and legal reform. As a result, they highlight the enduring tensions between constitutional aspirations and the pragmatic realities faced by marginalised communities. The term "postcolonial literature" refers to writings that explore the ramifications of colonial history, with a particular emphasis on sovereignty, cultural identity, and the quest for justice in postcolonial states. This body of work addresses constitutional politics—encompassing the discourses and processes that shape national identity and governance—while also scrutinising legal reform, which is understood as the effort to replace colonial legal systems with frameworks capable of providing genuine justice and equality.

Additionally, this literature engages with debates in the media concerning its role in either supporting or undermining state authority, thereby serving as a lens to interpret the disparity between state promises and the realities faced in postcolonial contexts. The convergence of law, politics, and media holds particular significance in postcolonial societies where remnants of colonial legal structures continue to exist despite attempts at reform. Mahmood Mamdani contends in *Citizen and Subject* (1996) that "colonialism created a system of law that was designed to subjugate, not to serve the people" (35). These colonial legacies are deeply entrenched within postcolonial state regimes, frequently undermining the principles of justice and equality that are meant to be upheld in national constitutions. Literature offers a crucial lens to examine these struggles and, at the same time it elucidates how legal frameworks are contested, manipulated, and transformed overtime. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) dramatizes the conflict between colonial legal structures and indigenous systems of justice. The novel's narrator observes of the colonisers: "The white man is very clever... He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolery and allowed him to stay" (176). This passage highlights the inherent contradictions within colonial legal systems that aimed to impose foreign frameworks on societies with their own robust legal traditions. J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) delves into the complexities of legal and moral justice in post-apartheid South Africa. The protagonist expresses deep-seated disillusionment, stating that "the law is not an instrument of moral justice. The law is what it is" (112). This remark highlights a significant frustration regarding the law's ability to address historical injustices in relation to present-day realities—a sentiment that echoes throughout broader postcolonial struggles for meaningful legal reform. Beyond constitutional and legal battles, postcolonial literature examines the role of the press in shaping public discourse and manipulating legal matters. Aravind Adiga critiques the media's complicity in perpetuating corruption and social inequality in *The White Tiger* (2008), asserting that "the truth is rarely told in the media... it is buried under the weight of the state's agenda" (249). Amitav Ghosh similarly critiques the manipulation of national identity and politics by the media in *The Shadow Lines* (1988), reflecting that "the nation is not something you can touch or feel; it is only a story" (206). These observations collectively demonstrate how postcolonial literature serves as an effective tool for reflecting on the complex relationships among law, politics, and media. This paper is structured into three interconnected sections. The first explores constitutional politics and the crisis of national identity; the second examines legal reform and colonial continuities; the third addresses media, state power, and the politics of representation.

Constitutional Politics and the Crisis of National Identity

a. The Role of Literature in National Identity Formation

Postcolonial literature serves as a crucial medium through which national identity has been negotiated, contested, and redefined. As postcolonial states transitioned from imperial domination to independent governance, literary texts emerged as arenas for articulating, affirming, and reconstructing discussions about national identity. A particularly significant function of postcolonial writing is its capacity to examine the complexities of nation-building,

particularly in contexts where emerging constitutions grapple with establishing state authority while striving for justice, equality, and the protection of human rights.

Chinua Achebe raises fundamental questions regarding colonialism, identity, and justice in *Things Fall Apart*. Through the character of Okonkwo, Achebe illustrates how colonial authorities dismantled the local Igbo system of justice, imposing a new legal framework that disregarded the community's cultural heritage. Achebe asserts that "the identity of a nation lies not only in its laws but also in its stories." These stories, though contested, become the foundational myths that hold a constitution together" (154). This statement encapsulates the conflict between colonial legal impositions and local narratives, underscoring that national identity emerges not solely from legal structures but also from cultural and historical stories. Achebe suggests that a genuine national identity can only be realised when the narratives of a people are integrated into legal and constitutional frameworks.

Achebe further develops this theme in *No Longer at Ease* (1960) through the character Obi Okonkwo, who grapples with the tension between traditional Nigerian society and the British colonial regime that governs his life. Obi's experiences in England and his subsequent return to Nigeria illuminate the contradictions inherent in nation-building. Despite Nigeria's independence and its constitution's guarantee of equality, Obi's experiences reveal the enduring structures of colonialism, particularly within education and employment. His disillusionment with both British and Nigerian systems reflects the incongruities between colonial ideals and the promised independence encapsulated in legal frameworks. Thus, postcolonial literature does not regard national identity as a static entity but as a dynamic process that is perpetually evolving. By articulating these struggles, postcolonial writers pose critical questions about the role of law in emerging states, positioning literature as a vital space for reimagining legal structures and notions of national belonging.

b. The Gap Between Legal Ideals and Postcolonial Reality

In many postcolonial states, there exists a significant disparity between the idealised images presented in national constitutions and the actual realities faced by citizens. Constitutions typically guarantee equality and justice; however, marginalised groups continue to experience ongoing exclusion and inequality. Postcolonial literature effectively confronts these inconsistencies, revealing how legal ideals are undermined by deeply entrenched social, political, and economic structures.

Amitav Ghosh explores themes of identity and the unpredictability of nation-states in *The Shadow Lines*. The novel interrogates the tension between the ideals of nationalism and the lived experiences of individuals caught in the turbulence of history. Ghosh writes: "A law is a reflection of a nation's past, but a constitution is its future" (213). This quotation underscores the idea that, although constitutions are intended to chart future paths, they are often constrained by colonial traditions that dictate the application of law and the realities of lived experience. Ghosh's narrative critiques the imposition of national identity upon individuals through legal and political mechanisms, effectively pre-empting a sense of belonging for those who were never promised such inclusion.

Similarly, J.M. Coetzee critiques the post-apartheid South African legal system in *Disgrace*. Despite constitutional promises of equality and reconciliation, Coetzee illustrates

how the new constitution fails to serve all citizens equitably. The character of David Lurie, a disgraced scholar, embodies the struggle within postcolonial South Africa to realise constitutional ideals. Lurie's experiences highlight the conflict between legal reforms and the harsh social realities faced by disadvantaged communities. Coetzee employs Lurie's narrative to demonstrate how the constitutional promises of equality and justice remain largely unfulfilled due to enduring social and racial disparities. Both Ghosh and Coetzee thus illustrate the ineffectiveness of postcolonial legal reforms in achieving genuine justice.

c. The Struggle for Postcolonial Constitutionalism

Balancing constitutional principles with the realities of governance represents a significant conflict in postcolonial literature. Although postcolonial states guarantee constitutional rights to equality, justice, and human rights, many citizens—particularly those from marginalised groups—find that these promises are often unfulfilled. Postcolonial literary criticism highlights the efforts of states to enact constitutional change while grappling with the tensions between the law and the state's failure to safeguard vulnerable populations.

Wole Soyinka explores the themes of postcolonial justice and constitutionalism in Nigeria through his novel *The Interpreters* (1965). The characters contend with disillusionment regarding post-independence governance, where equality and justice remain elusive. A central theme of *The Interpreters* is the ongoing struggle for justice in a nation whose colonial history continues to exert a profound influence over its political and legal systems. Soyinka articulates this disappointment succinctly: "Justice in a postcolonial state is not a gift; it is the unremitting struggle of the downtrodden against the weight of a colonial past" (72). This statement underscores the notion that achieving justice in postcolonial states poses a formidable challenge, necessitating a struggle against colonial legacies that persistently dominate political and legal institutions.

d. Tales of Exclusion: The Constitution's Broken Promises

Although postcolonial constitutions include provisions for equality and justice, numerous marginalised communities remain beyond the law's reach. Literature frequently examines how such exclusions become entrenched in legal and social systems, highlighting the ongoing struggles of these communities against injustice.

Kashmira Sheth addresses the plight of child labourers in India in her novel *Boys Without Names* (2010), illustrating the inadequacies of postcolonial legislation in protecting society's most vulnerable individuals. The narrative critiques the Indian Constitution's promise of equality, which has largely eluded the poorest and most marginalised citizens. Sheth writes, "The constitution promised equality, but the streets whispered something else" (158). This poignant passage reflects the chasm between the principles of legal equality and the harsh realities of poverty and exploitation that hinder disadvantaged groups from realising their constitutional guarantees.

Tayeb Salih similarly explores themes of exclusion in *Season of Migration to the North* (1966), particularly in the context of Sudanese migration to the West. The protagonist, Mustafa Sa'eed, returns to Sudan after a challenging life in England, disillusioned by the failure of

Western justice systems to deliver true justice. Salih critiques both colonial and postcolonial systems that perpetuate exclusion and inequality. Through Mustafa's narrative, Salih reveals how postcolonial states often reinforce social, economic, and political structures that obstruct the full participation of marginalised groups in society. Literature thus serves as a powerful critique of the disparity between the equality guarantees enshrined in constitutions and the exclusionary forces that continue to operate within postcolonial societies.

Legal Reform and Colonial Continuities

e. Literature as Critique of Legal Institutions

Postcolonial literature often critiques legal institutions that reinforce state power through legal inequality and corrupt policies. These texts reveal how legal systems, which are ostensibly designed to promote justice and fairness, are frequently manipulated by states to perpetuate social stratification and marginalise communities. Literature acts as a medium through which writers can expose the failure of legal systems to provide genuine justice, thereby maintaining the status quo.

Italo Calvino's *The Castle of Crossed Destinies* (1973) offers a nuanced critique of the arbitrariness of laws and their use for population control. Although it is not set in a postcolonial context, Calvino's incorporation of tarot cards to illustrate fate reflects the manner in which state power dictates individuals' destinies through legal frameworks. Calvino asserts, "The law is not merely the voice of the state; it is the tool by which the state enslaves its citizens" (54). This critique highlights the coercive nature of state laws, which restrict individual freedom while bolstering state sovereignty. In a similar vein, Zakes Mda, in *The Heart of Redness* (2000), critiques the enduring influence of colonial legal structures in postcolonial South Africa. He writes, "The laws we inherited are not ours; they were forged in a furnace that burnt away our dignity" (Mda 134). This metaphor implies that laws established for the benefit of the colonisers continue to oppress individuals within postcolonial society.

f. Colonial Legal Systems' Persistence

The legacy of colonial legal systems continues to affect citizens' lives in numerous postcolonial societies, even after they have attained independence. These legal frameworks, originally established to sustain colonial rule, often persist in modified forms following independence, thereby hindering genuine legal reform and justice. This ongoing issue is frequently critiqued in postcolonial literature.

Ousmane Sembene explores the remnants of colonial legal systems in Senegal in his novel *God's Bits of Wood* (1960). The narrative focuses on a workers' strike against a French-owned railroad company, highlighting how the colonial legal framework favoured the interests of French colonisers while neglecting the concerns of Senegalese workers. The characters find themselves trapped in a struggle against a system that was never designed to serve their needs. Sembene poignantly states, "The law was made to protect the interests of the colonisers, not the colonised" (Sembene 77). Both Mda and Sembene demonstrate how colonial-era legal

systems, which facilitated exploitation and inequality, continue to persist even after the formal end of colonialism, obstructing meaningful reform and perpetuating marginalisation.

g. Law, Human Rights, and Justice in Literature

The struggle for human rights frequently emerges as a significant theme in postcolonial literature, where characters navigate legal systems that inadequately protect the most vulnerable. Ngugi wa Thiong'o explores law and human rights in postcolonial Kenya, examining how colonial laws and justice systems continue to oppress the Kenyan people even after independence. Through the character Mumbi in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), Ngugi expresses, "In the court of law, we are mere witnesses to our own oppression" (Ngũgĩ 176). This statement highlights the legal system's failure to safeguard vulnerable individuals and underscores the law's role as a tool of oppression in the postcolonial context. This critique points to a broader issue: postcolonial legal norms often do not address the root causes of injustice and inequality, leaving disadvantaged groups without substantial protection.

h. The Legal Subject in Postcolonial Fiction

Postcolonial literature interrogates the complexity of the legal subject—specifically, how laws construct and define individuals and groups. In numerous postcolonial societies, legal institutions impose conditions of citizenship, rights, and exclusionary measures. Literary analyses indicate that these systems frequently exhibit discrimination against specific groups, particularly those who diverge from prevailing social, racial, or cultural norms.

Nuruddin Farah examines the legal subject in postcolonial Somalia in his novel *Secrets* (1998), depicting a legal system that inadequately safeguards individuals embroiled in political and familial disputes. Through the character Amina, Farah states: "The law was never meant to protect us; it was meant to control us" (Farah 123). This assertion underscores the controlling influence of the law in postcolonial contexts, restricting freedom and further marginalising already vulnerable identities. M.G. Vassanji explores the position of the legal subject in postcolonial Kenya in *The Blue Veins* (1996), noting: "The law does not protect the vulnerable; it defines them by their powerlessness" (Vassanji 45). These narratives reveal how legal systems construct legal subjects in ways that alienate and marginalise those outside dominant legal and social frameworks, highlighting the ongoing struggles of marginalised populations for justice and recognition.

Media, State Power, and the Politics of Representation

i. Media Representation in Postcolonial Societies

Media plays a central role in postcolonial societies in shaping public perceptions of legal issues, often dominating discussions in ways that serve political and social agendas. Postcolonial scholarship critiques this manipulation, revealing how media representations can distort reality to align with state interests, particularly concerning justice, law, and human rights. Postcolonial literary criticism further elucidates the complex relationship among media, state power, and

legal reform, demonstrating how the press can both reinforce and challenge systemic oppression.

Aravind Adiga critically evaluates the role of media in postcolonial India, asserting: "The press is not just a medium of information; it is the stage on which the drama of justice is enacted" (Adiga 227). This quotation encapsulates the media's active role in constructing and reinforcing social and political realities. In postcolonial societies like India, media often perpetuates class divisions and social hierarchies, propagating distortions of justice that favour the elite. Balram's success, shaped by media-generated images of achievement and progress, starkly contrasts with the actual experiences of the working classes, who find neither themselves nor their concerns adequately represented in the media or the law. Adiga critiques the media's influence in shaping public consciousness, resulting in a situation where the status quo remains unchallenged.

Amitav Ghosh similarly observes that "the nation is not something you can touch or feel; it is only a story" (Ghosh 206), illustrating how media can misrepresent lived experiences to conform to state-sanctioned narratives. Ruth Ware's *The Lying Game* (2017), although not set in a postcolonial context, provides valuable insight: "The media never tells the full story; it shapes the story to fit its own narrative" (Ware 321). This observation is particularly pertinent in postcolonial countries, where media often aligns with state political interests, distorting truths and legal discourses.

j. Press, Censorship, and Free Speech

Censorship and the promotion of free speech are among the most significant interventions in postcolonial literature. As a primary source of resistance, the press plays a crucial role in many postcolonial states, where governments frequently manipulate or restrict media to control the dissemination of information. Authors often utilise literature to explore the press's ability to both support and challenge state authority, demonstrating that a free press is essential for justice, human rights, and social reform.

In *The Shadow of the Sun* (1998), Ryszard Kapuściński reflects on the nature of reporting in postcolonial countries, stating, "In a land where the press is silenced, the truth must find other ways to speak" (Kapuściński 97). This observation underscores the critical importance of media in truth-telling, particularly when state repression inhibits the press from fulfilling its role. Kiran Desai addresses the themes of silenced voices in postcolonial India in *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), remarking, "There is a price for everything, and silence was the price of survival" (Desai 242). This statement highlights the repressive nature of state censorship, where self-expression can have severe political and social repercussions. Similarly, Zakes Mda comments on censorship in post-apartheid South Africa, asserting, "When the press is silenced, the people are rendered invisible, their suffering unseen by the outside world" (Mda 178). These critiques illustrate that press censorship not only undermines the media's informational role but also renders the oppressed invisible, thereby making justice an elusive goal.

k. Press Freedom and Legal Reform

The relationship between press freedom and legal reform is particularly vital in postcolonial contexts, where the press frequently serves as one of the few avenues for challenging systemic inequities. By exposing corruption and inequality within postcolonial legal frameworks, the press can take on significant advocacy roles in promoting legal reform. The struggles for free speech are closely intertwined with the battles against injustice in postcolonial literature; only in an environment of free speech can repressive laws be contested and reformed.

Adiga's *The White Tiger* illustrates that, when used wisely, media can reveal failures in the legal system and amplify the voices of the oppressed. The protagonist, Balram, understands that even under constraints, media remains an arena for justice. Through these critiques, postcolonial literature highlights the complex relationships between the press, state power, and legal systems, underscoring that press freedom is essential for achieving legal reform and justice. The press serves as a platform for uncovering corruption, questioning political authority, and advocating for changes within legal systems in postcolonial societies.

Conclusion

Postcolonial literature plays a crucial role in critically engaging with the legacies of colonialism as they manifest in law, politics, and media. Rather than providing simplistic solutions, postcolonial authors delve into the complexities of nation-building, the tensions between legal principles and lived experiences, and the media's significant influence on public perceptions of justice. This paper has illustrated how postcolonial literature scrutinises legal frameworks, highlighting the discrepancies between constitutional promises and the material conditions of marginalised groups.

One significant observation emerging from this analysis is that postcolonial legal systems often do not represent radical departures from their colonial predecessors; rather, they tend to reproduce historical power imbalances. Consequently, much legal reform in postcolonial states is inherently contradictory. Writers such as Coetzee and Ngugi illustrate in their critiques how legal structures, ostensibly designed to provide justice after independence, can easily become instruments of oppression. Constitutional commitments in countries like South Africa and Kenya remain largely empty for a significant portion of the citizenry, particularly among the most disenfranchised. Such criticism challenges the assumption that constitutional reforms are necessarily transformative. Instead, literature exposes how legal systems can perpetuate or even exacerbate inequality, underscoring that justice is not merely an abstract ideal but a tangible achievement shaped by existing structures.

This tension between legal ideals and realities is intensified by media. In postcolonial communities where law may not serve people fairly, media can become the arena where justice battles are fought—or silenced. Adiga's depiction of the press as "the stage on which the drama of justice is enacted" (227) highlights how media discourse can both support and oppose existing power distributions. Yet literature also reveals resistance: even when the press is censored, alternative forms of resistance—underground movements or personal narratives—can emerge. Authors such as Kapuscinski and Desai underscore the power of truth, demonstrating that even under repression, alternative means of sharing truth arise.

The concluding observation—that the state cannot escape its past through the stories we tell and those we are prevented from telling—encapsulates the enduring relevance of postcolonial literature. Literature recounts narratives about justice, law, and media that are integral to the state's ability to transcend its colonial legacy. These narratives not only unveil the lingering effects of colonialism but also propose alternatives—a pathway towards authentic justice and transformation. By shaping the state's narrative and its legal and media frameworks, postcolonial writers play a crucial role in ensuring that the state does not remain shackled by its past but evolves toward a more just and equitable future.

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Chekhov's *Misery* and Premchand's *Shroud*: A Comparative Study

Dharitri Ramjibhai Gohel

Abstract

This research article examines the portrayal of human reactions to death in Anton Chekhov's *Misery* and Munshi Premchand's *Shroud*, two literary masterpieces that, despite emerging from vastly different cultural and geographical contexts—Russia and India—intersect in their exploration of universal human experiences. Both stories offer poignant depictions of grief, societal neglect, and the psychological responses that arise in the face of death. Chekhov's *Misery* presents a deeply introspective narrative centred on Iona Potapov, a poor sledge-driver grieving his son's death in a cold, indifferent society. In contrast, Premchand's *Shroud* delivers a sharp social satire through the characters of Ghisu and Madhav, whose response to Budhiya's, (Madhav's wife) death is shaped not by grief in traditional context but by hunger, ritual, and survival. This comparative study also delves into narrative techniques, use of setting and dialogue, and thematic layers along with a strong enquiry into social fabric where poverty is equivalent to almost nothing.

Keywords: Chekhov, Premchand, Grief, Emotion, Poverty, Society

Introduction

Short story writing is the art of narrating life within limited pages by creating vivid word-pictures, infusing vitality into characters, and evoking emotions strong enough to leave a lasting impact on the reader. When imagination blends with reality, the writer steps into the background and the characters come alive, unfolding universal human experiences through a single incident or moment. This is why certain stories transcend time and culture and touch the deepest layers of human nature. Anton Chekhov's *Misery* and Munshi Premchand's *Shroud* are two such classics. Written in different eras, in different countries, and with seemingly different themes, both stories are unified by an undercurrent that makes them compelling: the incident of death.

While *Misery* foregrounds the psychological need for communication and sympathy, depicting a father's agony after losing his son, *Shroud* highlights extreme poverty, moral collapse, and the grim priorities that emerge when survival itself is at stake. Chekhov (1860–1904), Russia's master of realism and psychological subtlety, explores the silent suffering of Iona Potapov, an old cabman yearning for an empathetic listener. In contrast, Premchand (1880–1936), the pillar of Hindi-Urdu literature, presents a biting social satire in which Ghisu and Madhav react to Budhiya's death with startling detachment, treating it as an occasion for momentary relief rather than mourning.

Despite their geographical, cultural, and thematic differences, both stories illuminate universal human responses to death: grief, loss, emotional suppression, and societal apathy.

This comparative study examines narrative technique, emotional landscape, and thematic depth in both works to explore how Chekhov and Premchand reveal the complexities of human nature when confronted with death. Let us take a brief idea of both the authors.

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) a master of describing human nature by creatively recreating an incident into extra ordinary experience by its treatment through his classic sense and sensibility. Consequently, the incident and the characters leave long lasting impression on the mind of the reader. The outstanding characteristic of Chekhov's stories is- his stories often employ minimal plots and focus on moods and psychological depth. "Chekhov's stories focus on a particular mood... He defended his open-ended stories saying that the role of an artist is to ask questions and not to answer them." (Unit-14.pdf) and the story of *Misery* is one of the examples where universal human nature is sharply attacked. On the other hand, Munshi Premchand, (1880–1936) known as the "Upanyas Samrat" (Emperor of Novels) in Hindi-Urdu literature, and strong believer of writer's role as a social reformer, he gives voice to the weakest of society and thus holds mirror to reveal social evil. Thus, most of his works focuses on social realism, human suffering, and the plight of the underprivileged. In Shroud, As Divya A. rightly states, Ghisu and Madhav are not anomalies but "constructs of such activities... a poverty of conscience" shaped by prolonged starvation and systemic neglect (shroud analytics.pdf).

Thus, both the writers are ultimately focusing on wrong practices of society where a man is valued only when he has money. His words are heard, his presence is respected, and his opinions carry weight only if wealth stands behind him. Without money, a man is overlooked, ignored, and treated as insignificant. Hence, poor person is almost nothing for those who have something and the incident of death is relative. Now let us understand the plot of both the stories.

Misery

The story follows Iona Potapov, a Russian sledge-driver devastated by his son's recent death attempts repeatedly to share this sorrow with passengers, all of whom are indifferent. His grief is dismissed, trivialized, or ignored: "To whom shall I tell my grief?" he asks. He yearns to share his grief but finds no one willing to listen. Ultimately, he pours his heart out to his mare—a silent witness to his suffering. The silence of the animal becomes more comforting than human apathy. In short, the story describes the craving of a poor old father to find someone sensible who can listen to his grieved soul.

The story becomes extraordinary because it doesn't narrate day to day incidents of life and still it successfully describes common human nature realistically. When someone is in pain or misery, no one cares. It is the person himself has to bear the pain alone. No one can feel it until it happens to him or her. Following excerpt clearly shows the treatment of the old man by his sledge riders.

Apparently, he means to say something, but nothing comes but a sniff. "What?" enquires the officer. Iona gives a wry smile, and straining his throat, brings out huskily: "My son er . . . my son died this week, sir." "H'm! What did he die of?" Iona turns his whole-body round to his fare, and says: "Who can tell! It

must have been from fever. . . . He lay three days in the hospital and then he died. . . . God's will." "Turn around, you devil!" come out of the darkness. "Have you gone cracked, you old dog? Look where you are going!" (Pg 107-108)

Chekhov subtly shows how people often exert power on those who are weaker or socially inferior. The passengers, irritated and impatient, know Iona cannot retaliate—he is old, poor, and dependent on them for his livelihood. So, they vent their frustrations on him, reinforcing their own sense of superiority.

Again, when one of the passengers, slaps on Iona's neck is not just a physical gesture; it represents a casual, normalized cruelty. The men do not pause to think about whether they are hurting him because they do not see him as a full human being with feelings. Their tone calling him "old plague," "old dragon" turns him into a caricature rather than a person. The passengers' rudeness contains a hint of enjoyment. The mockery, the threats, the slap all show how people derive a momentary thrill from dominating someone who cannot resist. This is sadistic pleasure! Chekhov uses this moment to expose a harsh psychological truth: when people are emotionally empty, stressed, or disconnected, they often assert themselves through cruelty toward those who are more vulnerable. In addition, the sentence, "Iona hears rather than feels a slap on the back of his neck" deepens the meaning. He is so consumed by grief for his dead son that even physical pain does not register. This shows both: the depth of his internal suffering and the world's indifference to it. The story is strongly creating a live picture where each gesture tells a story of human nature. Chekhov describes:

His misery is immense, beyond all bounds. If Iona's heart were to burst and his misery to flow out, it would flood the whole world, it seems, but yet it is not seen. It has found a hiding-place in such an insignificant shell that one would not have found it with a candle by daylight. (Pg 109)

The words narrate sheer poetry where cascade of emotions is flowing. Reader can't escape the that feeling of misery.

Shroud

Premchand's *Shroud* (Kafan) is one of the starkest depictions of poverty, human degradation, and social hypocrisy in modern Indian literature. The story revolves around Ghisu and Madhav, known for their extreme lazy nature, a father-son pair belonging to the lowest rung of the social hierarchy. They are habitual idlers, labouring only when starvation forces them. At the story's onset, Budhiya, Madhav's young wife, struggles in childbirth inside their hut. Outside, by a burnt-out fire, Madhav and Ghisu sit helpless though they don't even attempt to help her. Budhiya eventually dies, and instead of genuine grief, father and son go around the village soliciting money for her shroud. Villagers, some out of pity, some out of social pressure, donate reluctantly. The two collect enough for the funeral rites. But instead of buying the shroud, they spend the entire money on food and alcohol comforting themselves that she is a pure soul and

has helped her even after her death. Premchand ends the story with Ghisu and Madhav drifting into drunken sleep. The opening lines of the story *Shroud* creates an unforgettable atmosphere:

At the door of the hut father and son sat silently by a burnt-out fire ... Budhiya lay in labor, writhing with pain ... a winter night ... everything drowned in desolation.

Premchand uses winter, darkness, and desolation symbolically to fore ground: the coldness of poverty, the emotionlessness of human under extreme deprivation and the darkness of social neglect. A burnt-out fire symbolizes extinguished hopes, not just of Budhiya but of the entire class of landless labourers. This beginning encapsulates the main theme: the cruelty of socioeconomic conditions that numb human sensitivity itself. The very idea that a husband sits waiting for his wife's possible death and talks about food and feast indicates the depth of misery that destroys the roots of human consciousness.

Madhav said in a pained tone, "If she's going to die, then why doesn't she go ahead and die? What's the use of going to see?"

Further, it is noteworthy that, Madhav and Ghisu's 'laziness' is not mere vice but a psychological response to lifelong exploitation. Here, the writer subtly suggests that exploitation can push people into moral collapse. Madhav and Ghisu have discovered that no matter how much they work, their lives remain unchanged. Their behaviour, begging for a shroud, and finally drinking the money away, appears immoral. But it can also be read as: a rejection of performative grief as they refuse to engage in the ritualistic drama of mourning expected by society, that can be told a silent rebellion, their refusal to 'behave properly' at the time of death is a distorted form of protest against a society that has never treated them as human.

Additionally, it is also noteworthy that Ghisu and Madhav understand human psychology far better than the villagers assume. They know that: society responds sentimentally to birth and death and pity is easiest to evoke at funerals. Thus, they manipulate the social codes of charity—an ironic display of intelligence shaped by systemic oppression. There are number of instances where hypocrisy of society is revealed. For example,

The Landlord Sahib was a compassionate man—but to show compassion to Ghisu was to try to dye a black blanket.

The simile implies that compassion itself becomes an act of burden. The landlord gives money, not out of human feeling, but to protect his own reputation. Again, the ritual of shroud after death exposes, the irrationality of ritualistic practices, Society's obsession with death over life and the prioritization of ritual over human dignity.

And the height of hypocrisy is, Budhiya died because of lack of support from her kin and the society, while society is ready to give her cloth after death as a part of ritual. Premchand ironizes this custom to critique the moral inversion of traditional society.

There are number of aspects covered in the story which makes study interesting. For example, the story reflects pre-independence India, where caste hierarchy determined access to resources, patriarchal norms where Budhiya's labour pain is unseen and unheard by society, symbolizing the invisibility of women's suffering and community charity is motivated more by public opinion, in addition, ritualistic mourning practices which demand expensive rites but ignore the dignity of the living poor. It is noteworthy that Premchand juxtaposes ritual purity with moral impurity, exposing contradictions within society. thus, it can be said that *Shroud* is not merely a story of two poor men—it is a tragic social document which describes poverty as the ultimate violence, ritualism as hypocrisy, human degradation as a systemic failure. The story ends with a haunting implication: The shroud was never for Budhiya—it was for the moral nakedness of society.

Comparative analysis

Deep Psychological insight

Chekhov's story is not about external events but the inner world of Iona. The climax comes not from action but from silence. By the end, Iona's grief finds no human outlet, so he turns to his mare, "Kuzma Ionitch is gone. He went and died for no reason..." (Pg 111). This moment is extraordinarily powerful. The mute animal becomes more empathetic than humans. Her breathing, her presence, her silence becomes the only space where Iona can pour out his emotions. In *Shroud*, although grief is expressed differently. often in its absence, Premchand similarly focuses on psychological truth: how poverty can deform responses to suffering and how emotional numbness becomes a survival mechanism. Iona's grief is overwhelming but unheard; Ghisu and Madhav's grief is twisted, evasive, almost absent but also unheard. Thus, both writers show that grief is not easily communicated, nor is it easily understood by others. Yet both writers share compassion for the poor, a critique of societal apathy and the fact that human nature remains constant across cultures

Narrative Techniques

Both the writers use dialogue not just to communicate but to reveal character and internal emotion. Chekhov uses restraint and silence to intensify emotions and thus creates meaning through absence i.e. what is not said. His technique makes Iona's grief universal, timeless, and deeply internal. While Premchand uses satire, sharp dialogue and strong social commentary to expose social structures, poverty and exploitation. He presents characters as both victims and perpetrators of injustice.

Themes

Both Anton Chekhov's *Misery* and Premchand's *Shroud* explore the human response to death, but they do so through vastly different emotional and cultural lenses. In *Misery*, the dominant themes are loneliness and emotional isolation. Chekhov powerfully highlights the emotional suppression that comes with poverty and old age. The story underscores how grief becomes unbearable not just because of personal loss, but because of the inability to express or share it. The insensitivity of the world around Iona turns his pain into something invisible. In contrast,

Shroud focuses on poverty, hypocrisy, and social satire. Ghisu and Madhav, rather than mourning Budhiya's death, exploit the occasion to gain food and liquor. Their behaviour reflects not personal cruelty but the deadening caused by generational poverty. Premchand critiques the social and religious customs that emphasize appearances over compassion. The requirement of a shroud for a woman who had no clothes in life becomes a sharp symbol of societal irony.

Setting Mirrors Emotion

Chekhov's snow-covered streets reflect Iona's frozen grief; Premchand's winter night and desolate hut symbolize abandonment and poverty. While Chekhov employs a subdued emotional tone that evokes sympathy, Premchand provokes discomfort through moral ambiguity and irony.

Characterization

Chekhov's Iona is subtle, subdued, tragic. Premchand's Ghisu and Madhav are crude yet philosophical, offering a complex study of moral ambiguity.

Title

The titles of Chekhov's *Misery* and Premchand's *Shroud* function as powerful thematic gateways, each distilling the essence of its narrative into a single evocative word. In *Misery*, the title encapsulates the pervasive mood of despair, the protagonist's fragile psychological condition, and the profound emotional isolation that shapes his every interaction. It signifies not merely personal sadness but the universal grief of humanity—an anguish that remains unspoken, unheard, and unshared. Correspondingly, Premchand's *Shroud* symbolizes the stark finality of death while simultaneously exposing the layers of social ritual, hypocrisy, and moral decay embedded within society. The *Shroud*, (kafan) becomes both a literal covering for the corpse and a metaphorical veil that conceals ethical corruption and societal indifference. Chekhov's title, by contrast, points to an emotional death characterized by silence, unarticulated suffering, and inner desolation. Together, the two titles illustrate how a single word can embody the psychological depth, cultural critique, and existential resonance at the heart of each story, making them enduring studies of human sorrow and moral introspection.

Conclusion

Anton Chekhov's *Misery* and Munshi Premchand's *Shroud* are masterful short stories that, though rooted in vastly different cultures, converge in their deep concern for the neglected and the grieving. Both writers expose how society fails to respond to suffering—Chekhov through the quiet, invisible grief of Iona, and Premchand through the grotesque, ironic detachment of Ghisu and Madhav. Yet, the emotional tones of these stories stand in stark contrast. Chekhov evokes empathy through silence and introspection, showing how a man can drown in sorrow with no one to notice. Premchand, on the other hand, uses satire and moral discomfort to force the reader to confront the dehumanizing effects of poverty, where hunger dulls grief and ritual masks apathy.

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From Aristotle to the Bard: Redefining the ‘Tragic Error’ in Shakespearean Drama

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Abstract

Traditional meaning frequently reduces the Aristotelian concept of hamartia in Shakespearean tragedy to a singular static “Tragic flaw”, a moral or psychological defect inherent in the protagonist’s character. This article argues that the traditional definition of Hamartia as a “Tragic flaw” is a moralistic approach which ignores the structural and cognitive complexities of Shakespeare’s drama. By examining the intersections of intellectual misjudgment and situational clash, this article shifts the traditional perspective to a new classification of the “Fatal error”, where a tragedy arises not from a character’s immorality, but from the friction between a virtuous individual and their surroundings. Ultimately, this research redefines hamartia as a dynamic collision rather than a fixed trait. This article offers a more nuanced methodology for interpreting the mechanics behind the tragic fall of tragic heroes across Shakespearean tragedies.

Keywords: William Shakespeare, Tragic Error, Aristotle Poetics, Redefining Hamartia, Intellectual Misjudgment & Situational Clash

Introduction

The concept of hamartia, as described in Aristotle Poetics, has long occupied a central position in the study of tragedy. This is typically understood as a fatal flaw or moral error within the tragic hero. Classical interpretations have frequently proposed this flaw as hubris or an inherent defect in character, thereby placing the major responsibility on the individual’s moral integrity. However, when this framework is applied to the plays of William Shakespeare, such a shallow interpretation seems insufficient. Shakespearean tragedy resists reduction to purely psychological or moral weakness, instead presenting a complex interplay between the individual and the external forces that shape their decisions and destinies.

In plays such as King Lear, Julius Caesar, Othello, Titus Andronicus, the protagonists are not merely undone by inner defects but are profoundly influenced by their environments which includes political disorder, social hierarchy, manipulation by other characters and societal pressures. These external elements do not simple act as a background condition but they actively participate in the construction of the tragedy. Hence, the notion of hamartia must be reconsidered not as an isolated inner failure but as a condition emerging from the interaction between character and context.

This article, therefore seeks to reinterpret Aristotle’s concept of hamartia through a Shakespearean lens, proposing a shift from an individualistic to a situational understanding. By re-examining key tragedies within this article, it aims to demonstrate that the tragic fall is not

solely the product of personal flaw but of a broader network of external factors that redefine the very nature of error in a tragedy.

The Tragedy of Julius Caesar (1599):

Julius Caesar is a 5-act play of 18 scenes. It is one of the shortest plays by William Shakespeare. Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" dramatizes the events surrounding the assassination of the Roman general and statesman, Julius Caesar, and the subsequent power struggles that erupt. A group of Roman senators, led by Cassius, conspire to kill Caesar, fearing his ambition and potential tyranny. Brutus, a respected Roman and Caesar's friend, is persuaded to join the plot, believing it is for the good of Rome. After Caesar's assassination on the Ides of March, Mark Antony, Caesar's ally, manipulates public opinion against the conspirators, sparking a civil war. The play explores themes of political ambition, betrayal, friendship, and the consequences of political action.

- Hamartia in Julius Caesar (Traditional focus): Hubris, arrogance, over confidence.
- Hamartia in Julius Caesar (Redefined focus): Intellectual misjudgment

In Julius Caesar, the idea of hamartia becomes difficult to confine within the traditional framework of an internal tragic flaw such as hubris. Instead, Shakespeare presents a world in which error arises from uncertainty, pressure and misinterpretation rather than from any single moral weakness. The tragedy unfolds not because individuals are inherently flawed, but because they are forced to act within unstable political and social conditions that twist the judgment.

This is particularly evident in the character of Marcus Brutus. His decision to participate in Caesar's assassination is often read as a moral failure, yet such a reading overlooks the extent to which his thinking is shaped by external influence. Brutus does not act out of ambition or jealousy; rather guided by the fear of tyranny and deep concern for the failure of Rome. His hamartia, therefore, lies in his reliance on hypothetical reasoning. He acts not on what Julius Caesar *is* but on what he *might become*.

Moreover, the play highlights how rhetoric and public perception function as decisive forces in shaping tragic outcomes. Mark Antony's funeral speech exposes the fragility of rational decision making in a highly charged environment. Brutus assumes that the reason will stabilize the situation, yet Antony demonstrates that emotion and performance have far greater influence over the masses. The resulting chaos such as that error is not located within an individual alone but is produced through interaction between the situation and individual. Brutus believes that because his motive is pure (saving Rome), the act of conspiring against Julius will be viewed as pure by the public. Brutus ignores Cassius' practical advice. He is so focused on the "ideal" Rome that he failed to see the "reality" of the Roman mob.

The Tragedy of King Lear (1605)

King Lear is a 5-act play comprising of 26 scenes. It tells the story of an aging king who divides his kingdom among his three daughters, with disastrous consequences. Lear favors his two

elder daughters, Goneril and Regan, who flatter him, while banishing his youngest, Cordelia, who refuses to engage in empty flattery. This decision sets off a chain of events leading to Lear's descent into madness, betrayal by his daughters, and ultimately, the deaths of Lear, Cordelia, and other key characters.

- Hamartia of King Lear (Traditional focus): Hubris, aggression, impulsiveness.
- Hamartia of King Lear (Redefined focus): Intellectual misjudgment, situational clash

In King Lear, hamartia feels less like a fixed flaw inside the hero and more like a deeply human mistake, one that comes from misunderstanding the situations rather than the intentions. Instead, of simply calling King Lear proud, it is more revealing to see how he struggles to balance two very different worlds: the formal world of kingship and the intimate world of kinship. His tragedy begins when he tries to merge these worlds without realizing they follow completely different rules.

The “love test” is a clear example. Lear asks his daughters to declare their love publicly, as if affection can be measured, displayed, and rewarded like in court. In doing so, he turns something personal into a kind of performance. Cordelia’s quiet and honest response does not fit this staged setting, so it is mistaken for lack of love or disloyalty. Meanwhile, Goneril and Regan succeed because they understand what the moment demands. They perform rather than speak truthfully. What makes this tragic is not that Lear cannot recognize love, but that he expects it to appear in wrong form. In a similar instance, Lear banishes Kent because he sees Kent too as disloyal who is supporting Cordelia and loses his best friend, advisor. This confusion continues even after Lear gives up his power. He steps away from the throne but still expects to be treated like a king, especially when he stays with Goneril. When she refuses to meet his expectations, Lear reacts with shock and anger, as he views both the worlds same and expects loyalty and respect throughout. His frustration is not just emotional; it comes from a deeper misunderstanding of how power actually works. This becomes even more striking in the storm scene, where Lear is seen lashing out at nature as if he is the one who can control everything around him.

Lear’s error is a category mistake. He treats love as a quantifiable commodity which can be measured in words and acres. His hamartia is the intellectual failure to distinguish between the “performance” love and the “real” love.

The Tragedy of Othello, Moor of Venice (1604):

Othello is a 5-act play consisting of 15 scenes. It tells the story of a noble Moorish general in the Venetian army, Othello, who is manipulated by his ensign, Iago, into believing his wife, Desdemona, is unfaithful. Fueled by jealousy and Iago's insidious lies, Othello descends into rage, ultimately murdering Desdemona before taking his own life upon realizing the deception.

- Hamartia of Othello (Traditional focus): jealousy, inferiority complex, blind trust on wrong people.
- Hamartia of Othello (Redefined focus): Intellectual misjudgment, situational clash

In Othello, hamartia can be understood less as a simple matter of jealousy and more as a combination of intellectual misjudgment and situational clash. Rather than being inherently flawed, Othello is a character who misreads the kind of world he is in and applies the wrong ways of thinking to it. His tragedy grows out of how he processes information and how he responds to an environment that is unfamiliar and emotionally complex.

Othello is a military leader, trained to value clarity, evidence, and quick decision-making. On the battlefield there is no time for emotions and action must follow what appears to be reliable proof. However, this way of thinking does not translate well into personal relationships. When dealing with Desdemona, Othello faces a situation that requires trust, emotional understanding, and patience; qualities which are very different from military logic. His hamartia lies in treating love as it were a matter of investigation, where conclusions can be drawn from concrete evidence.

This is where Iago becomes crucial. Iago does not simply deceive Othello; he carefully shapes the kind of “proof” Othello is willing to believe. The handkerchief, for example, becomes a piece of false evidence that Othello interprets as confirmation of betrayal. What is tragic here is not just that Othello is misled, but that he trusts the wrong kind of knowledge. He believes he is being rational and decisive, when in reality he is misapplying a form of reasoning that does not suit the situation.

At the same time, there is a clear situational clash between Othello’s identity and the society he lives in. as an outsider in Venetian culture, he lacks the subtle social awareness needed to navigate its unspoken rules. He cannot easily read the nuances of relationships and manipulation like others. This makes him vulnerable not because he is weak, but because he is operating in a context that demands a different kind of intelligence than the one he has. Othello’s noble soldierly qualities such as his decisiveness and trust in his “honest” subordinates become the very tools Iago uses to destroy him.

Titus Andronicus (1593):

Titus Andronicus is a tragedy by William Shakespeare. It is a 5 act play with 14 scenes. It is a story about the Roman general Titus Andronicus returns from war with four prisoners who vow to take revenge against him. They rape and mutilate Titus' daughter and have his sons killed and banished. Titus kills two of them and cooks them into a pie, which he serves to their mother before killing her too.

- Hamartia of Titus Andronicus (Traditional focus): Hubris
- Hamartia of Titus Andronicus (Redefined focus): Intellectual misjudgment and situational clash.

In Titus Andronicus, hamartia can be understood not as a simple matter of excessive violence or rigidity, but as a combination of intellectual misjudgment and situational clash. Rather than being driven by a single moral flaw, Titus Andronicus is a figure who fails to adjust his thinking to a rapidly changing and morally unstable world. His tragedy emerges from applying an outdated code of honor to situations that no longer operate according to those values.

Titus is a Roman general shaped by a strict belief in duty, sacrifice and ritual. His decisions are guided by a sense of order that assumes violence can be justified if it serves the state or follows a tradition. This becomes clear early in the play when he sacrifices Alarbus, the son of Tamara, as a part of funeral rite. From Titus' perspective. This act is logical and honorable as it is an appropriate tribute to fallen soldiers. His intellectual misjudgment lies in treating ritual as universally meaningful, without considering how it might be perceived by others, particularly those who are not from Rome and are new to Roman values.

This misreading continues in his political decisions. When offered the emperorship, Titus refuses and instead supports Saturninus, believing that loyalty to tradition will ensure stability. Yet this decision places power in the hands of a ruler who is impulsive and easily manipulated. Titus assumes that the structures of Rome will function as they always have but the reality is far more unstable. His trust in the system reveals a gap between his expectations and the actual conditions of the world around him.

The situational clash becomes even more evident in Titus' response to personal tragedy, particularly after the assault of his daughter Lavina. Faced with an act of brutality that cannot be addressed through legal or social means, Titus initially struggles to respond.

Titus relies on a world where signs have fixed meaning. For instance: a "hand" represents honor and service. When he cuts off his own hand, he performs a nonverbal utterance which fails as the state does not return his sons as promised. Titus doesn't just act; he "reworks" classical myths like Ovid's story of Philomela and kills his own daughter for the sake of state and honor. He becomes the director of his own tragedy, and his error of prioritizing the aesthetic of revenge over actual survival.

Conclusion

In revisiting the concept of hamartia through the tragedies of William Shakespeare, it becomes clear that the traditional emphasis on internal flaw derived from Aristotle's Poetics offers only a partial understanding of tragic causation. While Aristotle's notion of error (hamartanein – to miss the mark) has often been interpreted as a moral or psychological defect within a broader network of external forces. Tragedy, in these works, does not unfold in isolation within the character but emerges through a dynamic interaction between the individual and their environment.

Across plays such as King Lear, Othello, Julius Caesar and Titus Andronicus, the tragic outcome is shaped as much as by circumstance, social structure and manipulation. Characters misjudge not only themselves but the situations they are in. They apply familiar modes of reasoning to unfamiliar contexts and act within systems that twist rather than reveal truth. In this sense, hamartia becomes less a fixed trait and more a relational failure.

In Julius Caesar hamartia can be understood as a failure to navigate external complexity rather than a failure of character. In King Lear hamartia is not about the pride alone. It is about how easily people can misread situations, how they can apply wrong expectations to the wrong context. Lear's tragedy feels human because it reflects a common vulnerability; the inability to see that different spaces require different ways of understanding. His fall is not simply caused by who he is but by how he fails to adjust to the world as it changes around him.

Hamartia in Othello is not simply jealousy, but a failure to interpret both people and situations correctly. Othello's downfall comes from trusting a mode of thinking that works in one world but fails in another. In Titus Andronicus hamartia lies in a failure to interpret both context and consequence. Titus is not simply violent or inflexible; he is a man whose way of understanding the world no longer matches the reality he inhabits.

What emerges from this re-reading is a more extensive and human understanding of tragedy. The Shakespearean protagonist does not fall simply because they are flawed, but because they are placed within conditions that make clarity difficult and error almost inevitable. Therefore, hamartia must be reconsidered not as an exclusively internal quality, but as a phenomenon equally shaped by external forces. It is in the tension between the self and the world that tragedy truly resides. By extending Aristotle's framework to include this interplay, this article arrives at a more nuanced concept of hamartia, one that recognizes that to "miss the mark" is not always a matter of personal failure, but often result of navigating a world where the mark itself is unstable. Shakespeare reorients tragedy away from inner defect towards situational vulnerability, where individuals "miss the mark" not because they are morally deficient, but because the world they inhabit makes clear judgment nearly impossible.

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Family, Women, Violence, and Law: The Complications within Alternative Possibilities

Shailaja I Hiremath

Abstract

This article examines why legal alternatives to domestic violence in India, such as the Domestic Violence Act (2005), have not transformed into social realities. It argues that the Indian family—far from being a safe space—is a patriarchal construct that normalizes violence against women. The analysis deconstructs the concepts of woman, family, and violence, revealing how they are shaped by caste, class, and gender hierarchies. Through an intersectional lens, the study highlights how patriarchy operates differently across social groups—from the restrictive practices of Kerala's Namboodiri Brahmins to the brutal disciplinary violence within Maharashtra's Mahar community. It critiques the homogenizing tendency of law, which overlooks these specificities and often treats violence as a "social issue" rather than a systemic feature of family life. The article also examines how colonial legacies, institutional biases, and public narratives of "misuse" undermine women's legal protections. Despite progressive laws, patriarchal values persist in the judiciary, media, and support institutions, preventing meaningful implementation. Ultimately, the work calls for a fundamental rethinking of gender relations and legal frameworks, emphasizing that without deep social and ideological change, legislation alone cannot ensure women's safety or justice.

Keywords: Domestic Violence, Feminist Legal Critique, Marital Violence, Caste-Based Patriarchy, Family and Power, Gendered Violence, Law and Social Control, Intersectionality, Social Silence

This article emerges from the question of why the alternative possibilities created by the law against domestic violence have not become social models in practice. It attempts to understand how a society that is outwardly modern yet inwardly traditional has conceptualized violence against women within the family. There is a need to comprehend how gender-based ideologies have produced inequalities and violence, and how these have been strengthened and sustained in the name of "morality."

Whatever a society conceptualizes in the name of "morality" becomes the ground on which it generates customs and beliefs. It is society itself that constructs the intellectual forms and grammatical structures that legitimize such customs and beliefs. This issue can be studied at two levels: 1. An examination of why women, across all periods, continue to break social customs and beliefs. 2. An examination of why women and girl children who have shattered social customs and beliefs do not emerge as models in society. The present article undertakes the study at the second level. Before entering into the subject, it is necessary to clarify the meanings of the three concepts, woman, family, and violence.

Women: Definition of Meaning

It is necessary to clarify who are to be understood as women. From the time of conception in the mother's womb until old age, processes of sexual development in human beings continue to occur. Therefore, some who are identified as male at birth later transform into female; some who are identified as female at birth transform into male. Others exist as intersex persons. Women without a uterus are referred to as "boddiyar"; they are not recognised as women. Such biological diversity among human beings in nature rejects the rigid practice of classifying people strictly as "male" and "female."

The perspective that recognises only "male" and "female" in this world is a male-centred perspective; that is, a hegemonic perspective. Women can be categorised at three levels:

1. Those who are biologically female and have been subjected to patriarchal socialisation are identified as women.
2. Those who are identified as male at birth but emotionally perceive themselves as female and aspire to live accordingly. For example, "Hijras."
3. Those who are biologically male but are shaped as female due to social pressure. For example, "Jogappas."

Since a dissertation has its limitations and in order to avoid excessive expansion of the subject, this study focuses only on women belonging to the first category.

Family: Definition of Meaning

It is necessary to define what is meant by family. At the traditional level, a man, a woman, and children living under one roof are called a family. Because of employment and education, it may not be possible for husband, wife, and children to live under the same roof; therefore, liberal thought recognises them as a "family" on the basis of relational ties. Within the family, there exists a framework that identifies the wife and children from the standpoint of the husband. If a woman becomes a mother without marriage and lives with her child, that is not recognised as a family; even if a Devadasi woman lives with her children, she is not recognised within the framework of family. Those in live-in relationships are also not regarded as a family. Similarly, gay relationships and lesbian relationships are not viewed as families; even when emotionally identified women ("Hijras") live like wives with men of their choice, such relationships are not recognised as families. Likewise, even when Jogappas live with men of their choice, they are not viewed within the framework of family.

From an examination of these realities, the traditional family can be defined as follows: those who are biologically identified clearly as male and female must enter into a marital relationship recognised by the community, society, or the state; whether they live together or separately due to employment or education; whether they have children or not, their relationship is considered a family. To put it more directly, the sexual relationship between a man and a woman who enter into marriage recognised by the community, society, or the state is called "family." This relationship is explicitly oriented toward reproduction. Children born within the framework of marriage have all kinds of rights within the family and enjoy social legitimacy and respect. In other words, the concept of family denies the possibility of men or women having sexual relationships with partners of their choice outside marriage. It grants

moral legitimacy to sexual relations within marriage. The purpose of such sexual relations is the production of children. The family nurtures the belief that this leads to salvation (moksha). In sum, family is understood as the sexual relationship between a married man and woman. Children born within such a relationship are legitimized and recognised as part of the family. Children born outside such relationships are labelled "illegitimate offspring." Society does not recognise them within the domain of family. In male–male relationships and female–female relationships, it is assumed that children cannot be born; such relationships are not viewed on the model of husband and wife. Social and familial systems also reject biologically male persons living "like women" and biologically female persons living "like men." This process of rejection compels women to behave "like women" and men to behave "like men," enforcing stereotypical gender roles. Changes that occur within the biological processes of a living being, or the personal desire of men to become women and women to become men, are denied by hegemonic structures within the family and social system. Thus, the very concept of family represents a hegemonic ideology; it denies the choices and aspirations of diverse ways of living and forces individuals to construct their lives within the moral framework it has created.

Is Patriarchy Homogeneous?

The concept of "domestic violence" itself points to the patriarchal family system. The family embodies the process of directing and legitimising male dominance; it is this kind of structure that is called "family." In other words, by recognising domestic violence, the state and society implicitly accept that such violence occurs within the patriarchal family.

This leads to another problem. Is the family structure believed in by the state and society monolithic, or does it assume different forms depending on caste, class, region, and tribe? The following discussion attempts to clarify the differences in patriarchal structures between the Namboodiri caste of Kerala and the Mahar caste of Maharashtra.

The Namboodiri caste of Kerala primarily belongs to the landowning class. In the Namboodiri caste, women are identified as antarjanam. "Antarjanam" means a woman who lives her life inside the house from birth to death. There is a customary practice in Namboodiri families: only the eldest son of the Namboodiri lineage is permitted to marry a woman of the same caste. The younger brothers, born after him, marry women of the Nair caste, who are considered "lower caste."

This should not be understood as a process of transgressing caste boundaries. Nair women belong to matrilineal families. By marrying Nair women, Namboodiri men acquire ownership over Nair women's land. The politics of expanding land ownership is embedded in Namboodiri men marrying Nair women. Since only the eldest son is allowed to marry Namboodiri women, such women rarely get opportunities to marry. Consequently, polygamy becomes prevalent. The eldest son in a Namboodiri family acquires multiple wives. In order to marry off his sisters, he marries Namboodiri women one after another, receives dowry, and uses that money to arrange his sisters' marriages.

For all these reasons, Namboodiri women often do not marry at the appropriate age. Even if they marry, it cannot be said with certainty that they will find a husband of a similar age. They are married to older men, and sometimes they may not marry at all. Namboodiri women are not allowed to marry men of other castes. In all these ways, the sexuality of

Namboodiri women is suppressed. This is a form of patriarchy specific to the Namboodiri caste.

In the autobiography *Baduku Nammadu (Our Life)* by Baby Tai Kamble, one finds a clear depiction of the patriarchal structure within the Mahar community of Maharashtra. Mahar men beat their wives brutally every day. Exhausted by workload, physical violence, and suspicions about their chastity, married women would leave their husbands' homes in the middle of the night. Some left in search of love with men of their choice, while others returned to their parental homes. Before they could even reach their natal homes, members of their husbands' families (husband, father-in-law, brother-in-law, mother-in-law) would track them down, subject them to further violence, and forcibly bring them back. Even those who had gone with other men were not spared; they were hunted down, abused, and dragged back home. Once brought back to the husband's house, another form of punishment was inflicted on the woman. A hole was drilled into a square wooden block weighing about five kilograms, large enough for a foot to be inserted. A metal rod was placed through it, and the block was fixed to the daughter-in-law's right leg. The proportion of daughters-in-law subjected to such punishment was one in fifty (Baby Tai Kamble, 2009, p. 74). Unable to endure such violence, the punished women would again run away from home. When such women were brought back by persuasion, the husband and father-in-law would cut off their noses and then throw them out of the house. Such women were labelled "fallen women"; no one was allowed to shelter them or even speak to them.

This is the form of patriarchy within the Mahar caste of Maharashtra. Thus, patriarchy varies according to caste. Therefore, patriarchy cannot be viewed as homogeneous.

The Nature of Patriarchy in Academic Studies and Law

Humanities scholarship and the law on the prevention of domestic violence conceptualise patriarchy as a homogeneous system. Although the forms of violence against women within patriarchal systems differ, they all originate from the same foundation of power. The forms of physical, emotional, economic, and sexual violence recognised by law are centred on the power structures of patriarchy.

The law does not recognise caste-specific forms of patriarchy; instead, it interprets them as particular cultural practices of specific castes. Consequently, forms of violence against women that occur within particular castes and remain confined to those castes are not even considered as violence. For instance, within the Golla caste in Karnataka, patriarchal practices subject menstruating and postpartum women to social ostracism by expelling them from the household for a certain period, treating them like social offenders. The law does not recognise this as domestic violence against Golla women; therefore, such practices have been placed under the category of superstition eradication. Until the news-channel TV9 launched a campaign against this practice, Golla women were suffocating and dying under the veil of their caste. The law does not oppose the violence produced by caste-specific patriarchy. Instead, by treating patriarchy as homogeneous, it identifies violence against women and girl children at a universal level.

Domestic violence can be identified at two levels: 1. Forms of violence that correspond to the specific nature of patriarchy within particular castes. 2. Forms of violence identified by

subsuming all castes into a single framework, broadly recognising power structures and identifying domestic violence accordingly. The state and the law have abandoned the first level of violence by treating it as a private matter of particular castes. The second level of violence has been brought into the central framework of state and legal thinking.

Violence: Definition

Humanities scholarship, law, and the Constitution have defined violence in multiple ways. The present article, taking as its conceptual centre the theoretical framework articulated by law and the Constitution in the context of women, understands violence as any behaviour that undermines the emotions, bodily dignity, and constitutionally guaranteed rights of girl children and women is recognised as violence against women. This includes physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, and economic violence. Every activity that infringes upon the right of women and girl children to live with dignity is understood as violence against women. Every act of violence committed against them is, therefore, a violation of human rights.

Is the Family a Space of Safety for Women?

Indian society has believed that the family is an institution that provides protection and care for women and children. However, events occurring around us and the lived experiences of girls and women negate this belief.

1. Women and girl children are subjected to sexual violence by fathers, grandfathers, uncles, cousins, and brothers. Reports of rape committees also state that women are more often raped by acquaintances than by strangers, and especially by family members. Sexual violence occurring within the family is not recorded; even when it is recorded, it does not receive much public attention; therefore, no social protest emerges around it.
2. Whether in the natal home or the marital home, every girl child and woman is subjected to one form of violence or another, because of skin colour or physical appearance, because of education or employment, because of the patriarchal structure of the caste into which she is born, because of her mobility, because of her speech or silence, or because of the fixed stereotypical roles within the family such as widow, barren woman, or auspicious married woman (*muttai-de*). All these realities within the family clearly demonstrate that women and children are not safe within the family.

My mother used to say that when she was young, she would pray to Shiva for protection before going to sleep. Overall, many such experiences reveal that women are not safe within the family.

Domestic Violence against Women: How Colonial Administration Managed It

During the colonial period, laws were enacted concerning the abolition of sati, child marriage, and widow remarriage, but these were not considered "domestic violence"; instead, they were identified as "social problems." If the British had recognised child marriage, sati, and widowhood practices as "family problems," they would not have been able to govern India. Indians perceived families as "cultural spaces." Therefore, it was not easy for the British to

enter these "cultural spaces." The problems of widowhood and sati were detached from the family sphere and brought into the social sphere. The process of bringing domestic violence against women into the social realm and viewing it as such is considered a major transformation. It is believed that justice was achieved for women's issues.

The family is viewed as the primary unit of society. The perspectives offered by the humanities for understanding family and society are treated as ultimate and unquestionable. There has been no tradition of breaking or critically re-examining these perspectives from alternative standpoints. That is why the practice of viewing the family as the primary unit remains dominant. Society is formed from the level of the family; therefore, the family has a social scope as extensive as society itself. If domestic problems are examined within the framework of the family, the already constructed and widely accepted belief that "the family is a safe space for girls" collapses. If domestic violence is exposed, girls may begin to reject relationships such as marriage. But Indians have believed families to be cultural spaces. If it is proven that "families are spaces of violence," the deeply entrenched Indian ideology that "families are cultural spaces" will automatically disintegrate. The impact will directly fall upon the family; families will dissolve; Indian men will experience helplessness, anxiety, and a sense of orphanhood.

Therefore, the British transferred Indian family problems into the social sphere and used the perspectives of the humanities to do so. To ensure that their rule and existence were not threatened, they brought all family problems into the social domain and discussed them there. Because of this British strategy, many people in India were able to respond to women's issues. Consequently, Indians accepted the "women's problems" identified by the British and gave practical impetus to their ideas. However, these interventions had only the touch of social reform; they were not aimed at reducing or eliminating violence against women within the family. In 1923, the Special Marriage Act recognised women's right to divorce. Yet, it is noteworthy that there was no serious discussion about women's right to divorce. Instead, debates centred on child marriage and widow remarriage, focusing on the age of marriage and remarriage. In other words, even the laws framed by colonial rulers as pro-women continued to view marriage as the ultimate destiny of women.

In many communities in India, the dowry system does not exist; instead, practices such as bride price and thera exist. The British's focus on upper-caste and upper-class communities in India continues even today. That is, this is not a problem of the entire female population of India. The Dowry Prohibition Act, formulated during the colonial period by focusing on upper-caste, upper-class, and middle-caste middle-class women, remained confined to the level of rhetorical ideals. The death of Tarvinder Kaur in 1979 gave a major impetus to the anti-dowry movement. It was only with the implementation of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005, and its rules in 2006 that violence against women and girl children, including dowry-related violence, began to be recognised as domestic violence.

The Domestic Violence Prevention Law: From a Male Perspective

Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code criminalises cruelty committed against women by their husbands and their husbands' families. It is treated as a non-bailable offence. There is a claim that many women's organisations have relentlessly struggled to bring such laws into force. This

claim needs to be examined. Recently, there has been widespread debate that Section 498A is being misused. The entire system has raised an uproar, alleging that women are using this law as a weapon against men. It is possible that a few women may have misused this law. But the question of misuse is not confined to women-centric laws alone; it applies to all laws. Whenever laws are framed and implemented in favour of socially marginalised groups, the issue of "misuse" comes to the forefront and begins to dominate public discourse.

Amid this noise, the suffering of the marginalised - women, emotionally vulnerable women (transgender persons or "hijras"), and Dalits goes unheard. It is precisely to silence the suffering of the marginalised that the system continuously creates and sustains narratives of "misuse." Every day, countless women become victims of domestic violence. They die psychologically every day, biting their lips in silence without even verbally recording the violence inflicted upon them. Innumerable young women fall prey to so-called "honour killings." Women are assaulted and even murdered by those against whom they seek legal protection for their rights. When they demand legally guaranteed rights, they are ostracised by their own relatives. Even before birth, once it is known that the foetus is female, many are denied the chance to see the world. Most girls are subjected to sexual abuse within their own families. Many women continue to experience sexual violence at the hands of their husbands. Despite witnessing and hearing hundreds of such incidents, the narrative that women are misusing the law continues to grow louder day by day. Under this narrative, women's suffering, humiliation, sighs, and the truths of their murders are buried. Such narratives constantly construct women themselves as great criminals and perpetrators of violence, so that women's suffering and assaults are neither recorded orally or in writing nor believed even when recorded.

After the enactment of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, many people have opposed the law for three main reasons:

1. All citizens are equal before the law. But the domestic violence law pits women against men.
2. Since the implementation of the domestic violence law, the number of family break-ups has increased.
3. In most family conflicts, women are responsible. Women themselves exploit other women.

These attitudes can be analysed as follows. As we already know, the entire structure of family and society is biased in favour of men. Many women, in the name of family honour and out of fear of losing their dependent status, silently endure the violence inflicted upon them within the family. An unwritten law prevents girls and women from sharing their experiences with relatives, neighbours, or friends. This ensures that women cannot express the violence they suffer even at the level of language; in other words, it prevents women's suffering from being recorded even in oral forms. The belief that being a woman itself is destined to suffer has naturalised domestic violence against women as something as inevitable as nature. Thus, the patriarchal social system sets men against women within both family and society. Values and attitudes created by men, for men, and in favour of men further strengthen this structure. This is precisely why the Constitution and the law adopt a pro-women stance. This constitutes the analysis of the first reason mentioned above.

Women from upper castes, upper classes, and middle castes and classes have some awareness of their right to live. They have realised the hollowness of the belief that enduring humiliation is the destiny of womanhood. Therefore, they are moving towards the freedom to choose, to live, to move, to earn, and to retain rights over their earnings. When obstacles arise in this movement, they walk out of the very families that create those obstacles. This movement of women has caused tremors in the social system. Violence against women within the family was supposed to dissolve into darkness along with their silence and breath. But today, because of women's growing consciousness, it is being voiced; words are being recorded. For those who have breathed patriarchal values for centuries, this process has become deeply unsettling. That is why they complain that the law is breaking families. Those with patriarchal mindsets refuse to accept that the domestic violence law is introducing non-violent values into the family. This constitutes the analysis of the second reason mentioned above.

Whether in family structures or social structures, relationships among women have been woven in ways that pit one woman against another: mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law, sister-in-law against sister-in-law, barren woman against mother, unmarried woman against married woman, uneducated woman against educated woman, educated woman against uneducated woman - across multiple levels, women have been pushed into fragmentation. These are not conflicts among women as society imagines them to be; rather, they are conflicts systematically produced by familial and social structures. Therefore, instead of viewing them as "women's conflicts," they must be understood as conflicts and ruptures created by the system itself. But the system has prepared a social gaze that prevents such an understanding; it has shaped the very framework through which women's conflicts are interpreted. Hence, social perspectives and attitudes towards "family" and "women's conflicts" cannot be accepted as they are. This constitutes the analysis of the third reason mentioned above.

Scope of the Domestic Violence Prevention Law: A Social Perspective

The Domestic Violence Prevention Act includes within its ambit, not only married women but also daughters, mothers, illegal wives, women who have lived as wives, adopted women, and widows. However, this law is being viewed as if it were limited only to the problems of married women. In particular, judicial institutions and crime-prevention agencies are interpreting registered cases in a distorted manner, viewing them merely as conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. For this reason, the claim that "this law gives priority to women" is being interpreted as "this law gives priority to daughters-in-law." Are mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law not women as well? By advancing such arguments, the judiciary and crime-prevention agencies are adopting a strategy of pitting women against women. Such politics prevents the Domestic Violence Prevention Act from being effectively implemented.

It is noteworthy that immediately after the emergence of family-centred laws, organisations such as "Victim Husbands' Associations" also emerged. When a woman who files a domestic violence case is a daughter-in-law, attempts are made, through the mother-in-law to register counter-cases claiming that the daughter-in-law committed violence against her. Courts are using familial and social perspectives that pit daughters-in-law against mothers-in-law and mothers-in-law against daughters-in-law. The very law that should have generated

serious awareness and debate on domestic violence is instead being used by patriarchal society to misdirect both the judiciary and crime-prevention agencies. In this process, the media organise large debates by bringing together lawyers, police officers, social workers, especially "women activists" and sometimes even "women thinkers" who are unknown to both academic and social spheres. Women's issues are not discussed from a women's perspective but from a male perspective. Consequently, such debates ultimately arrive at a preconceived theoretical conclusion that women are misusing the law. Because traditional society fears women-centric laws, it readily accepts media-driven debates that reinforce this narrative.

Family, Class, and Women

So far, I have studied more than a thousand families. Based on their economic backgrounds, families have been classified into three categories:

1. Upper-class families
2. Middle-class families
3. Lower-class families

In India, there is a direct relationship between economic stratification and caste stratification. In most cases, "class" is closely linked with "caste," and "caste" is often intertwined with "class." It is on this basis that families have been categorised into the three levels mentioned above.

1. Upper-Class Families

Most women in upper-class families enjoy certain basic economic facilities. They have access to good clothing, food, and vehicles such as cars and bikes. Not being allowed to pursue the courses of their choice, not being given freedom of choice in matters of marriage, not being permitted to take up employment, and not being granted a share in property rights - many women belonging to upper-caste and upper-class families do not even perceive these as forms of domestic violence. Alongside this, they remain silent, treating the violence they face as insignificant when weighed against the prestige of the family.

Women belonging to upper-class families were not inclined to state that they had experienced domestic violence. The reasons for this can be identified at two levels: 1. The dominance of family and caste structures. 2. Lack of awareness about the constitutional rights granted to girls and women. These two reasons are analysed below.

Upper-caste and upper-class women refused to speak about domestic violence inflicted upon them. Since problems within villages or communities are resolved by upper-caste and upper-class men, women and girls belonging to such families are not permitted to share their experiences of exploitation with others. I would like to present two cases as examples. Along with each case, an analysis is provided.

Case One

A man belonging to a prestigious family is engaged in social service related to Devadasis. Yet, within his own family, the condition of his daughter-in-law is deeply disturbing. She is not

allowed to speak with her husband. Even domestic workers in the house are treated with respect, but she is treated as less than an animal. When anyone visits the house, she is not allowed to appear before them. The male child she gave birth to has been taken away from her. To that child, the mother is a stranger. If she becomes pregnant, the pregnancy is forcibly terminated. The family publicly declares that the daughter-in-law has no relationship with their son. If the daughter-in-law were to become pregnant, it would imply a relationship with the son; therefore, whenever she conceives, the pregnancy is terminated. The violence she experiences is beyond what words can capture. She receives no support from her natal family. Her husband's family silences her voice; the backgrounds of both families lock her mouth shut. The structures of domination embedded in family and caste subject her to daily torture and slowly kill her. She knows that she can work in tailoring and computer centres and live independently. But her husband's family, foregrounding their caste and class dominance, deprives her of the opportunities she has created for herself. Her natal family does not stand by her. Patriarchy within caste has stripped the daughter of her natal support after marriage; simultaneously, the husband's family has threatened that she should not be given any support. Therefore, when the daughter repeatedly returns to her natal home, her parents sometimes view her helplessly and at other times as a burden. When they view her helplessly, they appear as people trapped within the rigid bonds of patriarchy shaped by class, region, and caste; when they view her as a burden, they appear as spokespersons of patriarchy within region and caste. Meanwhile, the husband's family derives special authority from the institution of marriage. Along with this, they enjoy the backing of patriarchy embedded in caste, class, and region. All these factors intensify the cruelty of violence inflicted upon such women. The dominant perspective of the husband's family that refuses to see the daughter-in-law as a member of the family but instead treats her as "our bonded labourer," and the natal family's ruthless attitude that "a daughter once given in marriage no longer belongs to her community," render women of upper-class families extremely helpless and push them into abyss-like conditions. For this reason, domestic violence against married women belonging to upper castes and upper classes is so complex that it defies description and resists analysis.

Case Two

The Mysuru case (2015) can be taken as an example. The woman's father was a retired IAS officer, and her father-in-law was an influential businessman. Despite such a background, the young woman was subjected to sexual violence by members of her husband's family for ten years in silence. Keeping in mind the "social prestige" of both her natal family and her husband's family, she took ten years to file a case against domestic violence. The woman in the second case mentioned here was highly educated. Her father was an IAS officer, holding one of the highest positions in government. Both father and daughter were aware of the law. Yet, the daughter did not share the violence inflicted upon her, considering her father's health. The high level of education acquired by the members of her husband's family and their social status did not prevent them from perpetrating violence against their daughter-in-law. At the same time, although the victim herself was highly educated, her educational background and natal social status did not enable her to stand up against violence. Why did this happen? We often believe that "education contributes to personality development and initiates the empowerment

of the nation." We claim to be receiving modern education. But why did such education not prevent injustice or encourage questioning of injustice when it occurred? In other words, education has no real connection with social institutions. Education has not transformed the structures of social institutions such as family and marriage, nor has it altered the perspectives through which these institutions are viewed. Even the Domestic Violence Prevention Act has not shaken institutions like family and marriage in the slightest. Does this mean that the family system is so strong that education and legal institutions cannot change it? Or do education and legal institutions stand helpless before institutions like family and marriage? Or is there a problem inherent in the very nature of education and law? All these questions need to be examined.

Even after independence and the framing of the Constitution, no fundamental change was seen in India's modern education system. The curricula changed, but the ideological foundations of the curricula continued unchanged. This process has continued uninterrupted. Education in schools, colleges, and universities has also retained traditional attitudes towards relationships between men and women, the family, and the institution of marriage. Information about constitutional rights exists in textbooks, but education does not provide the intellectual capacity to apply these rights to one's own life and expand their meaning. Hence, education remains confined to examination marks and never develops into a life perspective.

For all the above reasons, the structure of the family continues to perpetuate rigid traditional attitudes even today. Consequently, girls and women continue to exist in complex and precarious conditions. The 'family' views the daughter-in-law as an outsider; moreover, it attempts to mould her according to the emotional and psychological needs of family members. This process of moulding resembles the training of animals. Therefore, assaults and violence on her body and emotions continue ruthlessly, even in ways opposed by the Constitution and law. Violence against daughters-in-law is defined as a means of transforming their personality according to the family's beliefs. That is why family members who live with her perceive violence against girls and women that occurs before their eyes as something natural. For this reason, very few cases of domestic violence reach the threshold of law. Have all women who approached the law received justice? If they have, in what form was justice delivered? In the context of women, what is understood as justice? What are women's opinions about the justice they have received? These questions need to be examined. They require separate and dedicated research.

There are also some major obstacles inherent in the nature of law itself. During the formation of laws, the colonial administration took into account the sentiments of upper-caste, upper-class, and middle-caste, middle-class Indians; accordingly, the notion of domestic privacy was defined. Thus, "women's laws" were shaped by the male perspective of local upper castes and upper classes, as well as the colonial gaze. Even after independence, the laws formulated during colonial rule have continued. No serious examination was undertaken to determine whether laws actually incorporate constitutionally guaranteed rights. As a result, when women are subjected to the most degrading forms of violence, laws are interpreted through a gender perspective only if the judges handling such cases possess gender sensitivity. Since women's problems are complex, varying according to religion, caste, class, region, education, and employment, the problems faced by each woman differ accordingly.

2. Middle-Class Families

In middle-class families, women and children are subjected to all forms of violence recognised by law. In upper-middle-class and middle-class families, the natal family often files a dowry-related case only after the girl dies in her husband's house. As Madhu Kishwar has observed, the physical and psychological violence suffered by the daughter is not what primarily concerns her natal family. Instead, the natal family becomes disturbed only when the husband's family demands valuable assets such as land, gold, and money. When such demands cross limits, or when the young woman dies for this very reason, the natal family files a case against dowry-related violence, foregrounding only economic reasons and pushing into the background the multiple forms of violence the girl endured such as, violence inflicted in the name of skin colour, appearance, education, employment, the fact that she gave birth only to female children, or accusations of sexual relations with others. The natal family records only the violence inflicted upon itself as the violence inflicted upon the daughter. (See: *Manuṣi's Voice*, Madhu Kishwar, translated by L. G. Meera, 1997.)

Apart from this, if a daughter marries a boy from a different caste, she is subjected to "honour killing." Marriages across different religions, castes, and communities are not accepted as normal by the respective caste and community groups. In such cases, caste and communal interests, as well as issues of sharing and distributing property, come into play. This is fundamentally tied to the question of "purity of blood." Women who demand property rights - whether as daughters or widowed daughters-in-law they become targets of assault and murder. Such incidents have deep impacts on growing children. For children, violence does not appear as violence; they perceive it as a natural process and internalise it, transmitting it to the next generation.

3. Lower-Class Families

In most cases, those identified as belonging to the lower classes stand at the lowest levels of the caste hierarchy. Even within the castes classified at the bottom, there are internal hierarchies. These hierarchies divide them into categories of "superior" and "inferior." Even within "subaltern communities," patriarchy does not exist in a uniform form. These communities, too, impose sexual control over women in order to assert their caste purity. In this section, only those lower communities that have accepted the Devadasi system are discussed. Among communities such as the Nayakas, Gangamathas, Maadaars, and Holeyas, the Devadasi system exists alongside the institution of marriage. Whether a girl should be married or dedicated as a Devadasi is decided by the grandmother, mother, or aunt; men do not intervene in this decision. In these communities, the Devadasi system is not sustained merely by superstition and religious vows. It is also shaped by their firm attitudes towards the institution of marriage. Basamma (name changed) from Mariyammanahalli near Hospet narrated her experience as follows:

I raised my children with love. I made them literate. That is why I did not want to marry them off. My mother used to say that. In those days, even the situation of married women was like that. In our times, women of our lower castes would

run away with other men even after marriage. Women who ran away were brought back by beating them and forced to live with such men. They were punished severely. Heavy shackles were put on both their legs. Those shackles were so heavy that even taking a single step became painful. Iron chains were attached to them. Along with the weight of wood, they had to bear the weight of iron. While walking, they had to hold the iron chains in their hands. Any woman who was shackled was understood to have run away and returned. We were people who survived on daily wage labour. Women wearing shackles could not even stay inside the house. Whether going to the fields or to relieve themselves, they had to come out into the open. Everyone in the neighbourhood would come to watch them. They would not lift their bowed heads. They were punished so that they would not repeat such 'mistakes.' Even then, they would run away again. Even the men they considered their husbands inflicted severe violence on them. That is why they left their husbands and ran away with men who showed them affection. Among upper castes, such things did not exist. I never saw their daughters crossing the threshold of the house. In our community, marrying a daughter felt like pushing her into a well in broad daylight. That is why my mother did not marry us off. Letting a daughter grow happily and remain in her natal home was the only way for her to live peacefully.

The above words recall the descriptions found in the autobiography of Baby Tai Kamble (Jina Amucha, pp. 74–76). The accounts of Basamma and Baby Tai Kamble highlight the cruelty embedded in the institution of marriage among lower castes. Basamma's words reveal that marriage was not compulsory for everyone. While some women dedicated their daughters to the Devadasi system due to blind beliefs and superstitions, others did so in order to escape the even more brutal forms of domestic violence within their own caste communities- violence that was sometimes harsher than that found among upper castes. Even today, such processes continue. Pressures from the social environment, the atmosphere and expectations within educational institutions, and pressures imposed by the government and NGOs are gradually pushing communities that once accepted the Devadasi system towards the institution of marriage; as a result, these communities are being transformed into father-centred family structures. Recently, some Devadasis have begun marrying off their daughters. However, married daughters become victims of sexual, psychological, and physical violence from their husbands and in-laws precisely because of their mothers' backgrounds. Even when the husband's family belongs to the same community as the girl, their orientation towards the institution of marriage makes them view the life practices of their own community as inferior. Earlier, there were no strict sexual restrictions in lower communities. But their movement towards the institution of marriage is increasingly tying them to the concept of chastity. Consequently, married women in these communities are subjected to character-centred violence.

Men in communities that accepted the Devadasi system are often addicted to alcohol and gambling. As a result, girls and women in these communities are forced not only to endure all forms of violence perpetrated by their husbands and in-laws but also to engage in wage labour to sustain their children and families. Their emotional attachment to their children

compels them to swallow the violence inflicted by their husbands and in-laws. Children who grow up witnessing daily fights between their parents internalise this as a way of life. Thus, domestic violence against women is transmitted from generation to generation as an integral part of everyday existence. In such an environment, how can children dream of a better life? Many lower-class girls and women who cannot tolerate domestic violence have been pushed into sex work.

There are many communities among lower castes, the tribals as well as the nomadic communities that do not follow the Devadasi system. The limits of this article do not allow for a discussion of all of them here.

Even if girls born into the most upper-class families are unable to fully access constitutionally guaranteed rights, they still live relatively tolerable lives. If the daughter-in-law belongs to the same class, there is little problem. But if her natal background is even slightly lower in status, harassment becomes almost inevitable. The intensity of such harassment depends on the mindset of the members of the husband's family.

In upper-middle-class and middle-class families, the moral boundaries surrounding sexuality compel women to be perceived strictly within those limits. In matters such as marriage, these families do not permit crossing the caste boundaries drawn like a Lakshmana Rekha. This is why "honour killings" are more frequent among them. Upper castes and middle castes define their caste superiority precisely by subjecting women to sexual control.

The law, the state, and some NGOs have instructed communities that follow the Devadasi system that marriage is the ultimate solution. Children who are exposed to modern education increasingly desire a "father-centred" family structure. In these communities, as described by Baby Tai Kamble and Basamma of Mariyammanahalli, women's sexuality is controlled in an extremely harsh manner. Moreover, poverty, educational backwardness, and similar factors further intensify cruelty against women. Like upper and middle castes, these communities too equate women with the body and sexuality.

The three types of families analysed above are merely classifications made for the convenience of study. Those belonging to upper castes may belong to the middle or lower economic classes; those from middle castes may belong to upper or lower classes; similarly, those from lower classes may belong to upper or middle economic strata. The three categories of families overlap and merge with one another beyond hierarchical divisions when it comes to violence against women. Patriarchy attempts to establish itself in positions of power by breaking through the walls of caste and religion. The forms of patriarchy in upper castes are imitated by castes that follow them in the hierarchy. Therefore, although patriarchy varies according to caste, religion, class, and region, it ultimately consolidates itself at the level of power. Tehmina Durrani's *My Feudal Lord (The Autobiography of the Sixth Wife)* serves as an excellent example of this. Overall, domestic violence occurring in any caste and any class has adverse effects on family members and children. Alithea Levendosky, a professor in the Department of Psychology at Michigan State University, along with her research team, studied 182 mothers aged between 18 and 34 and concluded that domestic violence directly affects the foetus (Prajavani, 20 December 2014, p. 10). Similarly, studies on women inclined towards terrorism reveal that conflict between parents is a major factor in their family background (Manthana, *Lady Terror*, 20 May 2015, p. 9). Not all those involved in terrorism are victims of poverty alone; many have grown up witnessing domestic violence. Therefore, domestic

violence against girls must be taken seriously. The analysis of the above discussion leads to the theoretical conclusion that domestic violence constitutes the fundamental core of many social problems.

Rape within the Framework of Marriage

Indians have not taken seriously the question of rape within marriage, because their firm belief is that such a question does not arise at all. The concept of "rape" is not new to India. Colonial rule applied this concept in accordance with India's social context. English medical practices were unfamiliar to Indians. Indigenous medical systems were embedded with many superstitions and were patriarchal in nature. In upper castes, underage girls were married off. Immediately after marriage, the girl was sent to her husband's house, without any consideration of whether she was mentally or physically prepared for sexual relations. Countless underage girls were subjected to sexual assault at a very young age. Consequently, marital relationships became violent rather than affectionate, and girls soon fell into psychological depression. They faced numerous physical problems due to sexual relations. Many became pregnant even before understanding what sexuality meant. A large number of girls died during childbirth. Although colonial rulers identified this as "rape within marriage," they did not legislate against it. Had they done so, it would have meant intervening in what could be considered the most private sexual matters of upper-caste Indians, which would have directly affected colonial administration. Therefore, to reduce sexual violence against girls within the marital framework, upper castes adopted an alternative route: they increased the age of marriage. Marriages conducted before the prescribed age were criminalised through the Child Marriage Prohibition Act.

Today, child marriages are occurring in all marginal communities. Upper castes had earlier used child marriage as a means to demonstrate caste purity. Subsequently, all castes and communities in the hierarchical order adopted child marriage practices to assert their caste purity. The objective of the Child Marriage Prohibition Act was not to prevent sexual violence against women as such, but to prevent sexual violence against girls within the marital framework.

The divorce laws formulated by colonial rulers defined "physical relations" as an inseparable part of marriage and allowed divorce if sexual relations were refused. Many men have used this provision as a weapon to obtain divorce easily. The judiciary does not consider why a woman refused sexual relations. One of our relatives refused to live with her husband, but she did not share the reason with anyone. Neither the social nor the familial environment enabled her to speak out. Thus, she internalised the problem in her relationship with her husband. When her mother persistently questioned her, the daughter was forced to reveal the truth: her husband was forcing her into oral sex. He rejected sexual relations that were socially accepted as "natural" and oriented towards reproduction. Even after learning the truth, the mother advised her daughter to adjust with him. With no other option, the daughter returned to her husband's house. She tried to prepare herself to respond to her husband's demands, but she failed. When she found no place either in her husband's house or in her parental home, she committed suicide. There are countless wives who cannot adapt to their husbands' obsession with anal and oral sex. Many such women have been divorced because they did not comply

with their husbands' sexual demands. These women are unable to explain, either to society or to family, the sexual violence they experience within marriage. In some cases, women consent to their bisexual husbands having sexual relations with third-gender persons; some even consent to their husbands marrying them. Such marriages are still not legally recognised in India. They exchange garlands before a household deity and live happily. Many wives who wish to remain as wives and mothers reject anal and oral sex that is unrelated to reproduction, but in order to retain their place in their husband's home, they accept their husbands' relationships with "emotional women" (hijras). This behaviour of wives cannot be considered genuine "consent"; rather, it is consent forced by the need to survive within a social framework. Women who believe that sexual relations with hijras do not result in children are not anxious about such relationships, since they assume that questions of inheritance will not arise.

Some husbands assault their wives' private parts daily, claiming that the wife is too thin, that her body is unattractive, or that she is sexually unappealing. Others constantly suspect their wives and subject them to sexual violence. The sexual violence that women face within marriage is indescribable. Society, family, and even the executive and judiciary do not provide any space for the expression of sexual violence committed by husbands against wives. If a woman resists in such circumstances, she faces familial and social rejection. In 2015, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women demanded that "marital rape" be recognised as a crime. The Indian government's position is that this does not apply to India, because marriage is believed to be a sacred bond. Although the media-initiated discussions on this issue, they failed to capture the seriousness of rape within marriage. Television media viewed it from a male-centric perspective rather than a feminist one. They portrayed "marital rape" as a joke. Media narratives suggested that such laws would further corrupt already corrupt women and that repeated enactment of pro-women laws would enable women to exploit men even more. They did not examine whether the Verma Committee Report of 2013 addressed marital rape, or what it actually stated.

Since sexual relations within marriage are viewed under the concept of lineage and reproduction, society regards them with great reverence. At the same time, society does not wish to examine whether such relationships are violent or affectionate; it considers such examination sinful and an intrusion into an extremely private matter. Therefore, awareness of the harmful consequences of child marriage on girls emerged only after colonial rulers created such awareness among Indians. The Domestic Violence Act speaks about sexual violence within marital relationships and stands in support of women's protection. Yet, it is noteworthy that no woman facing sexual violence within marriage has filed a case in court or with the police. Should this be interpreted as the absence of sexual violence within marriage? Should we assume that women hesitate to speak about it? Or should we conclude that the social system does not allow such expression? Do married women not perceive the sexual violence inflicted by their husbands as violence? Do they consider it the husband's right? What social interests underlie this perception? Do crime prevention agencies and the judiciary function in such a way that even when sexual violence is expressed it is not heard, and even when recorded it leaves no trace? Amidst all these pressures, what forms of sexual violence do women articulate, and what is their nature? These questions demand careful examination. Only then will the dark shadow surrounding sexual violence against women be removed and the truth revealed. Until then, the concept of "rape within marriage" will remain nothing more than a big joke.

Housewife – House Engineer

In 2013–14, the Union Minister for Women and Child Welfare of the central government expressed interest in introducing a bill related to women's issues. The bill proposed that a husband should give between 10% and 20% of his salary to his wife who stays at home. The intention behind the bill was to provide economic recognition to the labour of housewives. Since the housewife had been defined as an "unpaid domestic servant," the bill aimed to discard that notion and introduce the concept of the "house engineer" into popular usage. The bill was never implemented. However, it faced widespread opposition. The debates that followed interpreted it as an issue that would lead to the disintegration of the family. They discussed the differences between Western and Eastern family structures and argued that such a law was unsuitable for India. Cultural concepts such as *sahadharmini* (companion in dharma), couplehood, and housewife were brought to the forefront of the discussion. Questions were raised such as:

If a wife receives financial remuneration from her husband for household work, should she also receive remuneration for her sexual relationship with him? If she does, would the relationship still remain that of husband and wife? Would the "sacredness" of marriage be preserved? Since wives are supposedly lacking in financial prudence, would they not fall into consumerist culture? Would many husbands not end up handing over their entire salaries to their wives?

Many such questions were raised (see Tushara, January 2013, pp. 131–143). The print media and television channels debated this unimplemented bill as if it were an impending catastrophe. The question of officially recognising a wife's share in her husband's salary deeply unsettled patriarchal society. Had the Women and Child welfare minister instead proposed a bill stating that the government should pay a fixed salary to all housewives, or that private companies should pay wives 20% of their husbands' salaries if the husbands worked in private firms, on the grounds that wives prepare men for government jobs and private employment, there sure would have been massive public support. Posters with slogans like "Implement this bill immediately," "Save the family," and "Protect us from economic crisis" would have been printed and handed to wives to hold, thereby creating a massive women's movement! The media too would have highlighted the advantages of such a law, though without specifying what those advantages actually were.

The process by which the government provides loans to women at low interest rates and to groups like *Stree Shakti* is interpreted as "women empowerment." It is unclear whether such economic schemes implemented in the name of empowerment actually benefit women. But they certainly strengthen men further while trapping women in a vicious cycle of debt. No opposition has emerged from the social system against these state-led processes of women's economic empowerment, because these schemes do not attempt to establish the rights of married women within the family. Nor do the women participating in them exercise their rights within the male-centred economic sphere. Women obtain loans from the government in the name of *Stree Shakti* only to meet the financial needs of men. Whenever attempts are made to legally establish women's rights over property and finances within the family, powerful resistance erupts from the very foundations of society.

The Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence from a Women's Perspective

Some women say, "My father is good, my brother is good, my husband is good, but society is like this, so they behave this way." Others say, "My father, brother, and husband themselves are not good; they are bad people. Society only gives them the support to behave this way."

These two statements clearly reveal two realities:

1. Even when the men within the family are essentially good, social values transform them into perpetrators of violence.
2. Men within the family are already violent, and social values further intensify their violence.

Among the women who had experienced domestic violence and whom I spoke to, none expressed hatred towards individuals; instead, they opposed violence itself. Women strongly condemn men who, due to addictions (alcohol, gambling, extramarital relationships, etc.), lose money and health and subject family members to economic, physical, and emotional violence. If men abandon their vices and stop violence, women have no objection to living with them. Their anger is clearly directed not at familial relationships but at social values.

Contemporary women are no longer willing to conceal everything within the family in the name of "private matters" or "family honour." Interviewing women from middle-class and lower-class families was not difficult; once they began speaking, they opened their hearts and felt relieved. During the interviews, three realities were revealed:

1. Even while living within families, women experience a sense of orphanhood.
2. Gender hierarchies within families continue to nurture barbarity in the name of values.
3. Even in the presence of men in the household, women narrated the violence inflicted upon them. This indicates that most women were interested in discussing domestic problems in a social framework and seeking solutions.

Many women urged me to play a role that was not mine: "Tell them you are a police officer," "Tell them you are a lawyer. You know the law. Threaten them in the name of the law. Mere advice from elders won't make them change. Say you'll put them in jail and that will affect them. If men continue to harass us, the family cannot survive, sister."

A large number of women believe that individuals and society can be transformed through law. The aspirations and objectives expressed by many women whom I interviewed were identical to those embedded in the law on the prevention of domestic violence. Yet, patriarchal society harbours deep and intense fear of such laws related to the family. Therefore, it raises alarm, claiming that the domestic violence law causes disintegration of the family and that if the family collapses, society itself will collapse.

The objective of the Domestic Violence Act is to make the family free from violence and to initiate the implementation of human rights from the level of the family. Any law that is pro-women is, by definition, pro-oppressed. "Pro-women" always implies "pro-human rights." Implementing pro-women laws within the family means eliminating violence, preventing crimes, nurturing physically and mentally healthy citizens, and enforcing constitutionally guaranteed rights of women through legal mechanisms. The purpose of any

law is not to pit one individual against another, but to bring everyone to an equal footing and ensure a life of dignity and happiness.

After the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act, an organisation of "Victim Husbands" emerged. A husband incites his mother and sisters against his wife, then files complaints in courts and police stations claiming that his wife harasses him, his mother, and his sisters, seeking legal protection.

When daughters demand their share of property in their father's house, they are emotionally pressured through their mothers or through their brothers' wives and children. If emotional pressure fails, they face physical attacks and death threats. If women choose their own life partners, they are subjected to "honour killings." In essence, even though laws are framed in favour of women, patriarchal society does not allow them to be implemented. It panics and protests, claiming that pro-women laws destroy families, and thus keeps their implementation at a distance. As a result, all women-related laws exist only on paper.

Women of all castes seek legal support not to oppress men but to stop violence and lead peaceful lives. None of the women I interviewed believed that "law destroys families"; instead, they sought legal support precisely to preserve families. Men and those who share a male-centric worldview, transcending caste boundaries, unite in interpreting pro-women laws as threats to family and social order. They raise alarm about the "misuse" of laws. In this process of panic and protest, there lies an intention to keep women trapped in conditions of violence. They believe that violence enables them to mould women's identities according to their own interests. Thousands of years of history support this belief. The state too quickly aligns itself with male-centred interests.

For the law on the prevention of domestic violence to function effectively, government-established institutions meant to provide supportive services must operate in a complementary manner. Family counselling centres, support centres, Swadhar centres, reception centres, state homes, short-stay homes for women and girls - such centres and shelters were expected to become rays of hope for women affected by domestic violence. However, the objective of government service centres is not, as the law mandates, to provide protection and shelter to women subjected to domestic violence, but rather to "promote harmony within the family." Even when women who approach these centres wish to live separately from their families, the institutions pressure them to reconcile. They train women to adjust to the very conditions that compelled them to leave their families. Thus, institutions designated by the state, ostensibly for the benefit of women affected by domestic violence, do not create alternative possibilities, as envisaged by the law.

For women and girls who seek refuge with trust and hope, these institutions offer experiences hardly different from imprisonment. Those who have left their families are viewed by the staff as "not good women" or "not good daughters." This is because they lack training in a gender-sensitive perspective; they are direct products of patriarchal society. The law on the prevention of domestic violence exists only in textual form. The judiciary, executive, and various service agencies responsible for its implementation have not internalised a gender perspective. Society reacts with panic merely by looking at the written law, muttering like people half-awake: "Families will break apart," "Women are misusing the law," and similar claims. The government endorses this irrational social mindset and hastily decides to amend the law. The domestic violence law under Section 498(A) was brought to a compromise-based

(compoundable) framework. This implies that assaults and violence against women within the family need not necessarily be treated as crimes. While the Domestic Violence Act came into force in 2006, it was amended in 2015 to make it compoundable. Within just nine years of the law's enactment, transforming it into a compoundable offence in the name of "misuse" appears unprecedented in legal history.

Although India is a "democratic" nation, its governments function in favour of men. Consequently, despite the existence of countless women who have stepped out of families and built independent lives, they do not become social models. Nor does the democratic state create conditions for them to emerge as models. Tradition-bound societies that appear outwardly modern do not permit such possibilities. Law and social values stand at opposite ends of a straight line, never converging. The primary aspiration expressed by all the women interviewed is that entrenched practices within families must change. If gender-based practices are transformed, new families rooted in constitutional principles will emerge. In such a scenario, there would be no need for a law on the prevention of domestic violence. To achieve this, society, the state, the judiciary, and crime-prevention agencies must rethink their approaches and move in new directions.

Endnotes

1. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar identifies two categories of social reformers during the period of British rule: 1. those who confined themselves to reforming the Hindu family, and 2. those who engaged in the reconstruction of Hindu society (Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, 2010, p. 69). According to Ambedkar, both these groups aligned themselves with British reformism in their desire to elevate themselves to a "civilised" status. Those who were first exposed to the British education system were the upper castes and upper classes. Therefore, the social reform movement was largely led and dominated by upper-caste and upper-class groups. No reform movement can be said to be free from politics; every reform movement is inevitably driven by political motives. In the context of colonial rule, women-centred reform movements were backed by powerful political agendas. Many upper-caste men who had received modern education identified the problems of women within their own families. None of them listened to women of their communities or daughters to understand their problems. Only those women's issues that were identified by colonial authorities and accepted by reformers came to be recognised as "women's issues." As Ambedkar points out, reform movements in India were largely confined to Hindu familial reform. The notion of the "Hindu family," which the British attempted to generalise across diverse castes, did not actually expand into a unified Hindu identity; instead, it remained limited to the upper castes and upper classes. Those issues that were identified as "women's problems" became the basis for framing laws to address them. Consequently, during the reformist period, laws were formulated around issues such as dowry, the practice of sati, child marriage, women's education, widow remarriage, and foeticide. However, these laws did not include women from lower-middle castes, lower castes, tribal communities, and nomadic communities. The women's laws that emerged during the colonial period continue to operate even today in the same form. In lower-caste communities, there is no rigid practice of widowhood, no prevalence of child marriage, and sexual violence against women subjected to the Devadasi system is not even recognised as "rape" by law. Although men from lower castes, lower classes, tribal and nomadic communities have been granted rights such as education and employment under the Constitution, in social reality they continue to be deprived of these rights. In a broader sense, all castes, religions, tribal and nomadic communities are patriarchal in nature. In such societies, if men themselves are deprived of basic rights, what then can be the condition of girls and women? For communities that struggle daily for survival, issues such as dowry and foeticide do not even arise as problems. That is why it is said that, except for the law banning the Devadasi system, most women's laws do not encompass girls and women belonging to lower castes, lower classes, tribal and nomadic communities.

2. Many scholars and activists conclude that the women's movement is responsible for the numerous changes that have taken place in India's judicial system and crime-prevention apparatus. Although their positions appear true on the surface, they do not hold up at a deeper level. In reality, the changes that occur from time to time in India's legal system and crime-prevention mechanisms are largely driven by several organisations under the United Nations that focus on women's concerns. Under the directives of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, initiatives such as the observance of International Women's Day in India, the Women's Decade, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), among others, were implemented as part of the Government of India's action plans. Alongside this, the United Nations transformed women's rights into human rights. All these developments contributed to changes in the formulation of laws relating to women. The primary reason is that the Government of India began to understand the personality and subjectivity of women and girls beyond its traditional frameworks and framed laws accordingly was due to the pressure exerted by the United Nations. As a member state of the United Nations, India is obliged to endorse its resolutions and conventions. The Government of India includes government representatives, state-recognised social workers, NGO members, media representatives, and others. In a democratic country like India, the representation of all these groups is considered essential. When women in India face extreme and inhuman forms of violence, NGO representatives and social activists who participate in the UN Commission on the Status of Women, function as the very voice of the United Nations. Having signed the UN resolutions on women, the Government of India, as part of its moral politics, accepts the pressures exerted by these actors. In this context, changes are introduced in Indian laws and new laws are enacted. That is why I assert with certainty that the women's movement is not the primary reason for changes in women-related laws in India.
3. The formal system of education was shaped by colonial rulers. Education that was limited to the upper castes, upper classes, and middle castes and middle classes was freed from rigid caste boundaries. The education shaped by colonial rule came to be called modern education. However, it cannot be said that it was modern in an ideological or intellectual sense. India's national movements designed curricula with "nationalism" and "Hindu culture" as their central concerns. Colonial administration, too, did not question the politics of the curriculum. Two reasons can be identified for this: 1. The content of the curriculum was treated as an internal or private Indian matter. 2. Even colonial rulers shared the same attitudes as Indians regarding family, marriage, and relationships between men and women; or, in some respects, they held even more rigid positions than Indians.

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Details of Interviewees

(Interviewees names have been changed at their request. Only a few names are mentioned symbolically.)

Name	Age	Caste	Education	Place
Anu	25	---	SSLC	Bengaluru
Jayashree	30	Brahmin	BA	Bengaluru
Mallama	60	Madara	6th Std	Bidar
Paravva	30	Madara	BA	Vijapura
Pramila	32	Lingayat (Jangama)	MA	Mysore
Basamma	97	Madara	4th Std	Mariammanahalli
Mamatha	21	---	6th Std	Bengaluru
Renuka	28	Gangamathastha	PUC	Hunagunda
Sukanya	37	Banajiga	Degree	Gulbarga

Defamiliarizing Human-Nonhuman Relationship: Indigenous Ecological Worldview and Kinship Across Species in Lakshminath Bezbarua's Select Folktales

Jahnu Deori & Shahila Zafar

Abstract

Lakshminath Bezbaruah's folktales collection, *Burhi Āir Sādhu* (1911), holds a significant place in the Assamese literary tradition. These tales are popular in every household of Assam, both as a source of moral lessons and as popular entertainment. This paper approaches select folktales from *Grandmother's Tales* (2020), the English translation of *Burhi Āir Sādhu*, as expressions of an Indigenous ecological worldview grounded in kinship, care, and relationality. The article focuses on two folktales, *The Tale of The Kite's Daughter* (*Siloni Jiyekor Sādhu*) and *The Cat and Her Daughters* (*Mekuri Jiyekor Sādhu*), from the folktales collections to explore how portraying nonhuman species (a cat and a kite) as mothers to human children defamiliarizes human-nonhuman relationships, inviting readers to see humans and animals as part of a shared moral and ecological world. The current article demonstrates how the selected tales challenge the habitual assumptions of the wild as hostile, predatory, or merely instrumental through a close stylistic and narrative analysis. The selected tales defamiliarize the human-nonhuman hierarchies by foregrounding the familiar maternal instincts like nurturing, protecting, teaching household chores, and self-sacrifice, through embedding them in nonhuman creatures, thereby encouraging readers to view familiar human-nonhuman hierarchies from a new standpoint. Therefore, the paper argues that Assamese folktales express an Indigenous ecological worldview in which care, reciprocity, and coexistence define human-nonhuman relationships.

Keywords: Defamiliarization, Folktales, Foregrounding, Indigenous Ecological Worldview, Kinship & Stylistics

Introduction

Being a 'social animal' comes with the tendency to communicate and socialize; therefore, to connect and bond with each other, humans talk, interact, and share their thoughts, personal experiences, and knowledge, which can be seen as telling a tale. In order to make their experiences and ideas more entertaining so as to captivate the audience, humans tend to embellish the tales with varied expressions, vivid imagery, and even mystical features. These stories gradually become more than simple accounts of events through creative narration and extend into collective repositories of memories (Assmann 2). As these narratives are repeatedly shared within communities and transmitted across generations, they evolve into cultural narratives that come to represent beliefs, values, and traditions of a society. In this process, many such tales take the form of folktales, preserved and circulated within communities as part

of their cultural heritage (Dahal and Bhatta 31-43, Thompson 4). Hence, these folktales are associated with the psychosocial and cultural goals served within the particular communities from which they originated (Davies and Fido 166). Historically, in societies without mass media, mobiles, or formal schooling systems, folktales have emerged as primary cultural and pedagogical tools functioning as vehicles for moral values, cultural continuity, indigenous knowledge, and communal memories (Baruah et al. 309; Goswami b7; Hazarika 61; Khiangte et al. 2; Yadav 765). They are passed down through generations to teach social, cultural, and moral values to children at an early age, entertain them, and instill fear of the consequences of their actions, preventing them from engaging in activities deemed morally and socially inappropriate.

Within Indigenous contexts, folktales extend beyond these pedagogical functions and do not merely carry forward cultural and historical memories and beliefs but actively produce relational ethics and ecological sensibilities (see Hoque and Panda 1-10). Such perspectives are closely associated with Indigenous epistemologies that view human life to be deeply interconnected with the natural world, where relationships with the environment are a way of life, and both humans and their surroundings play mutual roles in each other's survival. For instance, there are multiple communities in the Northeast of India that are living in the contemporary world while sustaining Indigenous epistemologies that are rooted in relationality and interspecies coexistence. In these communities, human life is understood as entangled with rivers, forests, animals, and landscapes where humans are not considered a dominant force over those, but as one among many beings having distinct forms of knowledge and agency. Therefore, by not positioning humans as all-powerful, these worldviews highlight the importance of coexistence and relational accountability among all living and nonliving beings (see Chatterjee). These values of a shared world are often transmitted and reinforced among communities through folktales. Through storytelling, memories, and emotional engagement, folktales play a crucial role in sustaining this worldview by instilling an ethos of care and love for the nonhuman world (see Selim 85-93). The coexistence of beings and relational understanding of life resonates with Donna Haraway's work, which argues that human life is inseparable from other species and is constituted through networks of collaborative relations, challenging the idea of "bounded individualism" as a flawed and outdated way of understanding life (Haraway 30-57). This relational ontology reframes existence itself as "becoming-with," which preaches that nothing exists in isolation; all entities are co-created, mutually dependent, and ethically entangled within the ecosystem (Haraway 12-13, 16). Enrique Salmón's concept of 'kin-centric ecology' aligns with Donna Haraway's ideas, as both reject the anthropocentric notion of human exceptionalism. Kin-centric ecology expresses Indigenous perceptions of humans as members of an extended ecological family, sharing ancestry, agency, and ethical responsibility with nonhuman life forms (Salmón 1328). Kinship thus extends beyond genealogy into ethical affiliation, acts of care, and co-survival. Similarly, Leslie Marmon Silko puts forward an Indigenous understanding of land and life as kin-based, noting that humans survive only when they perceive their surroundings as kin rather than resources (85-91). Eduardo Kohn further emphasizes an empathetic approach by discussing the importance of trying to think from the perspectives of other beings, destabilizing human-centric epistemologies. He argues that nonhuman beings engage in semiotic processes of interpretation and response to their environments, which humans can partially understand through lived,

relational engagement. Such a provisional interpretation could help foster a relational thinking in which humans neither pretend to know everything about other beings nor dismiss the possibility of understanding their perspective altogether (131-152). This can be observed in folktales, which provide a narrative space where such relational thinking becomes visible through the voices, perspectives, and agency attributed to animals, plants, and elements of the environment, representing them as thinking, feeling, and acting beings, portraying connections between human and nonhuman beings. For example, Assamese folktales popularly present stories from animals' perspectives, or develop meaning through analogies, thereby portraying forms of relational thinking that reflect an indigenous wisdom of shared consciousness among humans and nonhuman beings. Folktales collections like *Burhi Āir Sādhu / Grandmother's Tales* (1911), *Kokā Deutā Āru Nāti Lorā / The Grandpa and the Grandson* (1912), and *Xadhukatha* (1934) present animals and nonliving elements as possessing subjective agency and conscience. They portray human-nonhuman and human-environment relationships as natural and relational. Such a technique results in a defamiliarized understanding of commonly held notions about human-nonhuman relationships, which in turn challenges the habitual anthropocentric assumptions. However, such unrealistic depictions as discussed liberate the readers' imaginations to include exploration of complex ecological realities, unconventional relationships, and the interconnected nature between humans and the nonhuman world.

***Burhi Āir Sādhu* (1911)**

Assam is home to numerous ethnic communities from diverse races and tribal groups, enriching the cultural diversity of the land. These communities regard nature as sacred and serve as a guide to mankind's existence. Assamese people see humans as equals with the rest of the natural world. Their beliefs and customs are primarily motivated by an aim to enhance and preserve the ecosystem (see Gogoi 430; Phukon 1-2). In Assamese culture, this awareness of being equal to nature develops over years of listening to and recalling stories about human-nature relationships. *Burhi Āir Sādhu* (1911) by Lakshminath Bezbaruah, translated to English as *Old Mother's Wise Tales* (2020) and *Grandmother's Tales* (2020), emerges within this cultural and epistemological landscape as a repository of an Indigenous ecological worldview. Bezbaruah collected folktales passed down through generations via oral traditions, along with certain folk beliefs he witnessed, within the collection (Nath 27). Therefore, the exclusive credit for these stories cannot be granted to him. However, before he compiled these tales, they were passed down orally, and no one knows who their actual creators were. Since he collected and wrote them in his own style, adding his own touch and including some of his own stories, he is regarded as the master of these collections. In the introduction to his *Burhi Āir Sādhu*, Bezbaruah discusses how there can be similarities between Assamese folktales and those from other regions, particularly Bengal. However, he says that such resemblance should not be automatically seen as borrowing. Some tales may have originated in Assam when parts of East Bengal were historically linked to the region, while others traveled across cultures over time and acquired local variations (qtd. in Nath 23-24). Bezbaruah hints that such similarities in stories could also be because of the shared imaginative patterns of human societies. The thought is shared by numerous scholars, such as Joseph Campbell, who have suggested that such recurring folktale motifs across cultures highlight a broader psychological unity of humankind

(Campbell 754). As people often create stories around the entities surrounding their environment, most folktales seem rather similar with little variations despite the geographical distance.

Bezbaruah's *Burhi Āir Sādhu* is immensely popular in Assam, and the stories are still passed down to children and even adults in oral and written forms. These well-liked tales are ornamented with juicy plots, social issues, and most importantly, a moral lesson. *Burhi Āir Sādhu* consists of 30 folktales. However, the current paper focuses on two tales, *The Tale of The Kite's Daughter* (*Siloni Jiyekor Sādhu*) and *The Cat and Her Daughters* (*Mekuri Jiyekor Sādhu*), from the translated version, *Grandmother's Tales* (2020), by Haripriya Hiya. This article aims to examine these tales for their portrayal of nonhuman figures as maternal caregivers to human children, which functions as a narrative deviation that defamiliarizes habitual assumptions about human-animal relations, care, and kinship. The paper reconsiders select folktales from *Grandmother's Tales* (*Burhi Āir Sādhu*) as expressions of an Indigenous ecological worldview grounded in kinship, care, and relational ethics that reflect an Assamese worldview of coexistence with nature.

Defamiliarizing Human-Nonhuman Relationships

Defamiliarization or 'ostranenie' (making strange), emphasizes art's function to offer new perspectives of the world, presenting familiar objects and experiences in unfamiliar ways, thereby preventing art from becoming habitual (Shklovsky 12). Foregrounding, i.e., a linguistic or stylistic deviation from habitual perception (see Miall & Kuiken 30; Mukařovský 41-53; van Peer & Chesnokova 7-9; van Peer & Hakemulder 546-550) can lead to defamiliarization, which then prompts the readers or viewers to attend to it from a renewed perception. Defamiliarizing the usual forces viewers to see those aspects of everyday realities that they might have become desensitized to and mostly overlook (Miall & Kuiken 391-392). In literary texts, defamiliarization is often achieved through narrative deviation, role reversal, or unexpected rearrangements of social roles. For instance, in *The Tale of The Kite's Daughter* and *The Cat and Her Daughters*, the narratives revolve around the maternal instinct of two nonhuman figures towards human children. These unconventional kin dynamics are expected to cause defamiliarization in readers. In *The Tale of The Kite's Daughter*, the story follows a kite who adopts a girl child abandoned by her own human mother. The kite steps up for the role rejected by human parents, highlighting that compassion and conscience are not only reserved for humans but can be profound. Throughout the story, the narrator consistently refers to the child as "the kite's daughter", linguistically foregrounding the usual expectation of a familial bond, thereby showing that kinship is not just blood ties but is defined by care and support. Similarly, in *The Cat and Her Daughters*, the whole reproductive paradigm is defamiliarized as the cat gives birth to two human girls as a result of a curse she cast upon her mistress: "If I deserve any vengeance...may the fruit of my womb enter her belly and the fruit of hers, enter mine" (Bezbaruah, *Grandmother's Tales* 55), over the betrayal where the mistress tricked the cat by eating up larger share of fishes that the cat had hunt and brought for both. Therefore, in both tales, motherhood is estranged by portraying an interspecies familial bond, where two animals, who are rather known to be ferals, become mothers to human daughters. The kite, being a wild bird, lacks connections to humans; hence, the emotional motherly instinct of the kite towards

the human child challenges the notion of wild beings being compassionless towards other species. Meanwhile, cats are common pets that bond well with humans, but the story depicts the cat giving birth to human daughters, which defamiliarizes biological motherhood.

The familiar animalistic behaviors associated with both creatures are beautifully recognized as their way of expressing maternal care. In *The Tale of The Kite's Daughter*, the kite raises the child in her nest, transforming an aerial, not very human-friendly space into a domestic environment of nurture and protection. She steals food, clothing, and personal items like a comb, jewelry, and skincare products from the nearby village and from the riverbank, where women leave their belongings while bathing, to provide for her daughter. Likewise, the cat in *The Cat and Her Daughters* raises the human daughters by stealing food and clothing from neighbors to meet their needs. Stealing is not an uncommon behavior of kites and cats; however, in these tales, their acts of theft are not frowned upon but are instead reframed as expressions of care and responsibility. They not only provided food but also tried to fulfill essentials like clothing and other human necessities for their human daughters, hence challenging the belief that only humans could understand human needs. Their mothering did not only limit to providing but also taking up social, domestic, and teaching roles typically associated with human parents. For example, in *The Tale of The Kite's Daughter*, the kite took the responsibility of choosing a suitable suitor for her daughter, and when she saw a young merchant, she reflected, "If this man has a good heart, it would be quite swell to marry my daughter to him" (Bezbaruah, Grandmother's Tales 38). The act of selecting a potential partner for their children and marrying them off is common for human parents, but not for animals, at least not known of yet. Kite's motherly love for her adopted human daughter is expressed in her emotional farewell, where, like a human mother she instructs her daughter of the "usual dos and don'ts of society and sending her daughter away with heartrending sobs, all the while begging the merchant to take good care of her precious child" (Bezbaruah, Grandmother's Tales 38-39). She assures her daughter of forever love and protection, saying, "Aai, if you ever need me, just repeat the words that I taught you. I will fly to you without fail" (Bezbaruah, Grandmother's Tales 39). As assured, the kite kept her promise and further helped her daughter along in her marital life. For example, since the child was raised in a nest with no apparent human connection before meeting her husband, she never learned to do household chores. However, whenever the daughter struggles with cooking, cleaning the cowshed, or weaving clothes, she calls out to her kite mother by singing the same song the kite taught her, who then aids her with simple solutions. Similarly, in *The Cat and Her Daughters*, the cat fulfills the role of a mother by not only providing but also protecting her daughters from harm and teaching them how to recognize danger and respond to crises in her absence. In these moments, the kite and the cat transcend their instinctual nature, adopting human-like conscience to help their human daughters to provide, teach, and guide them around the human world where they will eventually have to inhabit. The nonhuman mothers' considerable understanding of the human world defamiliarizes the readers by challenging the rigid division between the animal world and the civilized human world, prompting them to imagine a world where all kinds of species can co-exist based on empathy, mutual understanding, and relational bonding.

The narrative of maternal care and responsibility takes a tragic turn towards the end of both folktales when both mothers lose their lives fulfilling their motherly responsibilities towards their children. In *The Tale of The Kite's Daughter*, the kite is killed by the jealous co-

wives of her daughter, who imitate the rescue song that the kite had taught her daughter to sing in times of need. Hearing the familiar song and believing that her beloved daughter is in distress, the kite immediately flies fast to her daughter's house, but is captured and tortured to death by the co-wives. Her readiness to look out for her daughter results in her death, which symbolizes the self-sacrificial nature of a mother's devotion. Likewise, in *The Cat and Her Daughters*, the cat instructs her daughters that if the milk kept near the Tulsi plant turns black and the Tulsi plant dries up, it will mean that something terrible has happened to her, and they are to prepare themselves for the outside world on their own. Right after a few weeks, while the cat was away stealing and gathering food for her daughters, the milk turned black, and the Tulsi plant dried up, signaling the death of their mother. The deaths of the protective mothers push the daughters into a life of danger, exploitation, and suffering. The loss highlights the significance of motherhood as well as the universal trauma of orphanhood, showing that the pain of losing a parent is not exclusive to humans. Readers are forced to recognize that responsibilities and emotions are shared across all species, blurring the often-drawn distinctions between humans and nonhuman beings. Furthermore, the violent death of the kite in the hands of the very species she was preparing her daughter to join evokes a sense of deep emotional resonance in readers, compelling them to self-reflect on human cruelty towards nature. It forces the readers to question the bias behind labeling ourselves as 'civilized' and other nonhuman species as 'savages', which justifies humans as morally superior over others.

Folktales as Expressions of Assamese Indigenous Ecological Worldview

In *The Tale of The Kite's Daughter* and *The Cat and Her Daughters*, the positioning of nonhuman entities in the role of caregiver to young ones of the human species conceptualizes an indigenous relational ontology where animals share the world with human beings in participatory roles, rather than just being passive recipients. This narrative stance corresponds closely to the Indigenous ecological landscape, which conceives nonhuman species as being organic to, and relationally interlinked with, their human counterparts, instead of following a hierarchical system with them. Like in many indigenous epistemologies, Assamese cultural traditions imagine the natural world as a living community working through mutual responsibility, kinship, and reciprocity; as opposed to one banishing the wild as an external or hostile domain (Baruah et al. 309; Hazarika 61; Gogoi 430; Phukon 1-2). Kinship in these tales is not limited to blood ties, revealing an extension of the sense of belonging to Mother Earth. The tales of the kite and the cat also reconceptualize motherhood and sensitivities related to instincts such as care, protection, and emotional attachment, by introducing the idea that such sentiments can transcend boundaries without dissolving the distinct identities of human and nonhuman beings. Such conceptualizations result in an ecological reality grounded in the practice of collective survival and relational existence, which Donna Haraway describes as "becoming-with" (12-13, 16). These folktales thus emphasize that existence itself is relational, shaped through networks of care, and an interdependence that binds humans to animals, plants, and landscapes (Bhattacharjee).

Assamese folktales are woven into all the nooks and corners of Assamese life. There are tales for every minute aspect of life that act as guidelines to daily living. Assam, being surrounded by lush green forests, animals, and numerous tribes whose existence revolves

around nature, their folktales also feature talking animals, dancing trees, spirits, the relationship between humans and other species, and many other fantastical elements. These tales are not merely for entertainment but also play a significant role in keeping Assamese people grounded in their environment and surroundings, fostering respect and care for humans as well as the nonhuman world. Assamese people maintain a sacred bond of kinship with all beings around them, and it is very much reflected in their folktales. Likewise, in the selected folktales of Bezbaruah, kinship is portrayed between two unexpected realms, highlighting care and belonging extending beyond conventional human relationships. Furthermore, the tales defamiliarize familiar aspects of maternal roles such as protecting, providing, arranging marriage, teaching household work, and sacrificing oneself for one's children by embodying those in nonhuman figures, compelling readers to reconsider the presumed distance between humans and animals. In both tales, the kite and the cat's daughter found love, safety, and belongingness with their nonhuman mothers, who nurtured and cared for them no less than human mothers do. When humans fail them and become sources of their suffering, their nonhuman mothers become their safe spaces. One of the earliest Romantic poets of Assam, Chandra Kumar Agarwala, who was also a contemporary of Lakshminath Bezbaruah, wrote a poem on *Tejimola*, another folktale from the *Burhi Aair Sādhu* collection. *Tejimola* is a tragic tale about a young girl who met her death at the hands of her cruel stepmother. However, *Tejimola*'s spirit takes up different forms, such as a bottle gourd, a lotus, and a mynah bird, and sings out loud about her murder story whenever someone comes near. In the poem, Agarwala rhetorically asks, "Manuh kutume doliyay pelale Kaknu kutum pali?" (When human kin have discarded you, in whom have you found your kin?) (Agarwala qtd. in Bhattacharjee). The same could be said for the human daughters in *The Tale of The Kite's Daughter* and *The Cat and Her Daughters*, where they found kinship beyond the human species with their nonhuman mothers. The selected folktales, therefore, suggest that kinship is not defined solely by blood ties or genealogy, but by love, care, and responsibility. Rather than only anthropomorphizing animals, these folktales act as a picture depicting the Assamese indigenous worldview, where kinship is not species-bound. Therefore, these folktales are considered mirrors of Assamese indigenous knowledge and wisdom, which perceives all elements of nature as tied together by an invisible thread of care, mutual respect, and interdependence. The folktales of Assam reflect a worldview in which humans, animals, plants, and all other beings are not separate entities but interconnected participants within a shared world.

Conclusion

Folktales of a region can tell a lot about the history, lifestyle, and beliefs of its people; therefore, serving as a mirror reflecting the collective values of the community. These stories also function as chronicles of social and moral teachings, which travel generations being passed down as heirlooms, nurturing local culture and shaping indigenous identity while guiding the future generations. Assamese folktales, in a similar fashion, carry the legacy of the cultural worldview unique to Assam. Assamese culture visualizes a coexistence of human and nonhuman species that prioritizes a close relationship with nature grounded in a symbiotic dependence, mutually caring for each other and destroying the common threat. Therefore,

Assamese folktales portray a coexistence of species that is intimate and sacred, which often blurs the distinction between them. The *Tale of The Kite's Daughter* and *The Cat and Her Daughters* reveal the Assamese cultural perspective of coexistence, laden with care, responsibility, and co-survival across species, to the rest of the world. The reimagination of motherly roles with nonhuman at the center, and human as the receiver, topples the anthropocentric expectations of the readers. The unusual narrative depicting the emotional bonding between the nonhuman mothers and their human daughters defamiliarizes the readers, shifting their habitual assumptions about the boundaries that typically separate humans from other species. This results in the understanding of kinship less as a biological fact but more as a performance and moral practice. The tales disrupt the conventional idea of wild beings as hostile or distant by portraying a kite and a cat, known for their predatory and instinctive behavior, as two devoted mothers of human children. In doing so, these tales defamiliarize conventional human-nonhuman hierarchies and reintroduce the wild as possessing emotions and moral sensibility, similar to humans. The tales also force readers to see certain actions of the animal mothers from a different perspective, thereby transforming how those actions are naturally interpreted. For example, the rationale behind the animals stealing food, clothing, and other items from humans is not grounded in the moral degradation of the creatures, rather it is associated with the motherly care and love towards the human children. Thus, the folktales affirm the relevance of indigenous ecological knowledge, which argues for a peaceful coexistence with nature based on reciprocity and care. Therefore, *Burhi Aair Sadhu* is a treasure of ecological wisdom emanating from the indigenous knowledge of the Assamese culture, that upholds interconnectedness between humans, animals, and nature. Amidst the ongoing environmental crisis and disruption to biodiversity caused by rapid industrialization and extensive deforestation, these folktales offer a lens into a world where humans and nonhumans are equals, coexisting in harmony and looking out for each other. Folktales play a crucial role in helping recognize that sustainable living cannot be upheld through exploitation or believing in hierarchy, but from accepting every existence as significant and respecting all forms of nature as our kin.

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The Detective, the Thriller, and the Failure of Disciplinary Order in Anglophone Crime Fiction

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Abstract

This paper offers a comparative, interpretive reading of four Anglophone crime fiction texts spanning 1926 to 2007: Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), Dorothy L. Sayers's *Gaudy Night* (1935), Lee Child's *Killing Floor* (1997), and Tana French's *In the Woods* (2007). Drawing on Jürgen Habermas's concept of legitimation crisis as one interpretive lens among several-supplemented, with explicit acknowledgement of their disciplinary differences, by Michel Foucault's analysis of disciplinary power and David Garland's criminology of the punitive turn, the paper proposes that a structural homology, in Lucien Goldmann's sense, may be discernible between the formal properties of these texts and broader cultural shifts in the relationship between citizens and the institutions nominally administering justice on their behalf. The concept of structural homology is operationalised through analysis of narrative resolution patterns, detective-figure construction, and the treatment of institutional authority within each text. The paper makes no genre-wide claim: its argument is explicitly limited to four selected specimens and the patterns of correspondence they suggest. It further situates the ideological reading within a field of competing material explanations, namely market forces, cinematic influence, genre hybridisation and integrates these explanations at the point of analysis rather than confining them to a separate section. The paper introduces internal qualifications and partial counterexamples to test the argument's limits rather than confirm its coherence.

Keywords: Crime Fiction, Legitimation Crisis, Structural Homology, Disciplinary Power, Punitive Turn, Genre Theory, Institutional Failure

Introduction

Two images, separated by eighty years. Hercule Poirot assembled the household of Fernly Park in 1926 and spoke for forty-five minutes without raising his voice. His authority is epistemic; his instrument, the complete revelation of truth. The killer, Dr. James Sheppard, the novel's first-person narrator, is undone by knowledge and not by force. Rob Ryan of the Dublin Murder Squad stands in a forest in 2007, his investigation in ruins, the child's killer unidentified, his memory irreparably broken, his institutional career effectively over. The case is never solved. The distance between these two investigative figures is the subject of this paper. Poirot operates within a fictional world in which institutional knowledge is imagined as adequate, i.e. in which disciplinary competence can, under sufficient epistemic pressure, restore social order. Ryan operates within a fictional world in which institutional adequacy has become structurally improbable. Both figures belong to recognisably the same literary genre; the formal properties

of the texts that contain them differ considerably. The question this paper pursues is whether those formal differences are legible as something more than generic evolution and whether they encode, in narrative structure and character construction, a shift in cultural attitudes toward institutional justice that their respective historical moments made available. That question admits no easy answer. The most the argument can claim is interpretive plausibility, not causal demonstration.

The argument advanced here is a comparative, interpretive reading of four texts, not a genre-wide conclusion about crime fiction across the twentieth century. The four texts were selected because they instantiate, with particular formal clarity, two distinct modes of crime fiction whose contrast is the analytical focus. The claim is not that these texts represent the genre as a whole, nor that the patterns they exhibit are historically inevitable. The claim is more circumscribed: that the contrast between the formal properties of the Golden Age pair and the contemporary pair suggests a pattern of correspondence with cultural conditions worth theorising, and that the frameworks of Habermas, Foucault, and Garland, deployed with explicit acknowledgement of their differences and limits, provide productive, if not uniquely compelling, tools for that theorisation.

A brief note on the frameworks themselves. Habermas, Foucault, and Garland are not a natural theoretical ensemble. Habermas writes within a tradition of critical theory oriented toward rational communicative action and the normative reconstruction of democratic legitimacy; Foucault is suspicious of any such normative project, reading institutional authority as power-knowledge in which claims to rationality are themselves disciplinary effects; Garland works within cultural criminology, drawing on both traditions but committed to empirical documentation of specific historical shifts. Their application to a shared analytical object, like a set of crime fiction texts, requires that their conceptual tensions be acknowledged rather than elided. The three frameworks are neither seamlessly compatible nor mutually exclusive; the readings they enable are genuinely different, and the differences are productive.

Literature Review

The scholarly literature on crime fiction divides, broadly, into formal-generic accounts focused on narrative convention and character typology, and cultural-sociological accounts attentive to the genre's relationship with ideology, power, and social structures. Both are well established; what remains undertheorised is the sustained dialogue between them, particularly in relation to the specific cultural-theoretical frameworks this paper deploys.

Julian Symons's *Bloody Murder* (1972) traces the historical movement from the Golden Age puzzle-plot, with its emphasis on ratiocination and institutional restoration, to the hardboiled novel and the contemporary thriller. Symons reads this trajectory as 'the movement of the crime story from puzzle to novel', from game to fiction of social reality, and his account remains the most sustained historical overview of the genre's formal development (Symons 13). John Cawelti's *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (1976) reads crime fiction through his concept of the formula, a culturally produced pattern that satisfies recurrent emotional needs, and his analysis of the detective story as a 'game of formulas' anticipates later ideological accounts without fully developing their implications (Cawelti 11). John Scaggs's *Crime Fiction* (2005) provides the most useful formal taxonomy for the present paper's purposes: the

detective novel privileges knowledge, deduction, and systemic restoration, while the thriller privileges action, sensation, and individual agency (Scaggs 39, 106).

Stephen Knight's *Crime Fiction since 1800* (2010) bridges formal and cultural analysis, reading generic conventions as indices of prevailing social structures. His argument that the Golden Age whodunit expressed a specifically class-inflected confidence in rational governance, the detective as proxy for a professional-managerial class that believed in the adequacy of its own expertise, grounds the ideological reading this paper develops, though it also complicates it. Knight's account implies a relatively direct correspondence between class position and narrative form that this paper's more cautious structural homology approach resists (Knight, 2010, p. 76). Gill Plain's *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (2001) attends similarly to cultural contexts, particularly the relationship between the interwar detective novel and the anxieties of the period.

The theoretical frameworks this paper employs have substantial secondary application in literary and cultural studies. D.A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police* (1988) remains the most sustained argument for reading narrative fiction through the lens of Foucauldian disciplinary power, though Miller's focus is the Victorian novel rather than crime fiction specifically, and his reading tends toward what critics have called theoretical overdetermination, i.e. treating every formal property as a disciplinary effect. The present paper attempts to avoid this tendency by introducing alternative explanations at the point of analysis. Garland's *The Culture of Control* (2001) has been widely applied in criminology and sociology; its application to popular fiction remains comparatively underdeveloped, though Lee Horsley's *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction* (2005) makes productive use of related criminological frameworks.

Wesson's *The Chow: Depictions of the Criminal Justice System as a Character in Crime Fiction* (2017) provides the most direct existing engagement with the ideological function of criminal justice representation in crime fiction, mapping fictional depictions across a spectrum from idealistic to cynical and situating contemporary crime fiction firmly at the cynical extreme (Wesson 115). Wesson does not theorise the historical trajectory that produced this positioning; the present paper attempts that theorisation while acknowledging the limits of its corpus.

What the existing literature has not produced and what this paper attempts, within its acknowledged limits, is a reading that connects Scaggs's formal taxonomy, Knight's ideological analysis, and Garland's cultural criminology into a coherent account of the formal evolution visible across these four texts, grounded in the methodological principle of structural homology and disciplined by attention to the competing material explanations that any ideological reading of popular fiction must confront.

Theoretical Framework

Structural Homology: Definition, Operationalisation, and Limits

The concept of structural homology, as this paper employs it, derives from the work of Lucien Goldmann and is developed in somewhat different directions by Raymond Williams. For Goldmann, structural homology describes a correspondence in form and logic between a cultural product and the social conditions of the class that produces it, not a relation of

reflection or direct determination, but a relation of shared structure at the level of organising categories (Goldmann 7). The cultural product need not represent social conditions, nor need its producers be conscious of the correspondence; the homology operates at the level of deep formal structure rather than explicit content. Williams complicates Goldmann's formulation by emphasising the mediated and uneven nature of the relationship between cultural form and social condition, and by insisting that the correspondence is always partial rather than total (Williams 95-100).

This paper adopts a Williamsian rather than a strictly Goldmannian position. The claim is that those formal properties exhibit a pattern of correspondence with conditions documented by Habermas, Foucault, and Garland, a pattern that is suggestive rather than demonstrable, and that the texts arguably embody rather than consciously articulate.

Operationally, structural homology is identified in three textual features. First, narrative resolution pattern: how each text ends, and what the ending implies about the institutional adequacy of the criminal justice system depicted. Second, detective-figure construction: what kind of authority the investigator possesses, whether epistemic or somatic, institutional or individual, and how that authority is legitimated within the narrative. Third, the treatment of institutional failure or success: whether the detective's investigation reveals, compensates for, or is defeated by the limits of the systems within which it operates.

A distinction between analogy, homology, and causation clarifies what the argument is and is not claiming. An analogy notes a resemblance between two structures without implying any deeper relationship; a homology, in Goldmann's sense, claims a structural correspondence produced by shared historical conditions without being reducible to those conditions; a causal claim would require that the social conditions produced the formal properties through an identifiable mechanism. The argument in this paper is homological rather than causal. The patterns identified are consistent with, and interpretable through, the frameworks of Habermas, Foucault, and Garland but those frameworks cannot be shown to have caused the patterns.

It is worth pausing here to acknowledge a significant limitation of the homological framework itself. The concept performs most convincingly when the formal features of a text and the social conditions under analysis are both well-specified and genuinely structurally analogous. In the case of the four texts examined here, the correspondence can be argued with reasonable textual grounding. But the framework strains when extended, as it must be in any comparative project, to account for texts that exhibit ambiguous or mixed formal properties. French's *In the Woods* is the clearest instance of this strain. The novel's institutional failure is, as the analysis in Section 6 demonstrates, partly attributable to a specific individual's compromised conduct rather than to systemic inadequacy in any Habermasian sense. The homological claim can accommodate this individual failure and structural failure need not be mutually exclusive but the accommodation feels more like theoretical flexibility than analytical precision. At a certain point, a framework that can absorb counterevidence without modification risks losing its explanatory force. The homological reading of *In the Woods* is interpretively available; whether it is the most explanatorily powerful reading of that novel is less clear.

Habermas and Legitimation Crisis: One Lens Among Several

Jürgen Habermas introduced the concept of legitimation crisis in 1973 (published in English in 1975) as an account of a structural tendency within advanced capitalist societies. As states assume responsibility for managing economic and social outcomes that market mechanisms cannot guarantee, they expose themselves to crises of motivation and legitimacy when those outcomes fail to materialise. The crisis is motivational as much as functional: institutions lose the confidence of those they govern not because they are uniformly corrupt, but because they are experienced as inadequate, i.e. too procedurally slow, too captured by interests other than those of the public they nominally serve (Habermas 46-50).

The Habermasian framework maps suggestively onto the formal shift from detective figure as epistemic authority to thriller protagonist as extrajudicial agent. But the mapping is suggestive rather than necessary. Market explanations, like the rise of airport retail, the influence of action cinema, the commercial logic of the bestseller list, account for much the same formal shift without invoking the legitimation crisis at all. Genre convention has its own momentum; formal properties that originated in one cultural context are reproduced in subsequent texts through imitation and market pressure rather than renewed ideological pressure. The cinematic influence on Child's formal choices is at least as well documented as any relationship between those choices and Habermasian cultural conditions. Saying this is not to dismiss the Habermasian reading; it is to insist that the reading earns its place by providing interpretive leverage that the alternatives do not, rather than simply by being available.

What Habermas offers that market and cinematic explanations do not is a framework for the cultural meaning of the formal shift: an account of why extrajudicial violence might feel satisfying to an implied reader positioned within a specific cultural moment, and why the infallible detective might feel inadequate. Genre convention and commercial logic explain why certain forms get produced; they do not, on their own, explain why those forms connect with readers or what cultural work they do. The Habermasian reading, at its most defensible, is a reading of the texts' affective structure and implied cultural positioning and not a causal account of their production.

It is also worth noting what the framework does not do. Habermas's specific account of the advanced capitalist legitimation crisis belongs to a very different intellectual tradition from Foucault's genealogical analysis of power, a tension the next subsection addresses directly. And the temporal mapping is imperfect: the Golden Age flourished before the conditions Habermas theorises had fully materialised, which means the Golden Age texts correspond not to a moment of legitimation crisis but to its anticipation.

Foucault and Disciplinary Power: Supplementary Mechanism

Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) traces the historical emergence of disciplinary power as modernity's dominant mode of social governance. The panopticon, Bentham's architectural model for an institution of total surveillance, functions in Foucault's analysis as a conceptual figure: the apparatus that induces the observed to internalise the regulatory gaze and discipline themselves (Foucault 200-209). Disciplinary power operates through knowledge rather than force, through surveillance rather than spectacle; it replaced, Foucault argues, the

pre-modern regime of sovereign violence and the public execution, the visible destruction of the criminal body.

The tension between Foucault's framework and Habermas's is significant. Habermas believes in the normative potential of rational communicative action and maintains that legitimization crises are failures that democratic institutions might, in principle, be reformed to address. Foucault would regard this belief as itself a product of disciplinary power, an effect of the very rationalising apparatus whose genealogy he traces. Where Habermas implies that the institutional inadequacy encoded in contemporary crime fiction represents a failure of democratic legitimacy, Foucault's analysis suggests that the detective fiction's authority was always a fantasy of power, i.e. knowledge, its crisis always latent. These are genuinely different claims, and the difference matters for how the texts are read.

This paper uses Foucault's framework specifically to theorise the detective figure and the formal register of bodily violence in the contemporary thriller, while relying on Habermas for the broader cultural claim about institutional faith. This is a tactical rather than a theoretical resolution; the frameworks remain in tension, and that tension is productive rather than something to be dissolved.

Garland and the Punitive Turn: Historical Grounding

David Garland's *The Culture of Control* (2001) provides the empirically grounded, historically specific account that the more abstractly structural frameworks of Habermas and Foucault require if they are to be more than theoretical impositions on the texts. Garland documents the collapse, from the 1970s onward, of what he calls the 'penal-welfare complex', the mid-century institutional consensus that crime was a social problem amenable to expert treatment, and that criminal justice's function was rehabilitation (Garland 34-40). The collapse of this consensus, and the rise of 'expressive justice', punishment designed to produce emotional satisfaction for victims and communities rather than rehabilitative outcomes, provides the most historically grounded account of the cultural shift that the formal contrast between the texts suggests (Garland 9).

Garland's account is empirical where Habermas's and Foucault's are structural, and this is both its strength and its limitation here. He documents specific historical shifts in criminal justice policy and culture, primarily in Britain and the United States; his framework is oriented toward policy and institutional culture rather than toward narrative or popular fiction, and the application of his account to generic convention requires the mediating concept of structural homology.

Methodology

Corpus Selection

The four texts, namely Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926), Sayers's *Gaudy Night* (1935), Child's *Killing Floor* (1997), and French's *In the Woods* (2007), were selected on three criteria. First, formal distinctiveness: each exhibit, in a heightened or exemplary form, the formal properties that the theoretical argument identifies as analytically significant. Christie's

novel represents the most formally ambitious defence of the Golden Age epistemological premise; Sayers's extends that defence from individual genius to institutional community; Child's represents the most thoroughgoing displacement of institutional procedure by extrajudicial violence in the mainstream contemporary thriller; French's represents the most formally sophisticated interrogation of institutional failure from within.

Second, canonical status and critical documentation: all four texts have been subject to substantial prior critical analysis, providing a body of secondary scholarship on which this paper builds and against which its readings can be checked. Third, temporal and generic distribution: the four texts span eighty-one years and represent the two generic modes whose contrast structures the argument.

The corpus has significant limitations that must be stated explicitly. Four texts cannot support generalisations about crime fiction across the twentieth century; they can support only the interpretive claims made about those four texts. The corpus is exclusively Anglophone, specifically British, American, and Irish, which means the argument cannot be extended to non-Anglophone crime fiction without further research. The corpus also excludes several significant counter traditions, the hardboiled novel, the police procedural, the noir novel, Scandinavian crime fiction, whose inclusion would complicate, and possibly partially undermine, the pattern the four selected texts exhibit.

One additional limitation deserves acknowledgement. The two Golden Age texts are both by canonical, highly educated British women writing in a specific class context; the two contemporary texts are by authors from different national traditions (American and Irish) with different relationships to institutional authority. Whether the formal differences between the Golden Age pair and the contemporary pair reflect generic evolution, cultural shift, or simply the different national and class contexts of their production is a question the corpus cannot fully resolve. This is not a minor caveat. It is a genuine limit on the strength of the homological claim.

Method: Close Reading, Genre Theory, and Hermeneutic Application

The methodology is qualitative and interpretive, combining close reading with genre theory and the hermeneutic application of social-theoretical frameworks. Close reading, in the tradition of practical criticism, attends to specific formal properties of texts: narrative structure, character construction, generic convention, and resolution pattern. Genre theory, drawing on Scaggs, Cawelti, and Symons, provides the categorical framework for what is formally at stake in the contrast between detective novel and thriller. The social-theoretical frameworks, Habermas, Foucault and Garland are deployed hermeneutically: as lenses that generate readings of the texts rather than as empirical hypotheses to be tested.

The standard the paper holds itself to is internal consistency and textual grounding. Every theoretical claim must be anchored in demonstrable textual detail-specific scenes, narrative moments, character actions, or structural features, rather than in abstract summary of the texts. Where the theoretical reading requires a significant interpretive move, the move is flagged explicitly.

Claims about reader experience or cultural attitude are inferential rather than empirically demonstrated. When the paper refers to 'the reader's satisfaction' or 'cultural

attitudes toward institutions,' these are claims about the ideological positioning of the narrative, the implied reader and the affective structure the text constructs, not empirical claims about the actual responses of historical readers. The distinction matters, and it is maintained throughout. Historical reader-response data, review archives, and disaggregated sales figures would be necessary to substantiate the empirical dimension of such claims; this paper does not have access to that evidence.

The Panopticon's Detective: Institutional Fantasy in the Golden Age

Reading the Golden Age whodunit as an expression of institutional confidence requires an immediate qualification. The two decades in which the form flourished were decades of acute institutional anxiety in Britain: the General Strike of 1926, mass unemployment in the early 1930s, the visible fragility of democratic institutions under the pressure of European fascism. Knight is precise on this point, the Golden Age whodunit flourished because its readers needed reassurance that rationality still governed human affairs, a need that testifies to the felt insufficiency of rationality in the world outside the text (Knight 76). The genre's institutional faith was compensatory and argumentative rather than simply reflective: the texts argue for institutional confidence in a cultural context where that confidence was genuinely under strain. This is a crucial qualification for the structural homology argument. If the Golden Age detective novel encoded existing cultural confidence in institutions, the homological claim would be relatively weak and the texts would simply mirror their social context. If instead the texts were constructing a fantasy of institutional adequacy in the face of real institutional anxiety, the homological relationship is more complex: the texts correspond to social conditions not by reflecting them but by producing imaginative compensations for them. The paper argues for the stronger reading, though it is also a reading that complicates any straightforwardly ideological account of the genre, since it implies that readers who were already anxious about institutions were seeking narratives that temporarily resolved that anxiety.

Foucault's panopticon provides one conceptual model for what the Golden Age detective achieves within the narrative, though the application requires care. Foucault's panopticon is an account of institutional power as it actually operates, or operated at a specific historical moment; applying it to a fictional figure requires explicitly acknowledging the interpretive move involved. With that caveat, the correspondence is suggestive: Poirot's famous 'little grey cells' function, within the novel's imaginative space, as a fantasy of epistemological completeness, i.e. a single consciousness achieving the total transparency of the social body that modern surveillance institutions promise but cannot deliver. The detective compensates, at the level of narrative fantasy, for what disciplinary institutions fail to provide in the world readers actually inhabit. Whether that compensation is best explained by Foucauldian analysis or simply by the conventions of the puzzle genre is not a question the formal analysis can resolve on its own.

Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* enacts this fantasy under conditions of extraordinary formal stress. Dr. James Sheppard, the novel's first-person narrator, is the murderer, a gambit that poses the most severe conceivable challenge to Poirot's method and, more interestingly, to the reader's capacity to trust the narrative. The first-person confessional mode is the form most resistant to detection; choosing it as the vehicle for murder turns the

novel's narrative machinery against itself. When Poirot assembles the principals in the drawing room at Fernly Park for his revelation scene, and begins to expose Sheppard's guilt through accumulated inferential detail, like the dictaphone left running in Roger Ackroyd's study, the goose quill pen that hid the wound, the precise timing of Sheppard's movements on the night, the epistemological performance is staged against the backdrop of what could have been the genre's complete formal failure. That Poirot succeeds is the ideological event, not merely the narrative resolution.

The Detection Club's fair-play rules, partly formalised in response to the controversy Ackroyd generated, confirm that Christie's gambit was received as a genre threatening move (Symons, 1972, p. 95). The rules exist because Poirot's success needed to be legitimated against the charge that Christie had cheated, which is another way of saying that the fantasy of total epistemic authority required formal protection. Poirot's confrontation of Sheppard is conducted privately; he offers the choice of suicide over public trial, controlling the form of institutional consequence while holding its fact absolute. The subordination of personal warmth that Poirot has developed genuine affection for Sheppard over their weeks of acquaintance to epistemic obligation is the detective's defining moral programme.

One complication is worth dwelling on here. The offer of private resolution rather than public trial could be read as the detective bypassing institutional procedure rather than confirming it as a form of extrajudicial settlement that anticipates the contemporary thriller's rejection of official process. Christie's text does not fully resolve this tension. Poirot acts within a certain conception of justice that the novel endorses, but the mechanism he employs, i.e. private confrontation, negotiated suicide is not institutional in any strict sense. The Golden Age detective's authority is arguably personal rather than institutional from the outset; what changes in the contemporary thriller is the form that personal authority takes, not its fundamentally extrajudicial character. This is an awkward moment for the homological reading, and the framework does not entirely absorb it.

Sayers's *Gaudy Night* (1935) extends the ideological argument in a different register. Where Ackroyd defends epistemic authority through individual genius, *Gaudy Night* defends it through institutional community, a distinction that matters for the structural homology claim, because it suggests that the Golden Age's investment in disciplinary order was distributed across more than one formal strategy. The crime Harriet Vane investigates in Shrewsbury College is committed against the college's intellectual integrity: a disgruntled scholar, Annie Wilson, whose husband was disgraced for academic fraud, is leaving vicious anonymous notes and destroying manuscripts in an attempt to undermine the scholarly enterprise that exposed him. Sayers frames the investigation as a defence of academic institutional life against the disorder that personal grievance and anti-intellectualism produce.

Wimsey's eventual identification of Wilson in the college library, delivered through a process of systematic inference that implicates Harriet herself in several crucial deductions, restores not just social order but institutional order: the integrity of the scholarly community is affirmed as a value worth protecting by rational, systematic means. The novel's closing scene, in which Wimsey proposes to Harriet in the Bodleian quadrangle using a formula from the Latin liturgy of the Oxford service of commendation, conflates romantic resolution with institutional endorsement in a way that is almost too deliberate to be accidental. Garland's account of the rehabilitative ideal, the institutional assumption that expertise is reliable, that

professional knowledge produces just outcomes, is precisely what Sayers's novel fictionalises and celebrates (Garland 34-40).

A market-driven alternative explanation deserves brief engagement here. The Golden Age whodunit was not only an ideological product but a commercial one; it flourished partly because its puzzle structure was well suited to the circulating library model that dominated British popular fiction distribution in the interwar period. The form's institutional confidence may reflect, at least in part, the conservative tastes of circulating library subscribers, a middle-class readership, whose institutional investments were material as well as cultural. This does not invalidate the ideological reading, but it situates it within a more complex field of determination than structural homology alone can account for.

The Thriller's Body: Institutional Failure and the Return of Sovereign Violence

Before turning to the contemporary texts, the counter-traditions they displace deserve at least brief acknowledgement because the trajectory from Golden Age to contemporary thriller is not the only available narrative of the genre's development, and treating it as such would misrepresent the actual diversity of crime fiction across the twentieth century.

The hardboiled novel, developed by Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler in the 1920s and 1930s, was contemporaneous with the Golden Age and represented a quite different relationship to institutional authority. Chandler's Philip Marlowe distrusts institutions while continuing to operate within them, navigating corrupt police departments, compromised district attorneys, and bought judges with a private code of ethics that is neither institutional nor extrajudicial in the Reacher sense. The noir novel, James M. Cain, Jim Thompson, Patricia Highsmith, goes further, placing institutional failure at the centre of its moral universe from the outset; Highsmith's Tom Ripley, who repeatedly evades institutional justice through social performance and luck, could be read as the consummate counter-example to the legitimisation crisis thesis, since his escapes suggest not a cultural demand for extrajudicial justice but a fascinated ambivalence about whether institutional justice deserves to triumph at all. The police procedural, Ed McBain's 87th Precinct series, the Scandinavian tradition of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, represents yet another response, depicting institutions as imperfect but still operative, their flaws more mundane than catastrophic.

These counter-traditions do not invalidate the pattern the four selected texts exhibit, but they complicate the claim that crime fiction follows a single ideological trajectory. What the corpus of four texts can demonstrate is a specific contrast between two formal modes; what it cannot demonstrate is that this contrast, represents the genre's dominant or inevitable development.

Raymond Chandler's *The Simple Art of Murder* (1944) provides the most explicit contemporary articulation of what the hardboiled and thriller traditions enacted: that the institutional premises of the Golden Age whodunit were false, and that fiction built on false premises was itself a form of dishonesty (Chandler 53-55). Child's *Killing Floor* (1997) and French's *In the Woods* (2007) take the trajectory Chandler named and push it beyond the hardboiled compromise. They represent two formally distinct responses to institutional failure, and the difference between them is as analytically important as what they share.

Killing Floor is formally a thriller in Scaggs's sense: it privileges action, sensation, and individual agency over knowledge, deduction, and systemic restoration (Scaggs 106). The novel's opening pages enact this immediately. Jack Reacher arrives in Margrave, Georgia, as a stranger with no institutional affiliation, rather he is a former Army Military Police officer, separated from service, with no badge, no office, and no accountability to any superior. Within the first fifty pages, he has been arrested by the local police on suspicion of a murder he did not commit, and the reader has been shown that the police department is itself implicated in the conspiracy. Chief Morrison and his officers are on the payroll of the novel's primary antagonist, a counterfeiting operation of extraordinary scale. The institution designed to protect the innocent imprisons them instead.

Reacher is not simply an outsider. He carries institutional competence derived from institutional membership. His ability to read crime scenes, to assess threats, to plan tactical responses, was produced by the Army. What his departure from the Army severed was the institutional accountability that normally accompanies that competence. The novel presents this combination, expertise without accountability, as the ideal qualification for justice in a world where the accountable have failed. It is a particular kind of institutional critique: not anti-expertise, but anti-procedure.

When Reacher discovers that his brother Joe, a Treasury agent working undercover in Margrave, has been murdered by the conspiracy, the investigation becomes personal in a way that the Golden Age detectives never could. Poirot's warmth for Sheppard produced no distortion in his analysis. Reacher's grief fuses entirely with his investigative purpose: he is pursuing justice and pursuing revenge simultaneously, and the novel does not attempt to distinguish between them. The climax, Reacher killing the lead antagonist physically, outside any legal process, is presented with the cool precision of action writing, without moral censure. The text positions an implied reader for whom this outcome reads as righteous; whether actual readers experience it as such is a question the novel's narrative structure cannot answer, and this paper does not claim to answer it.

Foucault's analysis of sovereign violence provides one way of theorising what Reacher's climactic action encodes. If Poirot's method embodies disciplinary power-authority exercised through knowledge rather than force, then Reacher's method can be read as a regression to the pre-disciplinary regime of sovereign violence: punishment administered through the body, personally, with visible physical consequence (Foucault 7-11). But the Foucauldian reading has a limit here that should be acknowledged. Foucault's 'regression' to sovereign violence is a historical genealogy, not a normative claim; applying it to Reacher's fictional violence as though Reacher represents a real cultural return to pre-disciplinary punishment involves a significant interpretive leap. The structural homology claim is that the formal properties of the novel, the displacement of institutional procedure by embodied force, exhibit a pattern arguably homologous to the cultural conditions Garland documents; the Foucauldian framework illuminates a possible mechanism of that pattern rather than demonstrating its existence.

A competing explanation deserves integration at this point. *Killing Floor* was published in 1997, the same year as its author's debut, and its formal properties, namely short chapters, high narrative velocity, and physically competent protagonist, correspond to the conventions of action cinema that had dominated popular entertainment throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

The influence of the Clint Eastwood 'lone avenger' tradition, of the Dirty Harry films, on the thriller's moral architecture is at least as plausible an explanation for Reacher's extrajudicial violence as a Habermasian legitimation crisis. The ideological reading and the market-cinematic reading are not mutually exclusive; hence both can be true, and the paper cannot adjudicate between them on the basis of four texts. The Habermasian reading offers something the cinematic explanation does not: a framework for why extrajudicial violence might register culturally as satisfaction rather than transgression. But that explanatory supplement does not establish the Habermasian reading as the dominant or necessary account.

French's *In the Woods* (2007) provides a formally different and, in some respects, more analytically demanding specimen. Detective Rob Ryan of the Dublin Murder Squad works within, believes in, and depends upon the formal structures of the Irish criminal justice system. He does not distrust his institution; he relies on it. The novel's formal achievement is to produce institutional failure from the inside, through Ryan's own investigative conduct, rather than by positioning the institution as externally corrupt.

Ryan's investigation into the murder of twelve-year old Katy Devlin in the Knocknaree woods is simultaneously an investigation into a decades-old disappearance in the same location, the disappearance in which Ryan, as a twelve-year old boy, was the only survivor, his memory of the event completely erased. He conceals this personal connection from his superiors and from his partner Cassie Maddox, violating the institutional protocols that define his professional role. His concealment is not corrupt in the ordinary sense as it is not motivated by personal gain but it is self-interested: he wants access to the case, and he wants to recover his own memory. The investigation collapses: the Katy Devlin case is solved (her father is the killer), but Ryan's identification of the killer involves a procedural impropriety that compromises the prosecution, the old case remains unresolved, and Ryan's breach of protocol ends his career.

The structural contrast with Ackroyd is precise and textually specific. Poirot's personal warmth for Sheppard produced no distortion in his method; Ryan's personal stake in the Knocknaree case corrupts his method at every level. French's novel tests, through this contrast, the Golden Age detective's fundamental premise-that disciplinary knowledge can be separated from personal investment-and finds it wanting. The panopticon, in French's Dublin, cannot see what Ryan himself cannot see: the connection between the present murder and the past disappearance, which is also the connection between the investigator and the case. The system fails not because it is corrupt but because it lacks the epistemological resources to compensate for Ryan's self-concealment.

Maddox's fate in the novel deserves specific attention as a partial counterexample to the homological claim. She is the more capable investigator of the pair as she maintains procedural discipline, reads the evidence more clearly, and is marginalised and ultimately damaged by Ryan's failures rather than by institutional inadequacy in itself. The novel's formal presentation of Maddox suggests that the institutional failure it dramatises is partly Ryan specific rather than systemic: an equally capable but less personally compromised detective might have succeeded. This is a genuine limit on the Habermasian reading, which tends toward the structural rather than the individual. French does not confirm that the institution is inadequate; she confirms that this particular investigator, in this particular case, was

constitutionally unable to perform within it. The homological reading survives, but it survives with caveats that its own framework cannot fully absorb.

The novel's unresolved ending, Ryan's career ended, the old case unsolved and Maddox estranged, is its most significant formal argument. The Golden Age ending is defined by resolution: the guilty identified, the community reintegrated. French denies both. The refusal of resolution is itself a formal statement about the limits of institutional competence, though its precise ideological valence is not entirely settled by the text. It could be read, with equal plausibility, as a statement about the limits of individual competence, i.e. about what happens when a detective investigates his own trauma, rather than a statement about institutional failure in Habermas's structural sense.

The Limits of the Ideological Reading

The preceding sections have integrated competing explanations, such as market forces, cinematic influence, the diversity of counter-traditions, at the point of analysis rather than confining them to a separate discussion. A more systematic account of those limits is nonetheless warranted.

The most significant challenge to the structural homology argument is the diversity of crime fiction across the period it covers. The genre's development from the 1920s to the 2000s was not a single trajectory from Golden Age confidence to contemporary crisis; it was a proliferation of sub-genres, some of which exhibit the pattern the four selected texts suggest, and some of which resist it entirely. The police procedural tradition, from McBain's 87th Precinct series to the Scandinavian crime fiction of Sjöwall and Wahlöö, depicts institutional life as imperfect, exhausting, and sometimes corrupt, but not as fundamentally illegitimate. Sjöwall and Wahlöö's explicitly Marxist police procedurals, published between 1965 and 1975, offer a formally distinctive critique of institutional authority that is neither the Golden Age's compensatory fantasy nor the contemporary thriller's extrajudicial substitution. Their Martin Beck series depicts a criminal justice system failing its citizens for structural, systemic reasons, but the response is political critique rather than individual violence. This is a form of institutional disillusionment that the Habermasian reading might accommodate, but that the Foucauldian regression to sovereign violence reading cannot.

The paper's corpus also excludes the substantial tradition of crime fiction written by women that challenges institutional authority in specifically gendered terms. Sara Paretsky's V.I. Warshawski novels, beginning in 1982, depict institutions failing women in ways that are inseparable from their gendered structures; Sue Grafton's Kinsey Millhone series operates similarly. These texts exhibit a complex relationship to institutional adequacy that is neither the Golden Age's compensatory faith nor the contemporary thriller's extrajudicial satisfaction. Any larger claim about crime fiction's ideological trajectory would need to engage these traditions, and a four-text corpus cannot do so.

The publishing industry's role in shaping genre conventions is also more complex than the structural homology account implies. The thriller's formal properties, like short chapters, high narrative velocity, physically capable protagonists, reflect adaptations to specific market conditions, including the rise of airport retail, the dominance of the bestseller list, and the competitive pressure of action cinema and television. Lee Child has said in interviews that

Reacher's physical characteristics were calculated to make him cinematically legible, a creative decision that preceded the market's response rather than simply reflecting it. Genre convention has its own momentum; formal properties that originated in one context are reproduced in subsequent texts through imitation and expectation rather than renewed ideological pressure. None of these considerations invalidate the structural homology argument, but they limit its scope considerably. The argument works best as a reading of the four selected texts and the specific pattern they exhibit, not as a theory of crime fiction's ideological development, and not as a claim about the causes of the formal differences between the Golden Age and the contemporary thriller.

Legitimation Crisis as Interpretive Framework: A Qualified Synthesis

The four texts, read comparatively through the frameworks this paper deploys, suggest the following pattern. The two Golden Age texts construct, through their formal properties, an infallible detective, institutional community and unambiguous resolution, a narrative fantasy of disciplinary adequacy. The fantasy is compensatory: produced against a background of real institutional anxiety rather than in the context of confident institutional trust. The two contemporary texts document, through their formal properties, extrajudicial violence, institutional self-destruction, absent resolution, a narrative of institutional failure. The failure takes different forms: displacement in *Killing Floor*, defeat in *In the Woods*.

Habermas's legitimation crisis maps onto this pattern at the level of cultural condition: the motivational withdrawal from institutional procedures that Habermas identifies as a structural tendency of advanced capitalism corresponds to the formal shift from detective-figure as epistemic authority to thriller-protagonist as extrajudicial agent. The correspondence is suggestive rather than demonstrable; the frameworks reveal a pattern in the texts that is interpretively coherent, not causally proven. It is worth being direct about what this means: the Habermasian reading is offered here as a productive interpretive framework, not as an explanation of why these texts were written the way they were. Market forces, generic convention, and cinematic influence can account for much the same formal properties without invoking the legitimation crisis. The paper's claim is that the Habermasian reading provides interpretive leverage on the cultural meaning of those formal properties, on what the texts do, affectively and ideologically, for an implied reader positioned within a specific historical moment.

Foucault's analysis of disciplinary and sovereign power provides a more precise account of what the detective-figure formally embodies and what its displacement by embodied force formally encodes, but the Foucauldian reading sits in tension with the Habermasian, since Foucault's genealogy implies that the disciplinary ideal was always a fantasy rather than a real institutional achievement temporarily lost. Garland's historically grounded account of the punitive turn provides the most specific cultural-historical anchoring for the claims about the contemporary texts, the rise of victim-centred retributivism and expressive justice is documented in policy and culture in ways that the structural and genealogical frameworks cannot match, but it is oriented toward actual institutions rather than toward their fictional representation.

The temporal mapping also requires a qualification. The Golden Age flourished between the 1920s and the 1940s, decades that preceded the consolidation of Habermas's legitimation crisis in the 1970s. The Golden Age was not produced at the moment of institutional crisis, but at its anticipation; the compensatory function the genre served was a response to anxieties about institutional adequacy that were already present before the crisis fully materialised. The contemporary thriller, published from the late 1980s onward, corresponds more directly to the conditions Habermas, Foucault, and Garland each theorise, though even here the correspondence is imperfect: the thriller's market-driven formal properties may have been adopted for commercial reasons that are independent of the cultural anxieties they happen to reflect.

The refined central claim, following from this analysis, runs as follows: a pattern of structural homology, in Goldmann's sense of a formal correspondence between cultural product and social condition, can be discerned in the contrast between the formal properties of four specific Anglophone crime fiction texts and the cultural conditions documented by Habermas, Foucault, and Garland. The Golden Age texts suggest a narrative encoding of compensatory institutional faith; the contemporary texts suggest a narrative encoding of institutional failure and its extrajudicial or individualised substitutes. The pattern is interpretively productive, textually grounded, and theoretically disciplined, but it is a reading of four texts, not a theory of the genre, and the competing material explanations identified in Section 7 cannot be resolved on the available evidence.

Conclusion

The argument has moved from fantasy to failure, and has done so with explicit attention to its own limits. The four texts exhibit a formally coherent pattern: compensatory epistemic authority in the Golden Age pair, extrajudicial violence and institutional defeat in the contemporary pair. Habermas, Foucault, and Garland, applied with acknowledgement of their disciplinary tensions and as diagnostic analogies rather than causal proofs, provide a productive interpretive framework for that pattern. The concept of structural homology, operationalised through narrative resolution, detective-figure construction, and the treatment of institutional authority, specifies the method by which the correspondence is identified.

What this paper has not done is demonstrate that the pattern reflects a necessary or causally determined relationship between crime fiction and cultural conditions. The four-text corpus supports a reading; it does not support a theory. The counter-traditions excluded from the analysis, hardboiled fiction, police procedural, noir, Scandinavian crime fiction, female investigator narratives, all complicate the pattern in ways that would require substantially more analytical work to integrate. That work is a genuinely open research agenda, and it is not clear that a broader corpus would confirm rather than complicate the homological claim.

Several directions suggest themselves. A broader corpus, twelve to fifteen texts rather than four, including specimens from the excluded counter-traditions, would allow the homological claim to be tested rather than merely illustrated. Comparative work across non-Anglophone traditions, particularly Indian crime fiction (Satyajit Ray's *Feluda stories*, Abir Mukherjee's *Calcutta procedurals*) and Scandinavian crime fiction (Sjöwall and Wahlöö, Mankell, Larsson), would test whether the legitimation crisis hypothesis is specific to Anglo-

American institutional culture or exhibits broader cross-cultural applicability. Reception, historical research-reader response data, review archives, sales figures disaggregated by cultural context-would provide the empirical grounding that the inferential claims about cultural attitude and implied reader positioning currently lack.

The gendered dimension of the argument also remains underdeveloped. Cassie Maddox's marginalisation in *In the Woods*, she is the more capable investigator, damaged by Ryan's choices rather than by institutional inadequacy in itself, raises questions about whether the failure of disciplinary institutions takes different narrative forms when the investigator is female, and whether the extrajudicial violence of the contemporary thriller is structurally gendered in ways the present paper has not fully explored.

Four endings. Poirot speaks for forty-five minutes in a drawing room and the social order is restored. Harriet Vane identifies a poison-pen writer in a college library and the institution's integrity is preserved. Jack Reacher kills the man who killed his brother and drives out of Margrave without looking back. Rob Ryan loses his case, his partner, and his career, and the child's murderer is never publicly named. The distance between the first pair and the second is what this paper has tried to measure. The measurement is provisional. The frameworks used here illuminate the pattern, but they do not exhaust it, and the pattern itself may look different from different methodological vantage points. Four endings are a beginning, not a conclusion, and the terms of that beginning remain genuinely open.

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The Heroic Personality of Fatima in Rasheed Jahan's Play, *Woman: An Analysis in the Light of Vira Rasa*

Mudit Sharma & Reena Verma

Abstract

In the traditional plays female protagonists were a creation of male fantasy and they were dressed and undressed according to the whims of males. They were deprived of any agency, assigned secondary status and were conceived as passive characters. During the pre-independence period, the nationalistic agenda visualized the women as Bharat Mata. In the initial decades after independence, the binary division of the image of women either as a homemaker or home wrecker was in keeping with the patriarchal value system and endorsed the male perception of family and gender. Though contemporary playwrights like Karnad, Tendulkar, and Mohan Rakesh opened up a space for alternative ideological perception and critically attacked the established norms, Indian drama still remains a colonized space and the portrayal of women characters is marked by ideological closure. The portrayal of women remains the fiction of the male gaze tainted by the encoding of the sign 'woman' within a patriarchal culture and is caught within the binary of the victor and the victim. These identities have been written on women to the extent of oppressive fixation and have become aporetic whereas identity is forever making and unmaking itself, it is malleable and fluid. Contemporary women playwrights provide a new perception of gender roles and show a shifting sense of gendered space. They deconstruct the patriarchal stereotype and weave a complex web of identities. Instead of portraying women characters in black and white, they tread the tricky terrain and delve upon the grey shades, the conflicts within the fragmented personalities that illustrate women's multiple reflections. They do not portray them as unidimensional or wafer-thin. Rather they are concrete, vivid, rebellious, alive, and agential. Rasheed Jahan is an important woman playwright who speaks against the marginalization, humiliation, oppression and subjugation of women. For this very cause she helped to found the Indian Progressive Writers Movement. She is the only woman writer included in the first anthology produced by the IPWM. Her two short pieces in the groundbreaking 1931 volume *Angare, Dilli Ki Sair* and the play, *Pardey ke Peechchey*, brought her phenomenal critical acclaim. As intended, *Angare* ignited the flames of controversy by confronting issues of social and economic injustice and gender discrimination. Her writing was considered provocative and volatile since she dealt with sexuality and society's treatment of women.

Keywords: Rasa Theory, Nationalistic Agenda, Bharat Mata, Ideological Closure, Alternative Ideological Perception

Introduction

The play represents the conflicting interests of husband, Atiq, and his wife, Fatima, who are part and parcel of the domestic space where conflicts are normal features of human

relationships. Fatima silences the voices of patriarchy in the form of her husband and comes out as a self-reliant, self-assertive, independent and courageous woman. Her departure is an act of resistance and a physical demonstration of Fatima's refusal to conform to patriarchal norms, communicated not through spoken language but through bodily actions. For the aesthetics of this play, Sanskrit aesthetics, particularly rasa theory, can be used to imbue her works with cultural depth and emotional resonance. The present chapter aims at applying rasa theory to the play in order to make an analysis of the play with a view to appreciating the heroic personality of Fatima. The chapter also aims to depict how *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas* and *vyabhicāribhāvas* in play create a cumulative effect to appreciate the heroic personality of Fatima and also how the play transcends the *vācyārtha* (denotative meaning) and arrives at *vyāṅgārtha* (suggested meaning) where Fatima becomes a universal woman impregnated with a kind of agential role, by breaking the traditional role assigned to a woman.

Rasheed Jahan has dealt with the significant characteristics of feminist discussion what Fatima exhibits resilience, strength, and a strong sense of self-worth. She defies societal norms and patriarchal expectations, advocating for gender equality and women's property rights. The final image of Fatima portrays her as a figure of quiet strength and resilience, suggesting that the seeds of rebellion and transformation have been sown. Her rejection of domestic violence and her refusal to remain silent about it demonstrate her rebellion against the acceptance of abuse within marital relationships. Despite the grim realities, the play emphasizes the need for women to recognize their worth and fight for their rights. The journey of Fatima in the play undoubtedly is a journey from suffering to subtle defiance.

(Amreen, 796)

The play, *Woman*, represents the conflicting interests of husband, Atiqullah and his wife, Fatima, who are part and parcel of the domestic space where conflicts are normal features of human relationships. Here, Fatima is a housewife and her husband, Atiqullah, is a Maulvi. He plans to get into a second marriage as Fatima couldn't give him children. He considers her to be barren. While the fact is that Fatima is not barren, she has given birth to twelve children, but unfortunately, they could not survive. Fatima feels so sad, gets irritated, and enters into an argument with her husband about his plan for a second marriage. Atiqullah tries to justify his actions by quoting religious prescriptions (shariyat), which pronounce childlessness as a valid reason to get into a second marriage. At the peak of the argument, when Fatima continues questioning Atiqullah, he slaps Fatima to silence her. This incident infuriates Fatima. She unfolds this secret of her husband's plan of second marriage with her tenant, maid, aunt and cousin, Khadeer. Khadeer helps her to take a decision and come out as a self-reliant woman Fatima who was compelled to be subjected to oppression and exploitation within the religious and patriarchal systems, undergoes a transformation and becomes aware of her own power and challenges her husband's action, gets prepared herself to take legal action, if needed, to prevent her husband from having a second wife. She defies societal norms and patriarchal expectations, advocating for gender equality and women's property rights. Thus, through Fatima, Rashid Jahan exhibits resilience, strength, and a strong sense of self-worth.

The working of rasa theory, especially an integration of *vibhāvānubhāva vyabhicāribhāvas*, helps imbue the play with cultural depth and emotional resonance. Before applying this theory to the play, let us first have the fundamentals of the rasa theory. The working of life and that of the theory of rasa are based on the same fundamental grounds.

Life has three fundamental things: cause (*kāraṇa*), action (*kārya*), and emotion (*bhāva*)—based on which rasa theory works. The rasa theory also has these three fundamental grounds, which Bharata calls respectively *vibhāva*, *anubāva* and *vyabhicāribhāva*. It is the combination of these constituents that enables the *sahṛdayā* to savour the rasa. He defines it as the savouring of the poetic combination –or better still, integration – of these elements: *vibhāva*, *anubhāva* and *vyabhicāribhāva*. Here, *vibhāvas* are of two kinds: *ālamban* and *uddīpan*. Under *ālamban* are included such persons or objects that are the occasion of feelings, as well as those in whom those feelings are generated. *Uddīpanas* are the Circumstances that accentuate emotion already aroused in the *sahṛdaya*. *Anubhāvas* are the consequents and *vyabhicāribhāvas* are temporary emotions. This combination activates the built-in structure of *sthāyībhāvas*, or abiding propensities, which are the modified forms of basic instincts as a result of centuries of the evolutionary process of humanization and social living. These very *sthāyībhāvas* are eight in number and have their corresponding rasa, according to Bharata. When these *sthāyībhāvas* are heightened to a relishable state called *rasadaśā* by the poet or writer, there is arousal of a *rasa* or emotion corresponding to each of them”. (Sharma and Shrawan, 27)

The present chapter demonstrates *vīrarasa* through Fatima’s emotional response to the situation she is put in. Fatima in *Woman* is *ālamban*, or *viśaya*, to be more precise, produces *rasa* in union with *sthāyībhāva*. In *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the heroic person is characterized by qualities like *utsāha* (enthusiasm or energy), *dhairya* (courage or fortitude), *śaurya* (valor), *tyāga* (sacrifice), and *vaiśaradya* (expertise or skill).

The above heroic qualities are manifested through expressions of firmness, heroism, charity, alongside other emotions like pride, agitation, and even ferocity in certain contexts in the character of Fatima. She performs her responsibilities as a dutiful wife. She meticulously tends to her husband's needs and well-being, showing genuine concern for his health. Despite her own hardships, Fatima fulfills her role with a sense of obligation and care, embodying the traditional expectations placed upon women in her society. She has genuine concerns about Atiq. When she finds Atiq having casual approach to her health, she feels worried and persuades him to take care of himself.

FATIMA: Look here, you've not been well and now you're eating these rich sweets. Then, this evening you'll eat the food from the wedding dinner. Won't you fall ill? Anyway, what is it to me? (Picks up the tray.) Enough, or you want some more?

ATIQ: (Takes another piece) That's enough. (Fatima takes the tray inside. Atiq picks up sweet crumbs scattered on the bed to eat. A woman in burqua enters, She looks around before addressing Atiq.) (Mukherjee, 524)

But that does not mean she is mute. She does not like him misguiding people by giving useless amulets. She asks her not to indulge in such evil activities to befool public in the name of having the power to treat people. When Atiq does not listen to her, instead calls her a stupid, uncultured, devilish woman, she questions him as a maulvi who uses religious texts for his own advantage, lies, never uses amulets to cure his and his wife's problems, and hides his own disease from the eyes of society. She warns her:

FATIMA: (Screams) Then listen to me too. I shall turn all your hypocrisy of being a maulvi, your big show and prestige, into ashes. And your beloved will not be allowed to step into this house. Don't think I am the daughter of some beggarly Sayyid that I'll be afraid of you. (Mukherjee, 525)

When Atiq blames her for the death of their twelve babies and so plans to marry again and tries to convince her that Shariat orders that when a woman is found to be barren or if her children aren't alive, then the man should marry again, she retaliates and considering his argument irrelevant. She corrects him by giving him the facts:

FATIMA: (Looks up) Am I to blame that my children died? Did I throttle them to death? If it was not the will of Allah that live babies be born to me, then what could I do? Who can alter the will of God? If the babies of your second wife die too, then what will you do? (Mukherjee, 518)

There is always a skirmish between both husband and wife and the cause is the second marriage. Atiq asks his tenants to vacate so that her second wife can live there. When Fatima comes to this, she becomes angry and says that this is her house. They pay her rent on time. Her tenant is very nice too, friendly and helpful nature. She does not want them to leave.

FATIMA: (Indignantly) Why? This is my house. They pay me the rent on time. The lady is very nice too, friendly and helpful. I don't want them to leave. (Mukherjee, 523)

Let us now see the role of *āśrayāmban*, which refers to the emotional dependence or reliance of a character on another character, object, or situation. This concept is crucial in understanding the emotional dynamics and relationships between characters in a performance. *āśrayāmban* is one of the key elements in creating *rasas* (emotional flavors) and *bhāvas* (emotions) in a performance. By depicting the emotional dependence or connection between characters, performers can evoke specific emotions and create a deeper connection with the audience.

Some possible aspects of Fatima's circumstances include:

- Overcoming societal expectations: Fatima faces challenges like gender equality and women's property rights.
- Supportive relationships: Fatima's relationships with others could play a crucial role in her journey, providing encouragement or obstacles.

Some *āśrayas* are more dependable than others and we, as readers, more readily enter into communion with the former. Fatima's maternal aunt and her two brothers, Aziz and Khadeer, are emotionally connected with her when Atiq shows his intention of his second marriage, then Aziz and Khadeer support her in her bad times. especially Khadeer helps her to decide to come out as a self-reliant woman.

Muslim socio-religious fabric, which acts as *āśrayāmban*, has strict orders that are supposed to be followed by women. The males of the house lead a woman according to their sensibilities. There are dress codes that have been assigned to women. A particular time limit has been set for girls. Men exercise their powers over women. They are forced to be dependent so they can be governed by males. Women are only asked to take care of the house. They are expected to nurture everybody known to them. Fatima's Mamani tells her:

MAMANI: His right is that he is a man. Who can stop him? Almighty God, the Noble Prophet, the laws of the Shariat, and the community give him that right. Why just one, he can take three more wives. It is the women's lot to be miserable. (Mukherjee, 529)

At the beginning of the play, Fatima is a typical housewife, constrained by societal expectations and dominated by her husband's authority. It is a society permeated by Muslim patriarchal values which promotes purdah, unquestioning obedience to husbands, polygamy and misinterpretation of religious texts for the advantage of men. The community expects wives to be patient and accept their fate, essentially reinforcing the societal norm that women should silently tolerate mistreatment. Fatima's aunt and Khadeer's mother, Mamani, reflects the mindset of women when she says if the husband doesn't listen, 'What can a woman do? She will weep and cry, that's all.' Even the other women, like the tenant and the maid, are also of the view that women should endure it as their fate. This expectation of wives to endure abuse is poignantly illustrated by her cousin Khadeer when he says, how other women in the community perpetuate.

KHADEER: What will curse and complaints achieve? Talk about action. Do you want that he shouldn't enter this house? Suppose he doesn't listen to you, then what will you do?

MAMANI: What can a woman do? She'll weep and cry, that's all. (Mukherjee, 532)

Uddīpanvibhāvas, which include 1. Environmental factors like settings, weather, or natural phenomena that evoke emotions, 2. Objects or symbols like specific objects, colors, or symbols that hold emotional significance, 3. Events or situations: like particular events, circumstances,

or plot developments that trigger emotional responses, enhance here the sentiments of *rasa* already aroused by *Viṣayālamaban*.

Atiqullah represents patriarchy in the Muslim community. He believes in strict adherence to purdah, man's supremacy over woman, absolute obedience, silence and dependency on the part of woman, an uncompromising attitude towards traditional dress and hypocritical use of religious texts. Atiqullah insists that Fatima observe purdah when meeting her cousins, Kadeer and Aziz, highlighting his adherence to traditional values. These circumstances are suffocating for Fatima.

Fatima's daily life is filled with numerous instances of verbal, emotional and physical abuse from her husband. These interactions starkly underscore the imbalanced power dynamics and her profound lack of autonomy for women. Time and again, her husband reminds her of the death of children, her barrenness and his plan to marry again, making Fatima vulnerable and emotional. He manipulates religious texts to justify his wrongdoings, showing a blatant disregard for the emotional pain he inflicts on Fatima. He also expects her not to question her second marriage. The following statements of Atiq are self-evident to demonstrate how ruffian he was and how infuriated Fatima:

ATIQU:It is the duty of the wife to obey what her husband says without question. But you always argue no matter what I say. If you want to know the reason, then listen.

ATIQUULLAH: (Smokes a hookah) I can't understand how my second marriage will affect you. The running of the home and everything else with it, the money for housekeeping, all will be in your hands. I've told you many times that I shall look after you both in the same manner. I'm forced to marry again because none of your children lived.

ATIQU: One can at least try one's best to improve the situation. Look, I am nearly forty years old and I haven't a single child living. Children are the support of our old age. That is why Shariat has ordered that when a woman is found to be barren or if her children aren't alive then the man should marry again. (Mukherjee, 518)

The males of the house lead a woman according to their sensibilities. There are dress codes that have been assigned to women. A particular time limit has been set for girls. Men exercise their powers on women. They are forced to be dependent so they can be governed by males. Women are only asked to take care of the house. They are expected to nurture everybody known to them. Fatima's Mamani tells her:

MAMANI: His right is that he is a man. Who can stop him? Almighty God, the Noble Prophet, the laws of the Shariat, and the community give him that right. Why just one, he can take three more wives. It is the women's lot to be miserable. (Mukherjee, 529)

The next constituent of rasa are *anubhāvas*, (the involuntary physical expressions or reactions) that arise from emotions. For *vīra Rasa* (the Heroic sentiment), some possible *anubhāvas* include:

- Physical expressions:
- Bold postures: Standing tall, expansive gestures.
- Facial expressions: Determination, courage, or confidence.
- Vocal tone: Strong, assertive, or commanding.

These *anubhāvas* help convey the heroic sentiment, adding depth and authenticity to the performance. They can be used to portray characters' bravery, strength, or noble qualities. The *anubhāvas* (involuntary physical expressions) of *vīrarasa*(Heroic sentiment) in Fatima's character.

- Confident body language: Strong movements, assertive gestures.
- Determined facial expressions: Focus, resolve.
- Powerful vocal tone: Expressive, emotive.

These *anubhāvas* enhance her portrayal as a strong, determined individual, in the context of gender equality and women's property rights and empowerment. These *anubhāvas* flesh out a picture of Fatima's bold attitude how she wins over Atiq's patriarchal thought and She puts silence to the voices of patriarchy in the form of her husband and comes out as a self-reliant, self-assertive, independent and courageous woman.

When Fatima is slapped due to the desire of second marriage of Atiq, she does not sit silently and tries to foil all the plans of him. She admonishes her tenant not to vacate this house without her Permission. It is her house. Without her consent, nobody can enter in this house. It shows her strong and brave personality that she cannot yield in front of odd situation.

FATIMA: She hasn't yet set foot in the house and he has started to raise his hand on me. What calamity will fall when she comes? Well, let him also understand what I can do. Please inform your husband that there is no need to vacate the house. (Mukherjee, 526)

There is a serious dialogue between Fatima and Khadeer. Fatima says that she will reveal the hypocrisy of Atiq, who fools people fool on the name of the religious scriptures and even gives amulets for curing diseases because people do not know his true nature and how hypocritical he is? He is doing it a second time with a view to satisfying his desires and lust. She says that she shan't sit weeping and crying. She shall shout and tell the whole neighbourhood how he is cheating them. Further, her brother, Khadeer, pacifies her tension by saying what Purpose will that serve? She will start living here and your shouts will not be heard beyond forty yards. He tries to tell her that there are appropriate laws since this is your own property. You can stop him from entering this house if you have the courage to approach the courts of law.

FATIMA: No, I shan't sit weeping and crying. I shall shout and tell the whole neighbourhood how he is cheating them.

KHADEER: And what purpose will that serve? She will start living here and your shouts will not be heard beyond forty yards.

FATIMA: (Agitated) Are there no courts, no laws that can stop him from entering my house?

KHADEER: Yes, certainly, there are appropriate laws since this is your own property. You can stop him from entering this house if you have the courage to approach the courts of law.

FATIMA: (With force) If he brings her here then I promise in the name of God that I shall do everything to stop him. (Mukherjee, 532)

As far as vyabhicāris are concerned, one can perceive in Fatima *śaṅka* (apprehension), *viṣāda* (despondency), *utkanṭhā* (longing), *amarṣa* (indignation), and *dhṛti* (fortitude). It can manifest the qualities like *utsāha* (enthusiasm or energy), *dhairya* (courage or fortitude), *śaurya* (valor), *tyāga* (sacrifice), and *vaiśāradya*. These qualities are manifested through expressions of firmness, heroism, charity, and diplomacy, alongside other emotions like pride, agitation, and even ferocity in certain contexts. *Utsāha* forms the very foundation of *vīrarasa*, representing a dynamic and determined nature of Fatima. *Dhairya* is Fatima's ability to remain steadfast and composed in the face of adversity. *Śaurya* is demonstrated through Fatima's strategic thinking. *Vaiśāradya* is confirmed by Fatima's passion for a self-reliant, self-assertive, independent and courageous woman.

When Fatima comes to know that Atiq has an immense desire for a second marriage. She gets infuriated, says that he poses himself as a great maulvi. The community respects him. People come to him for a fatwa. But by God, she tells him, all these fabricated dreams of him burn her heart to cinders. Further, she says that suddenly a wise man appears in his dreams on jumerat night! Why does he not admit the truth that the girl is ill, and he goes to exorcise her? The jinn leaves her, and now he wants to take its place. If he wants to marry her, then go ahead and do so. This attitude shows that she will not yield in front of him, and this kind of concocted story cannot affect her. She shows a dauntless attitude while dealing with him.

FATIMA: (Interrupts) You pose as a great maulvi. The community respects you. People come to you for fatwa. But by God I tell you, all these fabricated dreams of yours burn my heart to cinders. But your lies don't affect me anymore. You were saying all these days that one of your disciples was after you, imploring you to marry his daughter. Now suddenly a wise man appears in your dreams on jumerat night! Why don't you admit the truth that the girl was ill and you went to exorcise her. The jinn left her and now you want to take its place! (Angrily) If you want to marry her, then go ahead and do so. Why are you asking me? When do you ever ask me about anything? But what's the need for you to tell these lies? (Mukherjee, 518)

Thus *Woman*, Rasheed Jahan activates our latent *sthāyībhāva* or enduring affective propensity through the conjunction of the character of Fatima as she interacts with other characters in the

play and as she appears to us through her physical gestures, some of them involuntary, and through her utterances. The application of *rasa* theory to the play hatches a complete graph of Fatima who breaks the silence and articulates her resistance in words and deeds. She ultimately established herself as an autonomous being free from the constraints imposed by patriarchal society. However, she undergoes a transformation and becomes aware of her own power and challenges her husband's desires, asserting her rights over her husband and her property. She even considers taking legal action to prevent her husband from taking a second wife, the common in all four types of hero and heroines of *vīra rasa* --*dhirodātta*, *dhiraśānta*, *dhirlalit*, *dhirprāśant* as defined in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* and demonstrates them in her actions while dealing with her husband. The play transcends the *vāc्यārtha* (denotative meaning) and arrives at the suggested meaning, where the stepping back of Fatima's husband signifies his defeat. The character development of Fatima in a drama starts off as a woman who is subjected to oppression and exploitation within the religious and patriarchal systems. She undergoes a transformation and becomes aware of her own power and challenges her husband's desires, asserting her rights over her husband and her property. She even considers taking legal action to prevent her husband from taking a second wife. Here, the integration of *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas*, and *vyabhicāribhāvas* in the play creates a cumulative effect to appreciate the heroic personality of Fatima.

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Representing the Postcolonial Subaltern: A Study of Mahasweta Devi's "Hunt"

Mukhtar Ahmad Dar

Abstract

This paper undertakes a critical examination of subaltern representation in Mahasweta Devi's seminal short story "The Hunt", foregrounding the complex intersections of caste, class, gender, and internal colonialism that structure the lived realities of Adivasi communities in post-Independence India. Engaging with the theoretical insights of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak—particularly her formulation of the "gendered subaltern"—the paper interrogates the ways in which Devi constructs a resistant tribal subjectivity that destabilizes dominant patriarchal and statist epistemologies. The protagonist Mary Oraon emerges as an emblematic figure whose transgressive agency is mediated through the culturally embedded ritual of Jani Parab, a festival that symbolically reverses gender hierarchies and enables a critique of normative gendered divisions of labour and power. The study contextualizes Mary's act of lethal resistance as a politically charged intervention against exploitative state apparatuses, corrupt forest officials, and feudal land structures that perpetuate systemic dispossession. In doing so, the paper situates Devi's narrative within larger discourses of internal colonialism, ecological exploitation, and the failures of postcolonial governance. The analysis further engages with the critiques of essentialist Western feminist frameworks advanced by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, demonstrating how Devi reconfigures Adivasi women not as homogenized victims but as historically situated agents capable of articulating an indigenous counter-ethic of justice. Ultimately, the paper argues that "The Hunt" reaffirms tribal myths and ritual praxis as potent ideological resources for subaltern assertion, resistance, and re-inscription of identity.

Keywords: Subalternity, Tribal Studies, Gendered Resistance, Postcolonial Feminism, Internal Colonization, Indigenous Agency, Mahasweta Devi, *Jani Parab*.

"In all my writings I have tried to present the subaltern point of view."

The Subaltern Studies Group was launched in the 1980s by a group of eminent Indian scholars, who in their attempt to restudy the Indian history and society, triggered some controversial issues. Among them is the problematic issue of the subaltern subject and its constitution in the Indian historiography. Since Indian society, despite being democratic and egalitarian, has been grappling with structural inequalities since Independence; a life of oppression, exploitation and marginalization is still a norm for the weaker sections here. Consequently, the issues of social inequalities, oppression and resulting struggles find expression in the writings of several literary authors, both in India and abroad. In India, the theme of subalternity, is running through several contemporary writers like Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Vikas Swarup, Arundhati

Roy, Arvind Adiga, Kiren Desai. One such regional writer who has exclusively dedicated herself to tribal activism is the acclaimed Bengali activist-writer Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016).

A prolific writer of fiction and non-fiction, Devi always wrote in support of the marginalized and downtrodden sections of Indian society. In fact, it was her deep activistic zeal and identification of historical phenomena of exploitation and oppression, subjugation and alienation, poverty and illiteracy among the weaker sections of Indian society, particularly Adivasi (tribal) people like the Santhals, Lodhas, Shabars, and Mundas, that inspired her to wield her pen and mark her protest. Chandra Talpade Mohanty in her thought-provoking essay “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses” argues that Western scholars often identify and treat third-world women in terms of underdevelopment, illiteracy, poverty, religious fanaticism, and over population of particular Asian, African, Middle Eastern, and Latin American countries (5-6). But the adivasi world that Devi discovered and then depicted in her literary oeuvre is contradictory to the Western Orientalist construct. “Unlike the Western-oriented anthropologists, Devi’s empathy or, in the deconstructive jargon, ‘ethical responsibility’ reveals to her the noble primitive” (“Conclusion: A Symbolic Interface” 250). Based on her personal experiences, she, in her works, presents a tribal culture which is more environment friendly and where women hold a place of honour. Rape is a rarity among them and is considered a grave crime deserving death penalty. Instead of dowry system, the system of ‘bride-price’ is a sanctioned tradition, and widow remarriage is customary. A learning from below has revealed to her their superior culture and civilized graces that are no longer part of the so-called modern mainstream society.

Gayatri Spivak, who is credited for introducing Devi to the West, has theorized the characters of the tribal men and women in her texts as ‘subaltern’. While following the postcolonial, post-feminist agenda of decolonizing and deconstructing the socio-political and religious hierarchical institution, Devi inscribes a new sexual/textual praxis in her narratives wherein the gendered subalterns undergo double colonization—one because of their caste, class or ethnicity, and other because of their sex. In fact, while documenting the tensions and struggles in the lives of the gendered subaltern, the sensitivity and ironic intensity of Devi’s idiom multiples manifold. In this regard the comments of Colin MacCabe in foreword to *In Other Worlds* are worth quoting:

The force of Mahasweta Devi’s text resides in its grounding in the gendered subaltern’s body, in that female body which is never questioned and only exploited. The bodies of Jashoda and Dopdi figure forth the unutterable ugliness and cruelty which cooks in Third World kitchen to produce the First world feast that we daily enjoy. (xxiii)

Although Devi’s literary output is categorized either as ‘recreation of past’ or ‘documentation of present’, her literary oeuvre generally explores the trident patterns of oppression—class, caste and gender. But rather than treating these trident patterns of oppression as analogous narratives, Devi takes them as “interpenetrative ones”. According to the co-editors of *Women Writing in India*, Susie Tharu and K. Lalitha, in Devi’s fiction:

Women's subjugation is portrayed as linked to the oppression of caste and class. But in the best of her writing, she quite brilliantly, and with resonance, explores the articulation of class, cast, and gender in the specific situations she depicts. (235)

Besides, an in-depth analysis of Devi's oeuvre reveals a unique kind of subaltern narrative that is effectively expressed by Gail Omvedt's *Dalits and the Democratic Revolution* in these words:

Things began to change, when someone brought him news of Naxalbari and awakened the spirit of rebellion creating a power of thought to fight for his rights" (11).

Whether it is their resilience or resistance to the oppression, Devi's subaltern characters set an unprecedented benchmark. All this has been vehemently projected in Devi's famous short story "The Hunt".

"The Hunt" is an English translation of Devi's Bengali short story "Shikar", translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in 1993. It maps the experiences of Oraon tribals, particularly of a tribal woman, in post-independence India. A story of daring attempt to self-preserve one's identity through violent-resistance, it portrays the contemporary transformation of gender roles and relationships that tribal women are undergoing in everyday life. This transformation of gender roles is represented by a traditional festival called Janiparab (the festival of justice), which provides a base for the cultural ethos of Oraon women. This activity, which although deconstructs the demarcated gender roles, does show that society is, by and large, still regulated by the male worldview. That is why, the speaker states that women "don't know why they hunt for a thousand million moons on this day" ("The Hunt" 12). In the midst of it, Mary, the protagonist, emerges as a powerful voice of gendered subaltern by grabbing the dominant place. As a mouth piece of Devi, she transgresses the patriarchal norms thereby asserting her sexuality and shunning the tag of passive and perpetual victim.

The story exposes and ridicules the colonialist mindset wherein the colonizers consider it their right to exploit tribal women for their carnal desires. Mary, however, mocks at the sexual advances of the mainstream forces embodied in the character of Tehsildar Singh, by using the traditional festival of Jani Parab as a symbol of resistance. Elaborating upon the festival of Jani Parab, Devi writes:

...the ritual of the hunt that the tribes celebrate at the spring festival is for the women to perform this year. For twelve years men run the hunt. Then comes the women's turn. It's Jani Parab. Like men they too go out with bow and arrow. They run in forest and hill. They kill hedgehogs, rabbits, birds, whatever they can get. Then they picnic together, drink liquor, sing and return home at evening. They do exactly what men do. Once in twelve years. ("The Hunt" 11)

Through this switch over of gender roles, as symbolized by the festival of Jani Parab and executed by Mary, Devi is trying to highlight the fact that aggressiveness, strength, passivity,

weakness, courage, bravery are not sex specific qualities but acquired through socio-cultural influence and censorship. This reminds us of Lynda Birke's *In Pursuit of Difference* wherein she argues that the discipline of human biology presents clear-cut differences between sexes with regards to chromosomes, genetics and inheritance. However, while obvious physical differences between males and females exist and develop during puberty, hormonal differences are not absolute. There is a broad range of reproductive anatomy that does not necessarily fit the gender definition of male and female.

Despite being a subaltern, Mary does not let her physiological differences become a hurdle in challenging the power politics of male chauvinist society. Commenting on this aspect of the story Soumen writes:

[The story] embodies a space that is, no doubt, a site of exploitation by and domination of the society but at the same time it is well equipped with an equally strong, subversive agency to topsy-turvy the whole game" (102).

Since Mary belongs to that culture where "insulting or raping women is the greatest crime" (*Imaginary Maps* xi), she could not tolerate the sexual advances of Tehsildar Singh passively and, therefore, hatches a conspiracy against him. She deliberately invites him on a rendezvous during annual Spring festival, Jani Parab or "the festival of justice" to a secluded place deep in the forest with the sole aim of killing 'the biggest beast of the jungle' and thus solemnize the blood ritual. After killing Tehsildar Singh, she celebrates "as if she has made the biggest kill" ("The Hunt" 16). According to Devi, this event, which made all "the mundane blood-conditioned fears of the wild quadruped" ("The Hunt" 17) vanish from the hearts and minds of tribals, was inspired by a true story and reflects how the tribals use their rituals to resist their social, cultural and sexual exploitation. The same views are expressed by Madhu Singh in these words:

Devi merges the ritual of the tribal women's hunt with Mary's murder of her suitor, suggesting that indigenous practices still provide a fertile ground for myths that can be deployed to combat contemporary oppressions. (91)

Mary's violent resistance, which Devi considers justified, is also necessitated by the kind of internal colonization which the Oraons undergo in the name of progress leading to catastrophic ecological loss. Under the garb of development, Oraons are deprived of the forest land—the land from which they not only derive their economic sustenance but is a means through which they preserve their culture and identity. Since one of means through which economic social justice in India can be guaranteed is through the equitable distribution of land, the government had made the regulation that the right to the fruits of the trees in the forest areas should go to the picker, and that Land Ceiling Act should be implemented. But the irony as per Devi is that in India "acts are for enactment and not for implementation" (Devi 26). That is why Prasadji has two hundred and twenty-five bighas of land, and it is non-tribals like him who have grabbed a large chunk of tribal land and pocket huge profit from Sal trees. The forest protectors, like forest-guard Tehsildar Singh, themselves indiscriminately fell Sal trees; thereby leading to environmental degradation like soil erosion and deforestation. While the tribals—the original

inhabitants of the forests, are deprived of all their forest rights and thus forced to live a life of destitution. And it is this destitution and helplessness that forces them to provide cheap labour to these internal colonisers. All this leads to the gradual and systematic annihilation of tribal culture, thereby authenticating the claim that the Indian Independence could not bring much change in tribal lives; only white imperialists were replaced by indigenous oppressors like landowners, contractors and corrupt government officials.

Against these oppressive forces, a machete-wielding Mary emerges as a symbol of power and resistance, as she defends her right of picking the fruit of four Mahua trees on Prasadji's property. She becomes economically independent by selling custard, apple and guava from Prasadji's orchards and succeeds in getting hard bargains from the wholesale fruit buyers. Besides, she also pastures Prasadji's cattle and emerges as a promising cowherd. It is her economic independence which helps her assert and protect herself from subordination and exploitation. Her ability to do jobs involving physical effort proves her a powerful subversive character. Her victory is the victory of all those subalterns who dare to raise voice against oppression and exploitation. Her voice is the voice of those subalterns who despite facing centuries of subjugation from external as well as internal colonizers have dared to say no to their oppressors. Commenting on this daring act by Mary, Spivak in the 'Translator's Preface' of *Imaginary Maps* writes:

When the subaltern speaks in order to be heard and gets into the structure of responsible (responding and being responded to) resistance, he or she is or is on the way to becoming an organic intellectual. ... Mary Oraon in *The Hunt* is one of those figures. (xxi-xxiii)

Devi not only supports this violent resistance of Mary, but also quite openly justifies it. While talking to Spivak she says, "I think as far as the tribals or the oppressed are concerned, violence is justified. When the system fails in justice, violence is justified." (*Imaginary Maps* xi-xii). To her Mary "resurrected the real meaning of the annual hunting festival day by dealing out justice to a crime committed against the entire tribal society" (*Imaginary Maps* xi). In fact, it is a forceful proclamation of resistance against gender politics and a diatribe on the "incursion upon the tribal land and forests by feudalism, colonialism, and global capitalism. As a result, the subaltern figure of Mary Oraon becomes a metaphor for tribals and marginalized people all over the globe" (M. Singh 91).

To sum up, 'The Hunt' while justifying the violent resistance, underlines the significance of indigenous customs and myths which can still prove effective and fruitful in countering the contemporary forms of oppression. The story not only demonstrates "the inconsistencies of patriarchal societies where gender stereotypes and limitations are mostly a socio-cultural and economic state rather than a divine or biological condition" (Karla 55), but also advocates the empowerment and promotion of the socio-economic development of tribal women through awareness and education.

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Interconnections of Nietzschean Philosophy, Quantum Ideas, Identity, Hybridity, and Cultural Encounters in Amitav Ghosh's Recent Writings

Pradeep Trikha

Abstract

Amitav Ghosh's *Ghost-Eye* (2026), a novel that blends magical realism, environmental activism, and themes of reincarnation, provides a rich foundation for examining how Western philosophy intersects with modern scientific ideas. This paper explores Friedrich Nietzsche's concepts—such as eternal recurrence, perspectivism, and the critique of rationality—and their resonance with the novel's portrayal of cyclical lives and multiple truths. It also draws on quantum thought, including parallel worlds, superposition, and non-mechanistic realities, as reflected in Ghosh's depiction of reincarnation and the 'environmental uncanny.' Through close reading, interpretive analysis, and references to Ghosh's commentary, this study argues that *Ghost-Eye* uses these frameworks to challenge human-centred views and promote a symbiotic relationship with the planet during the climate crisis. The analysis extends to Ghosh's broader oeuvre, including *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), *Gun Island* (2019), *The Nutmeg's Curse* (2021), and the Ibis Trilogy (2008–2015), revealing interconnections of identity, hybridity, and cultural encounters that reinvent literary forms and urge a reevaluation of knowledge systems.

Keywords: Magical Realism, Environmental Activism, Reincarnation, Western philosophy, Symbiotic Relationship, Identity, Hybridity, Cultural Encounters.

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh's *Ghost-Eye*, published in 2026, is a multifaceted narrative that spans the late 1960s in Calcutta and present-day Brooklyn. At its core is Varsha Gupta, a young girl from a strict vegetarian Marwari family who inexplicably craves fish and recalls memories of a past life as a fisherwoman in the Sundarbans. Diagnosed as a "case of the reincarnation type" by psychiatrist Shoma Bose, Varsha's experiences disrupt conventional rational thinking and link personal destiny to wider ecological issues (Ghosh, 2026). Decades later, Shoma's nephew Dinu, an antiquarian in Brooklyn, reconstructs these events at the request of environmental activist Tipu, who has a 'ghost eye', a condition allowing perception of spiritual realms. This novel builds on Ghosh's earlier explorations of the "environmental uncanny," where non-human forces disrupt human dominance, as seen in *The Hungry Tide* (2004) and *Gun Island* (2019). This paper examines Nietzsche's philosophy and quantum thought as interpretive lenses for *Ghost-Eye*, while integrating insights from Ghosh's other works to highlight themes of identity, hybridity, and cultural encounters. Nietzsche's ideas, drawn from texts such as *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883–1885) and *The Gay Science* (1882), critique modernity's

overreliance on reason and advocate a cyclical existence. As Nietzsche writes in *The Gay Science*:

What, if some day or night, a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life, as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh... must return to you—all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned over again and again—and you with it, speck of dust!' Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god, and never have I heard anything more divine!' If this thought were to gain possession of you, it would change you as you are, or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, "do you want this once more and innumerable times more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become to yourself and to life to crave nothing more fervently than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?" (Nietzsche, 1882, p.341).

In other words, the experiment involves a demon who confronts an individual in one's deepest solitude with the concept of eternal recurrence: the idea that your entire life—every joy, pain, thought, and mundane detail—will repeat infinitely in the same sequence, without alteration. The demon's revelation forces a profound self-examination: Would you curse this fate as a nightmare, or embrace it as divine? Nietzsche posits that this idea, if internalised, becomes the "greatest weight" on your actions, compelling you to live in a way that affirms life eternally. The passage culminates in the notion that true life-affirmation means craving this "ultimate eternal confirmation and seal" above all else. This is not merely a hypothetical scenario but a philosophical tool Nietzsche uses to probe human existence, values, and the will to live authentically. Eternal recurrence challenges modern consumerist, distraction-filled lives: In an age of social media and fleeting pleasures, would we affirm our scrolling habits eternally? It resonates with positive psychology (e.g., mindfulness practices emphasising present-moment acceptance) and environmental ethics (affirming a sustainable life to avoid eternal regret). However, in therapeutic contexts, it must be handled carefully to avoid exacerbating anxiety disorders. Critically, while inspiring, the idea risks solipsism—focusing on individual affirmation ignores communal responsibilities. Postmodern interpretations (e.g., by Vattimo) soften it into "weak thought," emphasising interpretation over eternal truth. Thus, to elevate philosophy to life-art, its ambiguities and potential for misuse demand scrutiny. If embraced, it could transform existence; if rejected, it reveals the fragility of one's values.

Quantum thought, inspired by principles such as Heisenberg's uncertainty principle (It is a cornerstone of modern quantum theory, highlighting the inherent indeterminacy of nature) and Everett's many-worlds interpretation, suggests that there are myriad worlds in the Universe in addition to the world we are aware of. In particular, every time a quantum experiment with different possible outcomes is performed, all outcomes are obtained, each in a different newly created world, even if we are only aware of the world with the outcome we have seen.] (Everett,

1957), suggests a probabilistic, interconnected universe. In Ghosh's writings, these ideas converge in motifs of reincarnation, memory, and climate activism, questioning singular truths and mechanical worldviews. By drawing on reviews, interviews, and connections to works like *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996)—which blends science fiction with reincarnation via a malaria-induced “chromosome”—and the Ibis Trilogy, which explores colonial migrations and hybrid identities, this analysis shows how Ghosh advocates for pluralistic knowledge systems in an era of environmental peril.

Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, which rejects absolute truths and embraces life-affirming cycles, resonates deeply in Ghosh's exploration of reincarnation and fragmented realities. A key concept is eternal recurrence, where life repeats infinitely, demanding joyful affirmation. In *Ghost-Eye*, Varsha's past-life memories as a Sundarbans fisherwoman devoted to Manasa Devi embody this cycle, not as punishment but as a tool for recovering lost ecological knowledge to address climate change.

Shoma understood now that Varsha's memories of her past life were so abhorrent to Deepika that she would prefer to have a daughter diagnosed mentally ill rather than allow any credence to her claims. Glancing at her watch, she saw that an hour had already passed. By this time, and she had established enough of the rapport with Deepika to feel able to read things along a little. ‘I think it's time for me to see Varsha. I need to talk to her in order to form an opinion. (*Ghost Eye*, p.47)

She entered Varsha's room to find her sitting on a cot and playing with a length of twine, under the watchful eye of her ayah. When Varsha looked up, Shoma was struck by the sharpness of her eyes. The rest of her face was soft, dimpled and childlike, but her gaze seemed to belong to someone much older. Equally striking was the fact that Varsha, unlike her mother, her ayah and everyone else in the household, showed no signs of stress and seemed quite cheerful. (*Ghost Eye*, p. 48)

For example, her recollections of flood-resistant rice cultivation serve as a “weapon” against industrialisation, aligning with Nietzsche's will to power, which encourages transcending nihilism through creative action (Nietzsche, 1886).

Ghosh extends the theme at a broader level. In *Gun Island* (2019), the Gun Merchant's legendary flight from Manasa Devi mirrors eternal recurrence, as ancient conflicts with nature repeat in modern climate crises, such as wildfires and rising seas. Ghosh notes in interviews: “Myths provide tools for understanding the uncanny—events too improbable for conventional narratives”¹. Tipu in *Ghost-Eye*, with his heterochromia allowing perception of ecological interconnections, embodies the Übermensch², overcoming rational limits to mobilise against threats like coal plants. Nietzsche's critique of rationality, as in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886), questions whether empirical science can capture experiences beyond reason. In *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1996), this appears in the subversion of Western science by indigenous mysticism, where a secret society manipulates Ronald Ross's malaria discovery for

immortality through reincarnation. Silence (*mauna*) acts as a Nietzschean force, preserving mystery against rational dissection. Ghosh aptly says:

If all of that information could be transmitted chromosomally, from body to body?' ... Just think a fresh start: when your body fails you, you leave it, you migrate- you or at least a matching symptomology of yourself. You begin all over again, another body, another beginning ... a technology that lets you improve on yourself in your next incarnation. (*The Calcutta Chromosome* 94-95)

The goal is to understand the mysteries of *The Calcutta Chromosome*, which remains unsolved in terms of its anatomical structure, by considering the potential of another life existing in a different body. Occult science, according to Hartman ³, is founded on the idea that "a true appreciation and understanding of the essential nature of man will show that the repeated *reincarnation* of the human monad in successive personalities is a scientific necessity" (*Magic: White and Black*, p. 37) ⁴. Mangala and Lutchman are working to control the Calcutta chromosome by engaging in reincarnation to increase longevity and possibilities beyond the time and space of a human body's normal life, and comprehend why it causes neurological disorders when it is transferred into a syphilis patient.

There is no formula for how much a spirit needs for its nourishment, but if it has a taste for independence, for quick coming and going, for wandering, perhaps for adventures of which only the swiftest are capable, it would rather live free with little food than unfree and stuffed. It is not fat, but the greatest possible suppleness and strength that a good dancer wants from his nourishment, and I wouldn't know what the spirit of the philosopher might more want to be than a good dancer, for the dance is his ideal, also his art, his only piety, 'his service of God' (Nietzsche, p.246)

Perspectivism—Nietzsche's idea that truth depends on viewpoint (Nietzsche, 1887)—illuminates Ghosh's narrative structures. *Ghost-Eye* alternates timelines and perspectives, from Shoma's clinical notes to Varsha's dialect, showing that no single truth dominates. Ghosh affirms: "No single system of knowledge has a monopoly on truth. There are many systems... putting them into conversation" (Ghosh, 2026, commentary). This critiques postcolonial rationality, where Western science pathologises reincarnation, ignoring indigenous wisdom like Sundarbans folklore. Ghosh envisions that human consciousness, memories, or personal identity ("all of that information") could be encoded and transmitted via chromosomes—the structures in cells that carry genetic material—from one body to another. It proposes a form of immortality or rebirth: when the current body deteriorates or "fails," the individual migrates to a new one, retaining a "matching symptomology" (likely meaning a replica of one's traits, experiences, or essence). This process is framed as a "fresh start" enabled by technology, allowing self-improvement in subsequent "incarnations." The language blends biological concepts with speculative transhumanism, suggesting a radical extension of life beyond natural limits. At its core, this idea challenges mortality, identity, and evolution. It echoes themes in

science fiction (e.g., mind uploading in Neal Stephenson's *Fall; or, Dodge in Hell*⁵ or body-swapping in Richard K. Morgan's *Altered Carbon*)⁶, but positions chromosomes as the medium, implying a genetic rather than digital transfer. This raises questions about feasibility, ethics, and the human condition. Ghosh articulates a seductive dream of technological reincarnation, blending genetics with immortality. Scientifically, it's unfeasible due to biological constraints; philosophically, it challenges but potentially undermines identity; ethically, it risks profound inequities. Ultimately, it reflects humanity's fear of death and desire for control, but pursuing it might cost what makes life meaningful: its brevity and unpredictability. As a thought experiment, it's provocative; as a blueprint, it's dangerously idealistic. If realised, it could redefine existence—but at what price?

In the Ibis Trilogy (2008–2015), perspectivism emerges in hybrid identities formed amid colonial migrations. Characters like Deeti and Neel cross-cultural boundaries on the opium ship Ibis, blending languages and forging new selves, challenging rigid hierarchies (Ghosh, 2008–2015). Thus, Nietzsche's ideas infuse Ghosh's writings with philosophical depth, transforming supernatural elements into tools for environmental resistance and cultural hybridity.

The haptic system is the sensory operator through which individuals gather information about their environment to put it. Simply put, it is through the haptic systems that we assess and understand everything we touch or feel, the skin, which is, of course, the single largest sensory organ of the body and possibly the most important to follow our body parts after the brain, is the key element in these sensory operators, but so are the mouth and the tongue. (*Ghost Eye*, p. 183-184)

The haptic (touch) system lets us gather and understand environmental information mainly through skin contact—the body's largest sensory organ after the brain. The mouth and tongue also play key roles in this vital sensory process. Nietzsche strongly emphasised the body and senses as the foundation of knowledge and reality (his “sensualism”). He famously wrote that “all credibility... first comes from the senses” and insisted that sense organs are real, causal parts of the body—not mere illusions. He rejected mind-body dualism, declaring the body wiser than abstract philosophy and central to how we interpret the world.

In Shoma's experience, therapeutic breakthrough often came about by happenstance because of a chance got a random word association. But this was not what happened with Varsha: in her case the breakthrough was entirely the result of careful planning and preparation, a process that began the moment Abhay Gupta's unexpected visit to Tavoy came to an end. (*Ghost Eye*, p.162)

Quantum thought offers another lens, challenging determinism with concepts like superposition, entanglement, and many-worlds. In *Ghost-Eye*, Varsha's dual identities evoke superposition: her consciousness overlays multiple realities, collapsing through observation like Shoma's therapy (Ghosh, 2026). Ghosh states: “The evidence [for reincarnation] is overwhelming... it forces you to realise that this world... is not [singular]; there are other

parallel worlds that exist in simultaneity” (Ghosh, 2026), echoing Everett’s theory (Everett, 1957).

Since Varsha had grown up in the analogue era, online searches for her educational records led nowhere. The only clues Tipu was able to find came from the publicly available information on the Gupta family’s companies. It turned out that after the death of HH Gupta, the patriarch, his oldest son, Subodh, had seized control of the conglomerate by buying out the shares that Abhay Gupta had left to his wife and children. But the buyout had not been cheap because Dipika, with the assistance of her family, had put up quite a fight. (Ghost Eye, p.162)

The ‘Ghost Eye’ symbolises quantum observation, where Tipu’s perception collapses uncertainties into actionable truths against environmental threats. This critiques mechanistic views: “The moment you accept [reincarnation], then you also accept the possibility that the world is not mechanical” (Ghosh, 2026). The Quantum uncertainty aligns with the environmental uncanny, like vanishing species defying predictable models. Ghosh prefigures this in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, where the “Calcutta chromosome” enables consciousness transfer via malaria, blending biology with quantum-like entanglement across timelines (Ghosh, 1996). Time is nonlinear, with past and future overlapping, mirroring quantum principles. In *Gun Island*, quantum ideas surface in uncanny events—displaced animals and migrants—suggesting entangled realities. The Mediterranean “Blue Boat” episode entangles human and nonhuman fates, urging multispecies justice (Ghosh, 2019). *The Nutmeg’s Curse* (2021) extends this nonfictionally, portraying nature as a “monstrous Gaia” with agency, where colonial conquests like the Banda genocide reveal entangled histories of exploitation (Ghosh, 2021). Quantum-like uncertainty exposes the illusion of predictable progress. Across these works, quantum thought positions reincarnation and migration as leaps across worlds, fostering symbiosis over domination. In Ghosh’s writings, Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence intersects with quantum many-worlds, framing reincarnation as lives across parallel realities that affirm existence amid crisis. Varsha’s devotion to Manasa Devi in *Ghost-Eye* embodies Nietzschean affirmation, using entangled memories to resist habitat destruction (Ghosh, 2026).

Perspectivism complements quantum pluralism: multiple truths mirror entangled realities, challenging singular rationality. In *Gun Island*, Shoma-like tensions between science and folklore open dialogues, while Tipu’s ghost eye alters reality via observation (Ghosh, 2019). This critiques postcolonial modernity, linking technicism’s failures to nihilism. The Ibis Trilogy shows hybrid identities emerging from cultural encounters—lascars’ pidgin language and indentured labourers’ solidarities—echoing quantum entanglement in global flows (Ghosh, 2008–2015).

The vision of a tall-masted ship, at sail on the ocean, came to Deeti on an otherwise ordinary day, but she knew instantly that the apparition was a sign of destiny, for she had never seen such a vessel before, not even in a dream: how could she have, living as she did in northern Bihar, four hundred miles from the

coast? Her village was so far inland that the sea seemed as distant as the netherworld: it was the chasm of darkness where the holy Ganga disappeared into the *Kala-Pani*, 'the Black Water'. (*Sea of Poppies* 2008:2)

Here, through Deeti's visionary experience, Ghosh establishes key themes of destiny, displacement, and colonial disruption while employing rich symbolic imagery, narrative foreshadowing, and a postcolonial lens to critique the intersections of empire, migration, and identity. From a postcolonial perspective, drawing on theorists like Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity and the uncanny, the ship, a symbol of European maritime power, invades Deeti's indigenous consciousness, foreshadowing the "mimicry" and cultural dislocations of empire⁷. The "four hundred miles from the coast" quantifies her remoteness, but it also metaphorically measures the gulf between colonised interiors and imperial peripheries, underscoring how globalisation (via opium wars and migration) collapses such distances. Critically, Ghosh's choice to begin with a female, lower-caste protagonist challenges Eurocentric historical narratives, centring the subaltern voice (as per Gayatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?") and humanising the often-anonymised victims of the 1830s opium economy⁸.

The forced poppy cultivation on the banks of the Ganga made the people lose their lands and agriculture. To satisfy the whims of the Britishers, people had to sacrifice their lands, which further made them helpless and forced them to decide to cross the sea to get a living. Britishers were lured by the unlimited profit of the opium trade, even at the cost of lives in China. Farmers did not have any other option to choose, any other way out to solve the problem. When Britishers were gaining everything from the opium trade, here in India, people were losing everything- land and crop and ready to "sweat themselves half to death for a few handfuls of rice" (*Sea of Poppies*, 135) and went as *girmitiyas*. ...the Company's annual gains from opium are almost equal to the entire revenue of your own country, the United States? Do you imagine that British rule would be possible in this impoverished land if it were not for this source of wealth? And if we reflect on the benefits that British rule has conferred upon India, does it not follow that opium is this land's greatest blessing? (*Sea of Poppies* 2008:77) Concepts like 'de-peasantisation' by forcing poppy as a crop of cultivation and setting up opium factories during colonisation are one of the causes of migration. Once migrated, the process continued. It is 'ecological imperialism'. Another example of 'ecological imperialism' is *The Nutmeg's Curse*, colonial genocides reveal hybrid histories erased by dominance, urging recovery of indigenous perspectives (Ghosh, 2021). He says:

It is not known for sure how many Bandalese survived the massacre of 1621. Coen was a Dutch governor who imposed colonial authority over the Banda islands and it was all his design to have a monopoly market over the nutmeg by killing whoever came on the way. Coen himself believed that no more than a few hundred fugitives escaped from the Bandas (*The Nutmeg's Curse*, 41).

And again, Ghosh critiques the idea of conquering nature without thinking about the Earth as a living entity:

But initially, the idea that the Earth is a living entity in which life maintains the conditions for life aroused scepticism and even hostility within the scientific community (*The Nutmeg's Curse*, 86).

The scientific community of the modern age considers nature as a dead thing waiting for humans to give it life. Identity becomes fluid, as in *The Calcutta Chromosome's* reincarnated vessels, which blend the self across eras and cultures. Ghosh reinvents form—non-linear narratives like quantum branches—to evoke wonder and interdependence, advocating environmental ethics through hybrid knowledge.

In *Ghost-Eye*, Varsha's past-life recount disrupts norms, evoking Nietzsche's transvaluation of values and quantum entanglement (Ghosh, 2026). Dinu's haptic memories revive states, mirroring quantum measurement. In *The Calcutta Chromosome*, Murugan's obsession with Ross uncovers entangled conspiracies, where silence preserves reincarnated identities.

It was a relief to escape from those voices in the evenings; to step out of that bleak, cold building, engaged in its scaffolding of rusty steel fire escapes; to get away from the metallic echo of its stairways and corridors. There was something enlivening, magical almost, about walking from that wind-blown street into the brilliantly lit passageways of Penn Station, about the surging crowds around the ticket counters, the rumble of trains under one's feet, the deep, bass hum of a busker's didgeridoo throbbing in the concrete like an amplified heartbeat. (*The Calcutta Chromosome*, 14; 1996)

And again, Ghosh points out:

But before franking the letter for the post, the next morning, Farley added a few scribbled lines in the margin: 'In haste: much that I feared has been confirmed in these last hours. Shortly before matins, there was a knock on my door: it was Cunningham's young assistant. He told me – oh so many things – I shall write of them all to you in time. Suffice it to say for the present that everything is other than what it appears to be, a phantom of itself. The young man has promised to reveal everything to me if I would but accompany him to his birthplace. Fortunately, the place of which he spoke of is not far from the location of my clinic. We are to leave tomorrow: I shall write again and in greater detail, dear friend, once I know more ...(*The Calcutta Chromosome*, 114; 1996)

Gun Island's Gun Merchant pursuit parallels eternal recurrence, with migrant solidarities fostering hybrid communities

It would seem that the intellectual titans of the Enlightenment had no inkling of what was getting underway. Yet, strangely, all around the earth, ordinary people seem to have sensed the stirring of something momentous. They seemed to have

understood that a process had been launched that could lead ultimately to catastrophe: what they didn't allow for was that the story might take a few hundred years to play out. It has fallen to us, centuries later, to bear witness to the last turn of the wheel. And what we are seeing already -' he paused to point a finger in the direction of the distant wildfires - 'should be enough to remind us that the climatic perturbations of the Little Ice Age were trivial compared to what is in store for us now. What our ancestors experienced is but a pale foreshadowing of what the future holds! (*Gun Island*, 19: 2019)

Regarding anti-immigration, refugee crisis and slave trade, Ghosh reiterates:

I saw now why the angry young men on the boats around us were so afraid of that derelict refugee boat: that tiny vessel represented the overturning of a centuries-old project that had been essential to the shaping of Europe. Beginning with the early days of chattel slavery, the European imperial powers had launched upon the greatest and most cruel experiment in planetary remaking that history has ever known: in the service of commerce, they had transported people between continents on an almost unimaginable scale, ultimately changing the demographic profile of the entire planet. But even as they were repopulating other continents, they had always tried to preserve the whiteness of their own metropolitan territories in Europe.

This entire project had now been upended. The systems and technologies that had made those massive demographic interventions possible – ranging from armaments to the control of information – had now achieved escape velocity: they were no longer under anyone's control.

This was why those angry young men were so afraid of that little blue fishing boat: through the prism of this vessel, they could glimpse the unravelling of a centuries-old project that had conferred vast privilege on them in relation to the rest of the world. In their hearts, they knew that their privileges could no longer be assured by the people and institutions they had once trusted to provide for them.

The world had changed too much, too fast; the systems that were in control now did not obey any human master; they followed their own imperatives, inscrutable as demons. (*Gun Island*, 121: 2019)

Ghosh's use of "escape velocity" metaphorically captures globalisation's unintended consequences—technologies enabling empire (ships, guns, media) now facilitate reverse flows via smartphones, social media, and cheap travel. This ties into slave trade legacies: demographic "remaking" created multicultural Americas but enforced segregation in Europe, fostering white supremacy that fuels modern xenophobia. By 2026, with ongoing crises (e.g., Ukrainian refugees contrasting with harsher treatment of non-European ones), Ghosh's point resonates, highlighting hypocrisy in "Fortress Europe" policies. It also intersects with climate themes: many refugees flee environmental degradation exacerbated by colonial extraction.

However, on the flipside, Ghosh's analysis can be critiqued for overgeneralization. Not all anti-immigration sentiment stems from conscious defence of "whiteness"—economic fears, cultural integration challenges, or resource strains play roles, as seen in diverse coalitions supporting restrictions (e.g., non-white Europeans in anti-migrant movements). The portrayal of systems as demonic and uncontrollable verges on technological determinism, absolving human actors (governments, corporations) of responsibility. Historically, while the slave trade was pivotal, Ghosh underplays intra-European migrations or non-European empires' roles in demographic shifts, risking a Eurocentric focus even in critique.

Ghosh brings to mind that climate change (first) drives migration (second), as rising seas, droughts, and conflicts displace millions, intersecting with colonial legacies. In *Gun Island*, this is embodied in journeys from Bengal to Venice, echoing the Gun Merchant myth of evasion and pursuit. The novel critiques modernity's fragmentation—separating environment from society, intellect from intuition—arguing for holistic reconnection. Strengths lie in its urgency and interdisciplinary scope, making abstract issues tangible. Weaknesses include potential over-romanticisation of the past and a tone of inevitability that might discourage action. In 2026, amid accelerating crises (e.g., IPCC reports warning of 1.5°C breaches), Ghosh's work remains vital, urging recognition that anti-immigration walls won't halt tides—literal or human. Ultimately, these passages provoke a re-evaluation of progress, insisting that ignoring history's undercurrents leads to catastrophe.

The Ibis Trilogy's cyclone scatters characters, symbolising quantum branching and cultural hybridity amid oppression (Ghosh, 2008–2015). These scenes weave philosophy and science into ecological narratives of resilience. *Ghost-Eye* extends Ghosh's project from *The Great Derangement* (2016), proposing a postcolonial sublime where multiplicity spurs activism. Ecocriticism benefits: literature fosters conversations between systems, offering hope amid grief. Future studies could explore Eastern synergies, such as *samsara* with eternal recurrence. In Ghosh's writings, Nietzsche's ideas intersect with quantum thought to challenge rational dominance, advocating pluralistic ethics for survival. By reinventing these concepts through themes of identity, hybridity, and cultural encounters, Ghosh urges embracing the uncanny for planetary renewal.

End Notes:

1. Harsimran Gill, 'My book is not apocalyptic at all. I guess I'm leaving hope as a possibility': Amitav Ghosh
2. Friedrich Nietzsche's *Übermensch* (Overman/Superman) theory, introduced in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, is the ideal human who creates their own values, transcends conventional morality, and affirms life without relying on religion or traditional dogma. It serves as a goal for humanity to overcome nihilism, focusing on personal strength, creativity, and earthly existence.
3. Franz Hartmann, in *Occult Science in Medicine* (1893), studied the hidden, spiritual laws governing life and health, bridging the gap between spiritual, mental, and physical realms. It posits that diseases are rooted in the spirit or mind, requiring healers to address both physical symptoms and metaphysical causes
4. Franz Hartmann, https://www.theosophy.world/sites/default/files/ebooks/magicwhiteblack00hart_0.pdf
5. https://www.ebooks.com/en-in/book/95780519/fall-or-dodge-in-hell/neal-stephenson/?srsltid=AfmBOor9J4TGrIjS8VDbwNN2yKs2zDZQMsfj7USNHnvIJCWeDgwCKIYd&_c=1
6. Richard Morgan, *Altered Carbon*, London: Takeshi Kovacs Book 1, 2002.
7. Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial theory, primarily developed in *The Location of Culture* (1994), focuses on how colonial authority is destabilized through the "in-between" spaces of cultural interaction, specifically through the concepts of hybridity, mimicry, and the uncanny (or unhomely). The ship, as a vessel of European maritime power, serves as a potent, ambivalent symbol in this framework, representing both the imposition of colonial order and its eventual subversion.
Key Concepts
8. While Spivak argued the subaltern cannot speak, Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies* explores the efforts of these marginalised individuals (Deeti, Kalua, Azé) to act and be heard. Deeti's struggle as a widow and her eventual escape to Mauritius illustrate a desperate, yet active, resistance to colonial and patriarchal structures.

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Beyond ‘Bambification’: A Zoocritical Re-evaluation of Anthropomorphism and Agency in Felix Salten’s *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*

Rahul More

Abstract

Felix Salten's *Bambi: A Life in the Woods* (1923) occupies a unique and contested space in the history of animal literature. Originally written in German as *Bambi: Eine Lebensgeschichte aus dem Walde*, the novel presents the life of a white-tailed deer from birth to maturity within a Central European forest. This research paper engages with the novel through two complementary theoretical lenses: zoocriticism—the critical study of the representation of animals in literature—and the literary-philosophical concept of anthropomorphism, the attribution of human characteristics to non-human beings. By situating Salten's text within the broader discourse of animal studies, ecocriticism, and post-humanist literary theory, this paper argues that *Bambi* constitutes a deeply ambivalent text that simultaneously challenges and reinforces anthropocentric paradigms. Through an examination of narrative voice, characterization, ecological consciousness, and political allegory, the paper demonstrates that Salten's use of anthropomorphism functions not merely as a literary convention for engaging child audiences, but as a sophisticated device for interrogating the boundaries between human and animal subjectivity. Drawing on the critical frameworks of scholars such as Susan McHugh, Randy Malamud, Donna Haraway, and Erica Fudge, this paper contends that *Bambi* anticipates many of the preoccupations of contemporary animal studies while remaining embedded in the Eurocentric, humanist ideologies of its time.

Keywords: Zoocriticism, Anthropomorphism, Animal Studies, Ecocriticism, Post-Humanism, Animal Subjectivity & Literary Representation

Introduction

There is a tradition of describing animals in the textbook. *Aesop's Fables* and *Animal Farm* are the examples through which readers were made aware of human problems, fears, and social rules. It wasn't until recently that experts started to study this seriously. This is the field called as zoocriticism which keep on asking “What does animals represent?”. It also enquires: “What exactly this story reveals about how humans view animals and do really humans respect animals’ lives?”

Felix Saltens book, *Bambi: A Life in the Woods* (1923) is an epitome to study this way. It narrates the story of a deer's life—from his steps to the frightening experience of being hunted and finally to his life as an intelligent old leader. Most of the people are aware of the 1942 Disney movie, which made the story well-known worldwide. Saltens original book is much darker and more serious. It deals with questions about life and politics.

It was in 1990s when Animal Studies grew as a subject. Early philosophers like Peter Singer and Tom Regan started the discussion by arguing that animals deserve respect. Later writers like Randy Malamud and Steve Baker engrossed on how we depict animals in books and art. The term 'zoocriticism' was championed by scholars like Susan McHugh. She pointed out that animals in stories are never just animals; they are usually "blank canvases" where humans project their own terrors and social issues. This creates a tricky tension between what an animal truly is and the human-like traits we give them. Experts like Erica Fudge further argue that our idea of "natural" animal behaviour isn't just science—it is shaped by the history and culture of the time. This is why understanding a book like *Bambi* requires looking at the specific world of early 20th-century Europe, where the line between humans and nature was being drawn in a very unique way.

Anthropomorphism is well known for giving feelings or thoughts to animals. For a time, scientists hated this; they saw it as a mistake that ruined "real" science. Many modern experts think this strict rejection is also a mistake. Scientist Frans de Waal calls this "anthropodenial"—the refusal to admit that animals might actually share some of our emotions and intelligence. Since we evolved from a common ancestor, it makes sense that our feelings aren't totally unique to us. In books, the goal isn't necessarily to be perfectly scientific. Instead, authors use anthropomorphism as a creative tool to help us connect with and care about nature. The real question isn't whether a book like *Bambi* is "unrealistic" for giving animals a voice, but whether that voice helps us respect and understand their lives more deeply.

Human Traits in *Bambi*: A Closer Look

Seeing Through Bambi's Eyes

In the book *Bambi* Felix Salten provides animals an inner life. He designates a deer with memories, profound dreads and a way of thinking about life and death. The story is told from Bambi's point of view so we feel what he feels. When Bambi is born the book describes his misperception and ecstasy as he sees the forest for the time. This style shapes empathy. By putting the reader inside Bambi's head Salten uses what experts call "imagination." However, there is a catch. Some critics argue that the "inner world" we are stepping into isn't really a deer's world at all. Instead, it's just our own human imagination projected onto an animal. Even so, Salten adds layers to this. He often describes Bambi's reactions to smells, sounds, and the terrifying presence of "Him" (the hunter) in ways that feel "other." He suggests that Bambi's mind isn't just a human mind in a deer's body; it's something stranger and more primal.

Why the Animals Speak

The animals in *Bambi* not only talk but also argue. Converse unfathomable topics like freedom. This follows a tradition of "speaking animals" in literature like Aesop's Fables. In *Bambi* the animals aren't interested in human morals. They talk about things that actually matter to a deer: But there is a major difference here. In old fables, animals usually talk just to give humans a moral lesson (like "don't be greedy"). In *Bambi*, the animals aren't interested in human morals. They talk about things that actually matter to a deer:

- The danger of the open meadow.
- The mystery of human beings.
- How the seasons change.
- The constant threat of death.

Their speech expresses animal concerns, not human ones. The most important conversations happen between Bambi and his father, the Old Prince. His father doesn't give "safe" advice. Instead, he teaches a tough, stoic way of living. His most famous lesson—that "He" (the hunter) is not all-powerful—is a huge challenge to the idea that humans are the center of the universe. It suggests that the forest has its own kind of power and intelligence that humans will never truly understand.

Family and Society in the Forest

The world Salten built is organized like a community. We see family bonds, friendships, romance and clear social rankings.

- Mothers and Children: Bambi's mother is a teacher and a protector.
- Friendship: Bambi's bond with Faline and Gobo feels like a childhood friendship.
- Growing Up: Bambi's journey from a fawn to a powerful leader follows the classic "coming of age" story.

Critics have pointed out that this "forest society" looks a lot like a European family from the early 1900s. Salten might have been creating a "fantasy" of a community that didn't exist in the human world anymore. If we look at when Salten wrote the book (Vienna, shortly after World War I), it makes sense. Human society was falling apart. The old empire had collapsed, and traditional families were struggling. By creating a forest world that felt stable, protective, and organized, Salten might have been creating a "fantasy" of a perfect community that didn't exist in the human world anymore. He used the animals to show a version of social wholeness that he missed in his own life.

The Forest as a Different World: A Lesson in Nature

The Forest vs. The Human World

In the story of *Bambi*, the forest isn't just a background where trees grow. It is a "counter-world"—a place that has its own rules, its own morals, and its own way of seeing the world. It stands in direct contrast to the human civilization that occasionally invades it. For the animals, the forest is an ethically charged space. Their way of living, perceiving, and being part of a community is presented as a genuine alternative to how humans live. While this idea of "nature as a moral alternative" is an old one, the author, Felix Salten, gives it a modern, darker twist.

He isn't just saying nature is beautiful; he's suggesting that human civilization has become dangerously disconnected from the truth of life.

The Law of the Forest: Life and Death

The most basic "moral law" in Bambi's forest is the acceptance of death. It is an unescapable part of life. Animals kill each other for food; Bambi witnesses his mother, his friends, and many others die. However, these deaths—as painful as they are—are treated as a natural part of how the forest works. They are "mortal encounters" that show how every living thing is defenseless and associated. What makes the forest's "natural" death different from the death brought by a human hunter?

- Natural Death: Part of a vicious succession. About endurance and equilibrium.
- The Hunter's Kill: In the book, this is described as "complimentary" or needless. It isn't done for equilibrium; it's done out of a craving for dominance. It doesn't serve the forest; it destroys it.

While some critics argue that this "romanticizes" the wild by making animal predation seem "better" than human hunting, the message remains clear: humans have something vital to learn from the forest's honest relationship with life and death.

"He": The Hunter as a God-Like Terror

The hunter is the most significant figure for understanding how humans and animals interrelate in this book. For most of the story, he is never called a "man"—he is simply "He." To the animals, "He" is an enigmatic, god-like figure. They only know him through petrifying evidences: his scent, a hefty footprint, the flash of a gun, and the trail of blood he leaves behind. By never giving the hunter a name or a face, Salten flips our human standpoint. We stop seeing hunting as a hobby and start seeing it through the eyes of the animals—as a heavenly anger or a natural disaster that makes no sense.

The Power of the Gaze: Who is Watching Whom?

In our modern world, humans are usually the ones watching animals. We look at them in zoos, in museums, and on nature shows. The animals are the "objects" being watched. Experts call this an asymmetry of power. Salten's novel completely inverts this structure:

- The animals are the "subjects" who are doing the watching.
- The human is the "object"—an eccentric, intimidating existence that is being experiential and eluded.

This is an influential move. It forces us as readers to stop being the "watcher" and start feeling what it's like to be the "watched." It makes us comprehend how scary and unintelligible we must look to the rest of the living world.

Recognition in the Face of Death

One of the strongest instants in the book occurs when an older Bambi looks down at a predator who has been unintentionally shot by another human. Staring at the dying man, Bambi doesn't feel content or victorious. In its place, he senses a bizarre sense of connection. He sees that the man is mortal, just like any deer. The man bleeds, just like Bambi's friends did. In this moment, the boundary between human and animal vanishes. They are both just "creatures" caught in the same cycle of life and death. This advocates that beneath all our technology and our "supremacy" over nature, we share a basic harmony with every other living thing. We all share the same helplessness.

Bambi's Legacy: Between Science and Fairy Tale

Bambi occupies a unique spot in literary history because it sits between two very different styles of writing. On one side, it follows the "realistic" animal story tradition. Before Salten, writers like Ernest Thompson Seton were already trying to write about animals as they actually lived, focusing on their real-world environment and survival. Like these authors, Salten believed in the "Darwinian" idea—that humans and animals are part of the same family tree and share deep emotional and mental connections. On the other side, *Bambi* is also a "literary fairy tale." The forest Salten describes isn't just a scientist's playground; it's a beautiful, imagined space used to talk about deep philosophy and politics. This mix—half real-world observation and half moral imagination—is exactly why the book is still so fascinating to study today.

The Influence on Modern Books

Even if they don't say it directly, many modern authors owe a lot to *Bambi*. Books like *Life of Pi* or *The White Bone* deal with the same big questions Salten raised a century ago:

- How do we describe what an animal is thinking?
- How does human violence change the natural world?
- What does it say about our own "human" morals when we try to imagine life as an animal?

Famous writers like J.M. Coetzee have continued this work, exploring the "limits" of how much we can ever truly understand another species.

The "Disney Effect" and the Invention of "Bambification"

We can't talk about *Bambi* without talking about the 1942 Disney movie. Ironically, the film made the story famous while also ruining its original message. Disney "sanitized" the story. The movie detached the dimmer, grittier parts—the continuous terror of death, the profound political meanings, and the raw descriptions of human brutality. This shaped what critics now call "Bambification." This is when we turn nature into something "pretty" and sentimental to make ourselves feel better. By making the forest look like a safe, blissful playground, we can disregard how damaging our genuine relationship with nature is. The huge gap between Salten's serious, creepy novel and Disney's sweet movie shows just how much humans scuffle to be truthful about the wild world around them.

Conclusion

The Lesson of the Forest

In this paper, it's been argued that Felix Salten's *Bambi: A Life in the Woods* is a foundational book for zoocriticism. It foretold many of the big questions experts are still asking today about how we represent animals in books. By giving the animal's voices, feelings, and social lives, Salten does two things at once: he makes us care deeply about them, but he also shows us that we can't help but see them through "human" eyes. A deep look at *Bambi* discloses an eccentric tension. On one side, the book challenges our ego. It forces us to see ourselves as the petrifying "Other" and displays that the forest has its own deep wisdom that humans have forgotten. On the other side, the animals still feel a bit human—they live in traditional families and share the same worries Salten's human neighbors had in early 20th-century Europe.

The Impossible Bridge

This tension isn't a blunder; it's actually the point. It reflects a hard truth: it is impossible for a human writer to truly "speak" for an animal using human language. As the philosopher Jacques Derrida suggested, the animal stands at the very edge of what our words can understand. When we use "human-like" traits (anthropomorphism) to describe a deer, it is both necessary and imperfect.

- It is necessary because it is the only way we know how to make people feel empathy for a different species.
- It is imperfect because we are still just imagining our own feelings inside a different body.

Bambi's Lasting Impact

The reason *Bambi* still matters today is that it sits right in the middle of this struggle. Salten created characters that aren't just "humans in fur coats," but aren't just mindless machines either. He practiced what modern experts call "critical anthropomorphism"—using our

imagination to respect animal lives while admitting we don't know everything about them. Ultimately, *Bambi* is not just a relic from the past. It is a living challenge to all of us. It asks us to think about how we represent the wild, where our own "human" limits are, and what we owe to the non-human world that keeps us alive.

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Positioning “*Thought the Paraclete*” within Contemporary Indian Travel Discourse

Rama Mani Josyula

Abstract

This article attempts to reinterpret Sri Aurobindo’s poem “Thought the Paraclete” within the framework of contemporary travel discourse. While travel writing has traditionally focused on geographical movement, recent scholarship recognises travel as a metaphor for psychological and spiritual transformation. Drawing upon theoretical perspectives on Quests and Inward Journeys discussed by Tim Youngs, this study examines the poem as a narrative of vertical travel through successive planes of consciousness. The poem reflects Aurobindo’s philosophical conception of the ascent of consciousness through the stages of Mind, Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, Overmind, and ultimately the Supermind. Each stage represents a transformation of awareness that moves from analytical reasoning toward comprehensive knowledge—within this framework, thought functions as the traveller guiding consciousness toward higher levels of illumination. By interpreting these stages as phases of an inward journey, the article places “Thought the Paraclete” within a broader understanding of travel writing that includes metaphysical and spiritual exploration. The study further contrasts this evolutionary form of travel with contemporary mobility culture, where travel is often commercialised and associated with physical movement across landscapes. Aurobindo’s poetic vision instead emphasises the inward transformation of consciousness as the most profound form of travel. The article therefore contributes to an interdisciplinary discussion connecting travel writing, literary studies, and the philosophy of consciousness.

Keywords: Sri Aurobindo, Thought the Paraclete, Inner Journey, Consciousness, Travel Discourse.

Introduction

Scholarly discussions on the poetry of Sri Aurobindo have largely focused on its mystical symbolism, spiritual philosophy, and metaphysical vision. Critics such as K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar interpret “Thought the Paraclete” as a poetic expression of the ascent of consciousness through successive spiritual planes culminating in supramental realisation. Iyengar emphasises the poem’s structural movement from ordinary mental awareness toward higher levels such as the illumined mind, the intuitive mind, and the Overmind, highlighting its visionary rather than analytical nature. Similarly, studies on Aurobindo’s poetry frequently situate his work within the broader framework of spiritual evolution and yogic consciousness.

Parallel to these interpretations, contemporary scholarship in travel writing has expanded the concept of travel beyond geographical movement. Critics such as Tim Youngs states that modern travel narratives increasingly foreground inward journeys, where the

exploration of the self becomes central to the travel experience. This perspective recognises spiritual quests and psychological transformation as important dimensions of travel discourse. The present study therefore brings these two fields together by examining the poem as a narrative of inward spiritual travel, thereby offering an interdisciplinary perspective connecting Aurobindo's mystical poetry with contemporary travel studies.

Research Gap

Although the philosophical and mystical dimensions of "Thought the Paraclete" have received considerable scholarly attention, most studies focus primarily on its metaphysical symbolism and spiritual psychology. Very little attention has been given to the poem from the perspective of travel discourse. Contemporary travel studies recognise the importance of inward journeys and spiritual quests in travel narratives, yet these theoretical frameworks have rarely been applied to mystical poetry within Indian literature. This article tries to address this gap by interpreting "Thought the Paraclete" as a narrative of vertical movement through planes of consciousness, thereby creating an interdisciplinary dialogue between spiritual literature and travel writing studies.

Methodology

This study employs qualitative textual analysis of Sri Aurobindo's poem "Thought the Paraclete." Through close reading, the analysis examines the poem's imagery, structure, and symbolic progression to identify the stages of consciousness represented within the text. The interpretative framework draws upon concepts from contemporary travel discourse, particularly the ideas of quests and inward journeys discussed by Tim Youngs. In addition, Aurobindo's own philosophical writings and critical interpretations by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar are used to contextualise the poem's spiritual symbolism. By integrating literary analysis with travel theory, the study interprets the poem as a narrative of spiritual ascent that redefines travel as an inward exploration of consciousness.

Discussion

Reimagining Mystical Ascent as Travel

Travel writing in the contemporary period has expanded beyond physical movement across geographical landscapes to include journeys into consciousness and the self. Critics such as Tim Youngs observe that modern travel narratives increasingly emphasise inward exploration, where psychological and spiritual transformation becomes central to the travel experience. Within this expanded framework of travel discourse, spiritual or mystical journeys can also be examined as forms of travels. Sri Aurobindo's poem "Thought the Paraclete" provides the best example of such inward movement. The poem can be interpreted not merely as a mystical expression but also as a vertical travel narrative that maps the ascent of consciousness through multiple spiritual planes. Rather than depicting physical landscapes, the poem traces an inward trajectory of thought as it moves from the ordinary intellectual mind toward higher states of

awareness, merging in supramental realisation. By situating this poem within contemporary travel discourse, the present study argues that Aurobindo's mystical vision can be read as a unique form of inner travel narrative in which the traveller is consciousness itself.

Mystical Vision and the Language of Experience

Sri Aurobindo emphasised that mystical poetry is concerned less with intellectual explanation and more with visionary experience. A mystical poem attempts to reveal an experience of spiritual ascent that cannot be fully expressed through conceptual language. The significance of such poetry lies in the intuitive perception created through imagery, rhythm, and symbolism. In "Thought the Paraclete," the ascent of thought across spiritual planes is suggested through symbolic imagery rather than explicit description. The poem does not provide systematic explanations of the realms through which consciousness travels. Instead, it conveys the experience of expanding awareness through evocative metaphors and visionary language.

Stages of Consciousness as Travel Trajectory

Critical interpretations by K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar highlight the poem's structural movement. Iyengar views the poem as an imaginative projection of thought's ascent from the ordinary mental plane to higher spiritual realms. The poem unfolds through several movements corresponding to the stages of consciousness described in Aurobindo's philosophy. The poem begins by presenting thought as a traveller attempting to transcend the limitations of ordinary human perception. Thought is personified as a winged being moving across vast spiritual spaces:

As some bright archangel in vision flies
Plunged in dream-caught spirit immensities.

This imagery portrays thought as a traveller moving through metaphysical space. The metaphor of flight suggests a vertical journey, distinct from conventional travel across physical landscapes. As the poem progresses, it evokes cosmic landscapes that symbolise different states of consciousness:

Past the long green crests of the seas of life,
Past the orange skies of the mystic mind.

These images create a symbolic geography of consciousness. The poem's movement corresponds to the successive stages described in Aurobindo's philosophy: Mind, Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, and Overmind. Each stage represents a widening of perception and a gradual approach toward divine knowledge. The destination of the journey occurs in the realm of spiritual unity:

Crimson-white mooned oceans of pauseless bliss

Here thought transcends its individual limitations and merges with a higher reality. The poem concludes with the dissolution of ego and the realisation of infinite consciousness described as: “Self was left, lone, limitless, nude, immune.” The destination of this inward journey is therefore spiritual realisation rather than physical conquest.

Inner Journey and Contemporary Travel Discourse

Contemporary travel theory recognises that journeys do not necessarily involve physical movement. As Tim Youngs observes, modern travel narratives frequently explore journeys into the self. Such narratives emphasise psychological transformation rather than geographical exploration. Within this context, “Thought the Paraclete” can be interpreted as a travel narrative in which the landscape is mental and spiritual rather than physical. The traveller in this journey is consciousness itself, moving through successive stages of awareness. The poem therefore demonstrates how travel writing can extend beyond material journeys to include metaphysical exploration.

Aurobindo’s Mystic Poetry in Indian Travel Discourse

Reading “Thought the Paraclete” through the lens of contemporary travel discourse situates the poem within a broader Indian intellectual tradition that views life as a journey of spiritual evolution. Indian philosophical traditions frequently describe the human experience as a movement toward self-realisation. Unlike conventional travel writing that focuses on the exploration of external territories, Aurobindo’s poetic vision explores the inner realms of consciousness. By framing the poem as a narrative of spiritual ascent, the study demonstrates how Aurobindo’s mystical poetry expands the conceptual boundaries of travel writing within Indian literary discourse.

Commerciality and Spiritual Travel

In contemporary society, travel is often associated with spending and tourism business. Modern travellers typically engage with transportation, accommodation and making memories. Travel experiences are therefore frequently shaped by economic and social factors. In contrast, the journey described in “Thought the Paraclete” represents a fundamentally different form of travel. This inward journey requires no physical displacement or financial expenditure. Instead, it demands spiritual discipline, observation, and inner transformation. Meditation becomes the medium through which the traveller ascends. Aurobindo’s vision thus challenges the prevailing commercial understanding of travel by presenting spiritual evolution as the most meaningful form of journey.

Conclusion

Viewed through the theoretical lens of contemporary travel discourse, “Thought the Paraclete” emerges as a profound narrative of inward exploration. The poem maps a transformative journey in which thought rises through successive planes of consciousness until it merges with

the infinite. In doing so, it redefines travel as movement not across geographical landscapes but across the evolving terrains of the self. Interpreting the poem within travel discourse therefore reveals the possibility of understanding mystical literature as a form of travel narrative—one that records the soul's ascent toward spiritual realisation.

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Women's Sexuality and Education: Kamala Das's Role in Changing Discourse

Sakshi Arora

Abstract

This paper explores how women's sexuality, when taught in colleges and universities, becomes a positive conversation rather than a taboo. Inclusion of such subjects in the university's syllabi reshapes the narrative surrounding women's sexuality and desires. This study, while exploring Kamala Das's poems on love, desire, and sexuality, highlights how their inclusion in the syllabi of colleges and universities across India changes the discourse on women's sexuality. This study stems from Foucault's theoretical idea that power produces knowledge and shapes discourse. It is explored that women writing about their bodies and desires, and the further inclusion of such topics by educational institutions, empower women and hence reshape the established narratives surrounding them.

Keywords: Discourse, Desires, Sexuality, Power, Education

Introduction

Women and their bodies are treated as caves having deep secrets that cannot be talked about openly. Women's bodies and desires are often assumed to be taboo, and shame is associated with their body parts and sexual desires. As women's bodies are not allowed to be talked about positively, they are often seen as objects of embarrassment or sex. The patriarchy shapes women's bodies and decides how and where they can be talked about. Therefore, they either become subjects of embarrassment or curiosity, leading them to be sexual objects. Women need to take hold of their bodies and articulate their lived experiences. This empowerment leads to a new discourse that reshapes their narratives.

Hélène Cixous, in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, emphasises women's desires and the importance of writing about them. Hélène Cixous coined the term 'écriture féminine' (female writing), which is a style of writing arising from female lived experiences. Cixous argues that the writing style and language of women and men are different. Women's writing is inconsistent, fluid, and unstructured, emotionally charged and expressive.

Cixous highlights that if women did not write about their experiences and desires, they would be kept away from their bodies the way they have been kept away from writing. Cixous proposes that women should write as their writing helps other women to acknowledge their emotions and desires — "I wished that that woman would write and proclaim this unique empire so that other women, other unacknowledged sovereigns, might exclaim: I, too, overflow..." (Cixous 876). Writing provides a safe space to express emotions. It helps people to understand themselves and share their emotions with others. It provides women with a space to transform social and political institutions that have traditionally relegated them to a

secondary position. Silence and shame surround female bodies. Their desires, both physical and emotional, remain unacknowledged, leading to their dehumanization and objectification. Das tries to break that silence in her poems by writing about it.

Apart from writing traditionally about feminine desires, Das also talks about the situation of women in a patriarchal society. While feminine needs and desires are presented with honesty, the poems also reveal women's physical and psychological destruction by men. Through her writing, Das explores women's desires and bodies that are kept under the rug and often talked about with embarrassment. Simultaneously, she also focuses on how she, like other women, is often objectified as a sexual object.

Her confessional poems are taught in colleges and universities across India. It helps young students to understand how female identities and their expressions have been suppressed by the patriarchal society. Through her poems, Das articulates female desires, marital relationships, and the complexities. In defying gender norms, she creates an empowering discourse for female narratives, especially those for Indian women.

Kamala Das's Role in Changing the Discourse

Kamala Das, an author from Kerala, wrote several poems where she articulated her bodily experiences. She focused on various subjects in the 1970s that are still considered taboo. Her confessional style of writing bears her life experiences, marriage, trauma and sexual desires. She has not hesitated to write about conventional taboo topics. Das's poems reflect on womanhood, feminine desires, sexuality and love. At the same time, she also explores the complexity and problems of complete surrender, where the bodies are treated as sexual objects, and the love does not remain. In the poem, "The Looking Glass", she encourages women to accept their sexuality and communicate their feminine desires to men: "Gift him what makes you a woman, the scent of / Long hair, the musk of sweat between the breasts, / The warm shock of menstrual blood and all your / Endless female hungers..." (12–15). In the opening lines of the same poem, it is suggested that getting a man to love a woman is easy if she communicates her desires as a woman: "Stand nude before the glass with him / So that he sees himself the stronger one / and believes it so, and you so much more / Softer, younger, lovelier" (3–6). Here, besides talking about sexuality, she has presented to the readers an aspect that, from the lens of men, women are softer, and they have to make sure that men find themselves 'stronger' than women to be loved by them. She ends the poem by saying that the body, which once "gleamed" by his touch, becomes "burnished brass", "drab and destitute" once he leaves. This adds more complexity to the poem – here she emphasises women's deep desires, at the same time, about the destructive condition of women once they are left by their lovers. Her poems not only depict women's desires but also their vulnerability. She has highlighted the power dynamics in the poem — a woman needs to communicate her desires, at the same time, they are expected to be softer so that the man continues to love her. These raw emotions add power and depth to her poem, while acknowledging the feminine desires, she accepts that women are often left destitute. Besides talking about female sexuality, she also highlights their experiences in the patriarchal context.

In the poem "Freak", Das portrays her loveless relationships and expresses her desire for real love rather than just physical relations. She argues how his lover just desires his body,

“Can this man with / Nimble Finger-tips unleash / Nothing more alive than the / Skin’s lazy hungers?” (9–12). Her poems reveal that she desires love while acknowledging the lack of emotional depth in her relationship. The man with ‘nimble’ fingers highlights the superficial and mechanical act of making love. Nimble fingers of a man can unleash no emotions in her but just arouse lustful desires. She does not hesitate to talk about women’s sexuality, but she also highlights the need for emotional connections that she finds missing. She asserts her embodiment and desires to challenge the societal expectations of women. At the same time, she is vocal about the despair a woman goes through in a loveless relationship. She explores femininity in a broader aspect. She challenges the silence and shame associated with women’s bodies while also venting about the objectification of women in the patriarchal context.

In her poems, Das repeatedly asserts that love is central to emotional fulfilment in a relationship. In “Introduction”, she explores identity and relationship: “he is every man / Who wants a woman, just as I am every / Woman who seeks love” (46–48). It suggests the difference in the expectations of Das and her husband. While he sought a ‘woman’, that is, physical desire, she desired emotional security. She argues that although her husband did not hit her, her young “sad woman-body” felt “beaten” Unable to bear the weight of her adult body, she states, “The weight of my breasts and womb crushed me” (29–31).

Das was married at the age of fifteen. She highlights how a girl child after the mark of puberty, like growing breasts and pubic hair, is considered a ‘woman’ directed towards marriage. She questions the institutions that assign fixed roles for women and expect them to fit into those roles. It is evident in the expectation of fulfilling the role of a good wife, wearing ‘sarees’ after marriage and not his brother’s comfortable t-shirts, as ‘sarees’ in India are often considered a marker of femininity.

Iris Marion Young, an American socialist feminist, in *Five Stages of Oppression* argues that gender exploitation is the transfer of sexual energy from women to men (14). Women’s emotional needs are often ignored, and they are relegated to a secondary position. Das, through her confessional poems, depicts the lived realities of women. Her poems highlight the sexual, emotional and psychological needs of women, as well as the constraints of patriarchal structures.

When these confessional voices gain educational power, they help in changing the narratives surrounding them. Das is taught in colleges and universities – a new discourse is shaped when women’s bodies, feelings, and emotions get space to be accepted. As Foucault says, power is not only repressive but productive; it helps to produce and shape their truth. This power gained through these educational institutions helps women to communicate their truth to people. Stephen J. Ball, in the introduction of his edited book, *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge*, states that “ education works not only to render its students as subjects of power, it also constitutes them, or some of them, as powerful subjects (4). After getting educated about women’s realities and their lived experiences, the learners, that is, the powerful subjects, internalise and articulate the truth within broader social and academic discourse.

Conclusion

Women's writing is rooted in their authentic lived experiences. They often inscribe their bodies and emotions into their writing to communicate about their experiences. A confessional voice like Kamala Das became a discursive voice that reshaped the discourse surrounding women. Her writings are neither categorised as exotic nor as over-sexualised writing. Womanhood is asserted through her raw emotions. After her writing being included in college and university syllabi, women's sexuality has not remained a site of shame and embarrassment, nor have they remained just sexual objects. Women's desires are accepted while acknowledging that they are not just objects of male pleasure. Das resists the reduction of women to men's desires, while unhesitatingly articulating her sexual desires.

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Spatial Understanding of Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*

Shravya Biskunda & K. Rani Rajitha Madhuri

Abstract

The foundations of space theory were laid down by Henri Lefebvre, a French socialist, in his book *The Production of Space* (1984). In the book he states that space is not an empty vessel in which events occur. Rather, it is socially produced through power relations, cultural practices and experiences of people occupying it. Foundations of space theory were greatly expanded by theorists such as Doreen Massey, a British social scientist, who observed space theory through the lens of feminism. She stated that space is experienced differently by men and women due to different power relations shared by them. This gave space a gendered outlook. This paper is an attempt to study space theory in the autofiction *When I Hit You* by Meena Kandasamy. The current paper applies space theory explained by Henri Lefebvre and Doreen Massey to *When I Hit You* so as to understand how space is produced, maintained and challenged in contemporary Indian writing in English.

Keywords: Space, Space theory, Lefebvre, Massey, Kandasamy, Patriarchy, Power, Control

Introduction

As a concept, space theory emerged in the late 20th century with the publication of *The Production of Space* by Henri Lefebvre. In the text, he contests that space is not a backdrop in which events happen. Rather, it is an active agent that shapes relationships, beliefs and experiences of those who live in it. Space is constantly shaped by power structures, dominant trends of thought and social dynamics which have a say in who is in the center of the society and who remains in the peripheries. Lefebvre introduced the concept of spatial triad, a structure of three interconnected elements: “spatial practice, representations of space and representational space”. These terms are rephrased by him as “perceived space, conceived space and lived space” (Lefebvre 38-39). Perceived space refers to the physical networks of space that connect places. Conceived space is representational and planned space that is controlled by authority. Lived space includes the myriad ways in which people feel, interpret and experience spaces. His theory of space is further expounded by Doreen Massey who brings in a new dimension to space theory by making it global and gendered. She says that space is structured in such a way that men and women have different levels of access to opportunities, mobility and freedom (Massey 167). This links space to structural patriarchy in which women are denied their rights, leading to power and autonomy being vested in the male populace, which the female has to seek from them.

Meena Kandasamy's autofiction *When I Hit You* is an Indian narrative that extensively uses space theory as proposed by Henri Lefebvre and Doreen Massey. The protagonist of the novel is a young opinionated woman who is married off to a patriarchal college lecturer in

urban Southern India. Her marriage is tainted with violence: living with an oppressive husband who resorts to abuse, surveillance and manipulation so as to subjugate her. The novel approaches the concept of space as a site of power relations, control politics and resistance. The theory of space expounded by Lefebvre and Massey are deeply interwoven in the novel. The application of space theory to *When I Hit You* allows for an exploration of how space is organised in Indian settings. It questions the systemic patterns that shape spatial experiences in patriarchal society.

Research Methodology

The selected methodology for this study is textual analysis using a theoretical framework. This is the most suitable methodology for this study since it aids in comprehensive understanding of selected theory embedded within Indian writing in English. The text chosen for this study is *When I Hit You* by Meena Kandasamy. The theory chosen is space theory as expounded by the theorists Henri Lefebvre and Doreen Massey. This work is specifically chosen due to its rich portrayal of spatial experiences in contemporary Indian society. The nuances of spatial politics and power structures are keenly observed in the text. Textual analysis using a theoretical framework would provide new insights to the understanding of spaces in the present-day Indian narratives.

Gendered Space

Gendered space refers to those spatial structures that reinforce gender stereotypes, centralising one gender, usually the male, and patronising the others at the same time. This reinforcement affects the manner in which people interact with and experience spaces. When the male gender is centered and activities performed by men are considered masculine and therefore powerful, all the remaining genders automatically become othered. In any society, power lies at its center. When those along the margins are denied power, they lose not just their voices but also their accessibility, identity and self-governance. It is to be noted that *When I Hit You* is not the only novel that explores gender relations in space theory. As noted by Dutta, gendered space politics can also be studied in Somanath Batabyal's novel *The Price You Pay* in which a female character, Neha, is oppressed by patriarchy in urban Delhi settings (630). This asserts that the gender at the center of discourse often asserts power and authority by usurping that of others. It forms the undercurrent in any patriarchal society, including the one in *When I Hit You*.

The protagonist grew up in a home where her father acted as a domineering head of the family who decided how the house would run under him. He decided the place where she would study, the courses she would study, the person she would marry, all under the belief that his opinions are never rejected by others in his family, especially the women. As observed by Doreen Massey in *Space, Place and Gender*, private space is deeply tied to gender politics (Massey). The protagonist's father takes decisions for her well into adulthood, thereby curbing her freedom to make decisions for herself. She is then married off to a man who pretends to be the voice of equality and dignity for women, but in reality is a misogynistic abuser. When he does not have his way, he assaults his wife as a mechanism of exerting power over her. Her marital life becomes a space where assault is a daily reminder that she is lesser than him in

every imaginable way. Rape is a tool that her husband uses to vent out his brutality and punish her for what he considers as bad behaviour. The protagonist's bodily autonomy is completely stripped off. She is constantly objectified and treated as a thing that is passed on from her father to her husband. He threatens her saying:

This punishment is not only for you. You will not die. Not immediately anyway. I will call your father to come and collect you. You will stay alive long enough for him to reach here and see you in this state. And he will know then what happens when he brings up a whore. This is a price he has to pay (Kandasamy 184).

The derogatory language he uses to address his wife brings out his deep-seated sexist perceptions of women. It directly links how power structures determine the management of space in society. As Lefebvre states, space changes its meaning depending on who occupies it. The space in which the man imposes tyranny is the same space in which the narrator loses her agency. Since patriarchy gives power in the hands of the male, the non-male entities such as the protagonist are left bereft of it, costing her- her autonomy, freedom and safety. As explained by Massey, this unjust distribution of power affects the space occupied by individuals inhabiting it. Space structured by patriarchy is shaped by gendered power relations. It becomes an entity where space is differently, unjustly and unequally experienced by men and women. According to her, space would then become a "simultaneity of stories so far" (Massey 9). This explains that space is a constantly changing entity, where multiple stories simultaneously co-exist in the same spatial structure, leading to different lived realities for different people.

Domestic Space

Domestic space has always been a sight of inequality in Indian writing in English. Be it gender stereotypes, expectations, adhering to or rejecting societal norms, domestic spaces are more often than not the first witnesses. A home is not just characterised by who lives in it, but also through spaces where control is exercised and resisted. Such is the case with Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You*. Although the majority of narration takes place in urban South India, the action is centered within the four boundaries of the protagonist's marital house. This house becomes the place where the narrator spends most of her time. She does not do it out of her free will. She is forced to remain indoors by her abusive husband who regulates every activity of her life. Domestic activities like grocery shopping, watering the garden, cooking and cleaning are to be informed and permitted by her husband: the person who spends the majority of his day outside the house. Not doing so would result in verbal, physical and sexual abuse meted out to the narrator. As she says,

The longer I stretch the act of the happily married couple, the more I dodge his anger. It is not a test of talent alone. My life depends on it (Kandasamy 20).

It is established early in the novel that the husband lashes out at his wife when things do not go according to his fancy. As explained by Khan and Goyal, commonly found domestic items

such as chopping boards, glasses and plates being thrown at the protagonist while scolding her for trivial issues such as extra salt in dishes explains the violent behaviour of her husband (4473). There is a clear distinction between the husband and the wife: the powerful and the powerless. When Lefebvre's theory of space is applied, it is to be observed that the lived space of the narrator is monitored by her abusive husband. Home becomes a warfield where the narrator battles for her autonomy.

Lefebvre laid the foundations of space theory by stating that power relations shape space. Massey built on those foundations by stating that space is indeed controlled by power, including patriarchal structures that are thrust upon women. Patriarchy is not a concept that is observed beyond the threshold of a household. It is deeply embedded within cultural practices of any society, making its way into the bedroom, drawing room, kitchen and common areas inside a house. It is precisely this patriarchy in domestic spaces that drives the narrative of *When I Hit You*. The husband of the protagonist constantly monitors her, critiques her intellectuality, writing and cooking skills, all within the confines of their home. She is not allowed to talk to neighbours as her husband thinks it would draw unwanted attention to her. She is not even allowed to step out of the house. This severely restricts her movement, making her confined to the boundaries of the house. Her mobility rests in the hands of her husband. Inside the house, she is constantly mocked at, criticised for her opinions, assaulted and raped. This once again asserts his unjust power over her. Home, which is supposed to be a safe haven, turns into an agency of deceit, abuse and assault.

... how the rooms begin to close in on this woman when she is being violated, how the walls chase her into corners, how the house appears to shrink the minute her husband is home, how there is nowhere to run, nowhere to hide, nowhere to evade his presence. (Kandasamy 21)

The above-mentioned lines show how the protagonist feels when she is spatially restricted, making her a second-grade citizen in her own home. This draws into account Doreen Massey's concept of 'power- geometry', as expressed in her text *Space, Place and Gender* (Massey). It is an idea which states that people are positioned unjustly in relation to accessibility, control politics and movement over spaces. While the husband moves freely, the wife needs his permission to step out of the home. While the husband has access to people and places, the wife is cut off from the external world, causing her to remain confined in spaces that her husband chooses.

Digital Space

In a patriarchal setting where authority is unequally distributed among its inhabitants, it becomes a tool that moulds the way people think and behave. In contemporary society, power politics is not simply limited to geographical areas; it has seeped into digital spaces. In an age where human connection is highly dependent on technology, cutting off one's access to it limits one's interactions with society. *When I Hit You* is a text that portrays how controlled digital spaces isolate the powerless from a support system, thereby making the victim rely on the manipulator who is also the breadwinner of the home. The protagonist's husband forces her to

let go of her phone, change her phone number, log out of her social media accounts and blackmails her into giving her passwords to him, all in the name of protecting their marriage. As a freelance writer, it is important for the protagonist to be active on digital platforms. He restricts her online interactions with probable employers which has a great impact on her professional life. As a writer, the protagonist had the liberty to explore her ideas and opinions. In her oppressive marriage, being a freelance writer gave her a slim chance of venturing into digital intellectual spaces. However, with her digital life being managed by her manipulative husband, she has no choice but to wait for his permission to use the internet:

In an act of mercy, he allows me three hours a week: rationed, it comes to a very brief half an hour a day. The internet access itself is possible only in his presence... (Kandasamy 59).

It is to be noted that the protagonist's parents do not find this inappropriate. In fact they are of the opinion that men are naturally jealous and that three hours is a very long time. Her parents are both victims and perpetrators of patriarchy living in a misogynistic society who do not find a problem with a husband abusing the wife under the guise of protection. When Lefebvre's spatial triad is applied, digital space in the novel can be observed both as a conceived space and as a lived space. It can be studied as a conceived space as it is constantly regulated by her husband. Her access to the internet was designed in a manner that left her with little to no opportunity for professional networking. This becomes lived space as she continues to be policed by her husband. Her spatial experience of the virtual world was vastly different from that of her husband. The same space carries two different stories: those of the controller and the controlled.

Space as Resistance

Space occupied by the protagonist in *When I Hit You* is constantly regulated and restricted by her husband. However, she takes back her freedom from time to time in attempts to save herself. In her marital home, she has always cooked food that is according to her husband's wishes. But when she found out that her husband wants a baby, she resorts to homemade birth control through ingredients found in the kitchen. This is a strong attempt at claiming rights to her own bodily functions. Her decision to refrain from having children with her abusive husband is one of the subtle ways in which she resists societal expectations and patriarchy exerted upon her by him. Through homemade birth control made by herself, the protagonist reclaims her body autonomy, thereby asserting her personal space in the domestic sphere.

Another attempt at reclaiming spaces is seen when the narrator attempts to maintain her profile as a writer digitally. Although she has very limited access to the virtual world she tries to explore her identity as a writer and a person. She reclaims her subdued voice through words on a page. This act of defiance of hers makes her at the receiving end of her husband's fury. Writing becomes the medium through which she confronts digital surveillance done by her husband. The protagonist resorts to online writing and publishing as a means of resisting spatial politics. She was first stripped off of her privacy but when she resists it, digital space becomes

a site of reclamation. This lived virtual space becomes a site where power is depicted, resisted and eventually negotiated.

Conclusion

This paper observes Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* through the critical theoretical lens of space theory as propounded by Henri Lefebvre and expanded by Doreen Massey. The study throws light on how space is produced in a patriarchal society where there is an imbalance of power and autonomy among people sharing it. It highlights the different layers of spatial politics, including experiences in gendered, domestic and digital spaces. As expressed by Lefebvre, space is never a neutral entity. The same can clearly be observed in the novel. Spaces in the novel are affected by power dynamics, human relationships and the presence or absence of authority. The novel observes patriarchal structures that are deeply entrenched in spaces, as elaborated by Massey in her discourses. Kandasamy's *When I Hit You* is a text that binds Indian frame of thought to Western theory, calling into question the very dynamics that shape global societies.

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Contours Of Cultural Consciousness: Mapping Lived Plurality in Pradip Kumar Patra's *Panoramic Shillong* and *Summer Implications*

Swasti Bisai & Tanushree Nayak

Abstract

Culture, as a lived experience rather than a static construct, finds lyrical articulation in the poetry of Pradip Kumar Patra. His collections *Panoramic Shillong* and *Summer Implications* embody a layered engagement with geography, memory, seasonal consciousness, and the subtle intersections of regional and national identity. It approaches culture not as a static inheritance or ceremonial abstraction, but as a dynamic, affective presence shaped by landscape, season, memory, and language. In *Panoramic Shillong*, the poet transforms the Northeastern terrain into a resonant cultural archive where hills, mist, and urban quietude embody layered histories and intimate belonging. The geography of Shillong becomes both physical and metaphysical space, allowing regional identity to converse with a broader national consciousness while preserving its distinct tonalities. In contrast, *Summer Implications* turns toward temporality, employing the Indian summer as a metaphorical field through which psychological intensity, social unease, and anticipatory renewal are rendered with lyrical restraint. Heat and stillness assume symbolic weight, reflecting the cyclical rhythms that undergird Indian cultural imagination, where endurance yields to transformation. Across both collections, Patra's English diction remains supple and evocative, mediating local sensibilities within a wider literary framework and enacting a quiet form of linguistic plurality. The interplay of space and season, exterior landscape and interior reflection, produces a poetics grounded in coexistence rather than conflict. Culture thus emerges as a continuum, rooted yet fluid, diverse yet cohesive, where multiplicity does not fragment identity but deepens it. Through reflective imagery and meditative cadence, the poet affirms that Indian cultural consciousness resides in lived plurality, sustained by memory, shaped by environment, and continually renewed through expression. This paper explores how Patra negotiates cultural plurality through landscape, temporality, and everyday life, situating his poetic voice within the broader framework of Indian multiculturalism. By examining spatial imagination, seasonal metaphors, and emotional topography, the study argues that Patra's poetry envisions culture not as an inherited monolith but as a dynamic, dialogic process embedded in lived experience.

Keywords: Cultural Consciousness; Lived Plurality; Regional Identity; Seasonal Symbolism; Indian English Poetry

Introduction

Culture is often spoken of as inheritance, as though it were a sealed heirloom passed reverently from one generation to the next. Yet culture, in its most vital sense, is not a relic but a rhythm: it breathes through landscapes, seasons, and speech; it trembles in memory and finds

articulation in the ordinary textures of daily life. In poetry especially, culture sheds the rigidity of definition and becomes sensuous, experiential, and lived. The lyric moment, poised between inward reflection and outward perception, provides a fertile ground where identity, environment, and emotion converge. It is within this living continuum that the poetry of Pradip Kumar Patra may be meaningfully situated. Patra's work emerges from a consciousness deeply attentive to place and time. His imagination does not treat geography as passive backdrop; rather, it animates terrain into a participant in cultural becoming. The hills, mists, and quiet urban cadences of Shillong, as evoked in *Panoramic Shillong*, are not picturesque embellishments but repositories of layered memory. They carry within them the whispers of indigenous heritage, colonial residues, and contemporary negotiation. Through attentive description and reflective cadence, the poet renders landscape as an archive, an embodied testimony to histories that coexist rather than cancel one another. In doing so, he offers a vision of culture as dialogue: between region and nation, margin and centre, solitude and society.

Shillong, in Patra's poetic rendering, becomes both a specific locality and a metaphorical expanse. Its contours suggest the fluid boundaries of belonging in a multilingual nation. The Northeastern terrain, often peripheral in dominant narratives, assumes lyrical centrality, challenging hierarchies of representation. By choosing to foreground such a landscape, the poet participates in an act of cultural reclamation. The periphery speaks, not in protest alone, but in contemplative affirmation. The hills and lakes hold stories not as static folklore but as evolving presences within modernity. Thus, the poetry gestures toward a plural India, where unity arises not from uniformity but from the coexistence of distinct cultural inflections. If space shapes one axis of Patra's cultural vision, time shapes another. In *Summer Implications*, the season of summer becomes a charged metaphorical field. Indian summer, with its relentless sun and suspended stillness, is not merely climatic; it is experiential, almost existential. It presses upon the body and mind, engendering restlessness, reflection, and anticipation. Patra captures this intensity with meditative restraint, allowing the season to stand as emblem of psychological states and social conditions. Heat becomes emblematic of inner turmoil; dryness gestures toward yearning; the distant promise of monsoon intimates renewal. Through seasonal imagery, the poet situates individual emotion within a larger cyclical rhythm, echoing a cultural philosophy that understands suffering and regeneration as intertwined. Such poetic engagement with season reveals culture as temporal continuity. Just as summer yields inevitably to rain, moments of desolation yield to transformation. The cyclical imagination that underlies much of Indian thought finds subtle articulation here. Patra's verse does not sermonize; rather, it intimates that endurance and change are twin aspects of cultural life. The oppressive afternoon and the expectant dusk alike belong to the same continuum. By attending closely to seasonal nuance, the poet maps the interplay between external climate and internal consciousness, suggesting that culture is shaped as much by environmental rhythms as by inherited narratives.

Language, too, becomes a site of cultural negotiation in Patra's poetry. Writing in English while drawing deeply from Indian contexts, he enacts a quiet hybridity. His diction remains lucid and unadorned, yet suffused with local resonance. This linguistic choice neither abandons indigenous sensibility nor mimics foreign idiom; instead, it bridges worlds. English becomes a medium through which regional experience travels beyond its immediate geography, entering broader conversations without forfeiting authenticity. The very act of

articulation thus embodies plurality: multiple linguistic inheritances converging within a single poetic voice. Memory threads through both collections as a sustaining motif. Personal reflection merges with collective remembrance, creating a tapestry in which the self is never isolated from its milieu. Whether contemplating Shillong's shifting light or the weight of summer's noon, the speaker remains anchored in relational awareness. Culture, in this framework, is not external spectacle but intimate participation. It is felt in the hush of twilight, in the persistence of heat, in the cadence of familiar streets. Such attention to the ordinary reveals the extraordinary resilience of lived plurality.

The present inquiry seeks to examine how these poetic strategies evoke landscape as archive, season as metaphor, language as bridge, memory as continuum, which together articulate a nuanced vision of cultural consciousness. Rather than approaching culture as abstraction, it considers how Patra's verse enacts it through sensorial detail and reflective modulation. By mapping the intersections of geography and temporality, the study foregrounds a poetics rooted in coexistence. In this poetics, difference does not fracture identity; it deepens it. Regional particularity does not resist national belonging; it enriches it. In a time when cultural discourse often oscillates between homogenizing impulses and fragmentary assertions, Patra's poetry offers a quieter alternative. It affirms that plurality is not merely a demographic fact but a lived experience, felt in the hills and the heat, in the rhythm of language and the persistence of memory. Through attentive lyricism, he renders culture as movement rather than monument, as unfolding rather than fixed inheritance. Such a vision invites readers to reconsider their own landscapes and seasons as sites where consciousness takes shape, and where the many voices of belonging find harmonious, if complex, resonance.

This research adopts a qualitative and interpretative methodology grounded in close textual analysis. The primary texts, *Panoramic Shillong* and *Summer Implications*, are examined through attentive reading of imagery, metaphor, tone, diction, and thematic progression in order to trace the representation of culture as lived experience. Rather than relying on quantitative data or external sociological surveys, the study privileges the internal logic of the poems to expose their symbolic structures, spatial imagination, and seasonal metaphors as the principal site of inquiry. The research is informed by cultural and literary theoretical perspectives that view culture as a dynamic, processual phenomenon shaped by environment, memory, and language. Concepts drawn from cultural studies such as lived culture, regional identity, and hybridity, which serve as interpretative frameworks for understanding how the poet negotiates plurality within an Indian context. Comparative analysis between the two collections enables the identification of recurring motifs and structural contrasts, particularly in relation to landscape or space and season or time. Additionally, the methodology incorporates contextual reading, situating the poems within the broader discourse of Indian English poetry and contemporary cultural expression. However, the emphasis remains text-centric, ensuring that interpretation arises organically from the poetic fabric rather than being imposed externally.

The primary aim of this research is to explore how culture is articulated as lived plurality in the selected poetry collections. It seeks to demonstrate that culture in these works is not portrayed as static tradition but as a fluid continuum shaped by geography, temporality, and collective memory. A further objective is to examine the role of landscape and season as symbolic frameworks through which cultural consciousness is expressed. By analyzing the

spatial imagination in *Panoramic Shillong* and the seasonal metaphors in *Summer Implications*, the study aims to reveal how regional specificity contributes to a broader national and human understanding of identity. The research also intends to highlight the significance of linguistic mediation in the poet's work, particularly the use of English to articulate Indian sensibilities. Ultimately, the paper aspires to contribute to the critical appreciation of Pradip Kumar Patra's poetry by situating it within ongoing discussions of multiculturalism, regional representation, and the evolving contours of Indian cultural expression.

Contours Of Cultural Consciousness

A critical engagement with the idea of cultural consciousness in Pradip Kumar Patra's *Panoramic Shillong* and *Summer Implications* demands attention to the subtle interplay between geography, temporality, and interior reflection that animates his verse. These collections do not announce cultural themes in declarative tones; rather, they allow culture to surface through image, atmosphere, and cadence. The poet's achievement lies in his ability to render plurality not as ideological assertion but as lived texture, embedded in the sensory and emotional grain of everyday experience. In *Panoramic Shillong*, the very notion of the "panoramic" suggests expansiveness of vision. Yet Patra's expansiveness is not merely visual; it is ethical and cultural. The landscape of Shillong unfolds as a layered terrain where indigenous memory, colonial residue, and contemporary urban rhythms coexist. Here, the poet has sketched the landscape of Shillong, beautifully, which is embedded with culture too, the lines are given below,

Mountains and greenery
burst into view
bidding adieu to the
mist-smear'd night....
All my learnings
dumped in the shabby
corner of my mind
develop tiny and tinsel wings
and fly over
to kiss the ethereal
existence of Shillong
and to be liberated
by being immersed
in her winking lake water." (Patra 39)

The hills are not static elevations; they are presences that observe and endure. Mist drifts through the poems as both meteorological and metaphorical veil, softening boundaries and hinting at the coexistence of multiple histories. The poet's gaze lingers on lakes, streets, and skies, but these are never isolated images; they resonate with communal belonging and quiet resilience. What distinguishes this collection is its refusal to exoticize the Northeast. Instead of presenting Shillong as picturesque otherness, Patra situates it as intimate space. The poems

cultivate a tone of reflective proximity, as though the speaker walks through familiar paths while remaining acutely aware of their layered meanings. Cultural consciousness here is inseparable from place. The environment shapes identity, but it does so gently, through accumulated impressions rather than dramatic declarations. In this way, the collection reclaims regional specificity as central rather than marginal. Shillong becomes a microcosm of a plural India, where difference is neither erased nor exaggerated, but acknowledged as constitutive.

If *Panoramic Shillong* is rooted in spatial awareness, *Summer Implications* pivots toward temporal intensity. The season of summer functions as more than climatic description; it becomes a critical metaphor for psychological and social states. The sun's relentless presence evokes strain and exposure, while the stillness of afternoon suggests suspended movement. Patra's lines often carry a measured rhythm that mirrors this suspended heat, creating an atmosphere of contemplation edged with unease. Cultural consciousness, in this collection, is shaped by time's pressure rather than landscape's embrace. The implications of summer extend beyond individual emotion. The season becomes emblematic of social restlessness, generational transition, and existential inquiry. Heat intensifies perception; dryness sharpens awareness of absence and longing. Yet embedded within this harshness is an implicit promise of transformation. The anticipation of monsoon hovers at the edges of many poems, even when unspoken.

The post-rain wind on a
 June morning while passing through
 the hopeless ether comes across a
 few birds and settles in the trees;
 the fog rises up from the dump
 ground through the trees after a
 thorough check-out....
 The summer night with her thirst
 quenched by the rain holds me in
 her lap for healthy dreams to dream
 and healthy life to live with no
 allowance of any symptomatic
 snores and sleepwalking. (Patra 21)

Thus, the cycle of seasons enacts a philosophy of endurance and renewal. Culture, as evoked here, is cyclical rather than linear, attuned to rhythms of suffering and regeneration. A critical comparison of the two collections reveals complementary dimensions of plurality. In one, plurality emerges through coexistence of cultural layers within a specific geography; in the other, through the shared temporal experience of climate that binds diverse communities. Space and time, respectively, become the coordinates of cultural mapping. The poet does not resolve tensions between tradition and modernity; instead, he allows them to inhabit the same poetic frame. Urban references mingle with natural imagery; personal reflection merges with communal resonance. Such juxtapositions create a textured field where plurality is experienced rather than theorized.

Language plays a crucial mediating role in this cultural articulation. Patra's use of English is deliberate yet unostentatious. His diction is clear, often understated, allowing imagery to carry emotional weight. This restraint is significant: it mirrors the quiet persistence of cultural identity itself. Rather than embellishing with ornate rhetoric, the poet trusts simplicity to convey complexity. English, in his hands, becomes a bridge that connects regional landscapes to broader readerships without diluting their specificity. The linguistic choice underscores a central paradox of Indian English poetry: the articulation of local rootedness through a global medium. Patra navigates this paradox with subtle assurance. Memory threads through both the collections as connective tissue. In *Panoramic Shillong*, memory is spatial, attached to hills and water, to streets and shifting light. In *Summer Implications*, memory becomes temporal, stirred by recurring seasons and cyclical return. Together, they form a continuum in which personal experience intersects with collective history. Cultural consciousness thus appears not as abstract ideology but as felt continuity through a sense of belonging sustained through recollection and repetition.

Critically, the poet avoids overt polemic. There is no didactic insistence on unity in diversity; instead, unity arises organically from attentive observation. The poems suggest that plurality is not a slogan but a condition of living, where, one negotiated daily through encounters with place, climate, and community. By foregrounding subtlety over spectacle, Patra affirms that culture endures in quiet gestures: in the contemplation of a mist-covered hill, in the endurance of summer's glare, in the patient waiting for rain. Ultimately, these collections map a nuanced terrain of consciousness where identity is neither fragmented nor homogenized. Through spatial attentiveness and temporal depth, Patra's poetry offers a sustained meditation on how individuals inhabit layered worlds. The contours traced across hills and heat are, in essence, contours of awareness marked lines that reveal how lived plurality shapes perception. In attending to these contours, the reader encounters a vision of culture that is supple, resilient, and intimately human.

Conclusion

In drawing this study to a close, it becomes evident that the poetic world fashioned in *Panoramic Shillong* and *Summer Implications* is not merely descriptive of culture but constitutive of it. Pradip Kumar Patra does not stand outside culture as a commentator; he inhabits it as a participant, allowing landscape and season to shape the pulse of his verse. What emerges from these collections is a deeply internalized cultural awareness, where, one that does not proclaim its presence loudly, yet resonates with enduring clarity. The most vital insight to arise from this exploration is that cultural consciousness in Patra's poetry is experiential rather than rhetorical. It is woven into the textures of mist and sunlight, silence and expectancy. In *Panoramic Shillong*, the hills do not simply signify regional identity; they embody continuity, witnessing transitions without surrendering their essential calm. The poet's gaze confers dignity upon locality, affirming that cultural plurality begins with attentive inhabitation of place. By rendering Shillong as intimate and layered, he challenges the notion that cultural centrality belongs only to dominant geographies. The periphery, in his poetic cartography, becomes luminous and self-sufficient. In *Summer Implications*, the axis shifts from space to time, yet the underlying sensibility remains consistent. Summer is not treated as a fleeting

season but as a crucible of perception. Through the languor and intensity of heat, Patra reveals how cultural life is shaped by endurance. The waiting for rain, implicit or articulated, becomes emblematic of hope's persistence within adversity. Thus, temporality in these poems acquires philosophical depth: suffering is neither denied nor dramatized; it is absorbed into a larger rhythm of renewal. Culture here is cyclical and regenerative, capable of sustaining identity through change.

A further critical realization lies in the poet's linguistic mediation. Writing in English while evoking distinctly Indian landscapes and experiences, Patra enacts plurality at the level of form. His language is restrained, almost transparent, allowing imagery and reflection to carry interpretative weight. This stylistic choice underscores the thesis that plurality does not require flamboyance; it thrives in balance. The English idiom becomes a vessel for regional consciousness, demonstrating that cultural authenticity is not compromised by linguistic adaptation. Rather, it is enriched through thoughtful articulation. Importantly, the two collections together create a composite vision. One charts the contours of belonging through geography; the other traces the implications of existence through season. Space and time, exterior and interior, memory and anticipation, these binaries dissolve into a cohesive field of lived plurality. Cultural consciousness, as represented here, is neither fragmented nor homogenized. It is layered, relational, and quietly resilient. Ultimately, Patra's poetry affirms that culture is not an abstract doctrine imposed from above, nor a fossilized tradition preserved unchanged. It is a lived negotiation, shaped by environment, sustained by memory, and renewed through expression. By mapping this negotiation across hills and heat, stillness and expectancy, the poet offers a nuanced vision of plurality that is both intimate and expansive. His verse invites readers to recognize that the true contours of culture lie not in proclamations of unity, but in the subtle harmonies through which diverse experiences coexist.

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~English Language Teaching~

Reimagining Literature Education: Pedagogical Innovation in the Course *Introducing Literature*

Abida Farooqui & Kadeeja Dilfa N

Abstract

Recent developments in humanities pedagogy emphasize learner-centric approaches that integrate analytical skills, creativity, and critical thinking. In this context, the course *Introducing Literature*, introduced in 2019 in the undergraduate English curriculum of the University of Calicut, Kerala, India represents a significant departure from conventional genre-based teaching methods. The course seeks to encourage students to engage with literature not merely as a body of knowledge but as a dynamic process of interpretation, critical inquiry, and creative response. This paper critically examines the conceptualization, pedagogical approach, implementation and reception of the course. Using qualitative research methods including semi-structured interviews and questionnaire responses collected from twenty-eight teachers across government, aided, autonomous, and self-financing colleges in the districts of Malappuram and Kozhikode of Kerala, the study evaluates the reception of this pedagogical innovation within the teaching community. The findings reveal that while the course successfully introduces analytical frameworks and encourages active language production, its implementation is constrained by systemic factors such as limited teacher training, rigid curricular timelines, varying language proficiency levels among students, and inconsistencies in the examination system. Drawing on educational theories such as the revised Benjamin Bloom taxonomy and the constructivist pedagogical framework of Jerome Bruner, the study argues that activity-based and student-centered approaches can significantly enhance literary competence when supported by appropriate institutional structures. The paper concludes that although *Introducing Literature* marks a significant step toward reimagining literature pedagogy in Indian universities, its effectiveness depends on sustained teacher training, curriculum continuity, and systemic reforms in evaluation and assessment.

Keywords: English Language Teaching, Language and Literature Teaching, Activity-Oriented Learning, Introducing Literature, Framing Textbooks, Calicut University Curriculum, Systemic Constraints, Innovative Pedagogy

The teaching of literature in universities has traditionally relied on a content-centered approach emphasizing textual analysis, historical contexts, and thematic interpretation. In many English departments, particularly within South Asian university systems, literary pedagogy has often been organized according to genre-based or era-based divisions, where poetry, drama, fiction, and criticism are taught as separate units. Although this approach enables students to gain

exposure to a wide range of literary texts, it faces a important limitation that it fails to cultivate the analytical and interpretative competencies required for independent literary engagement. The undergraduate English curriculum of the University of Calicut historically followed this conventional structure. Students encountered literary genres sequentially while theoretical concepts such as symbolism, meter, ideology, and narrative voice were taught separately in later semesters. Consequently, many students struggled to integrate theoretical knowledge with textual interpretation.

The introduction of the course *Introducing Literature* in 2019 marked a notable shift in pedagogical philosophy. Designed as a first-semester core course for BA English students of the University of Calicut, it sought to establish a foundational understanding of literary concepts while simultaneously encouraging active engagement with literary texts. Marking a radical departure from the conventional method of teaching literature followed in the university, the course urges the educators to go beyond their practiced limits to approach teaching as a creative and inventive task. It necessitates them to go beyond prescribed texts to arrive at methods and practices tailored for their respective students and thereby reclaim the organic nature of literature learning. Rather than focusing exclusively on prescribed works, the course emphasizes interpretative tools, conceptual frameworks, and creative response.

This pedagogical innovation reflects broader debates within literary education about whether literature should be taught primarily as cultural knowledge or as a set of interpretative and communicative skills. Scholars such as Kenneth J. Kantor have argued that English curricula must move beyond the transmission of literary heritage to foster functional linguistic and analytical competencies. The course *Introducing Literature* can thus be viewed as an attempt to operationalize this pedagogical vision. The present study investigates the effectiveness of this curricular reform. Specifically, it addresses three key research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the pedagogical approach of the course *Introducing Literature*?
2. What challenges arise in implementing its activity-oriented methodology within existing institutional frameworks?
3. To what extent does the course succeed in fostering critical and creative engagement with literature among undergraduate students?

The study analyses how the teaching community responded to the novel approach. Using semi structured interviews from selected teachers and selected literature review, the paper explores the possibilities as well as the problems faced by teachers in transacting the course effectively. The paper also looks at the limitations of the existing system to accommodate more effective teaching methods and resources. It further attempts to formulate alternatives to the challenges and suggests possible changes in the curriculum. Detailed interviews using multiple choice and semi-structured questionnaires were used to collect the required data. A number of teachers from government colleges, autonomous colleges, aided colleges, and self-financing colleges of two districts, namely Malappuram and Kozhikode, were interviewed to identify the experiences and the pattern formed in these experiences, and to understand the effectiveness of the approach adopted by the course.

The innovative approach adopted by the course was focused on enabling the students to appreciate the nuances of literature and go beyond the thematic appreciation of literary works, focusing on the formal and the ideological aspects as well. The course, being an introductory one, also aimed to provide a holistic understanding of literature that was expected to serve as a foundation to approach other genre-specific courses in the succeeding semesters. This approach is student-centric, emphasizing on a practical application of the concepts introduced, including more exercises and food for thought. A radical reform was introduced in the evaluation system too, as students were given unseen passages and asked to analyze them on the basis of the concepts they have been taught. The model question paper provided in the prescribed textbook included questions that demanded creative writing skills (for example, a 5-marks question in the 80-marks paper was as follows: “Write a poem of not more than 8 lines on the season of Summer. Use at least two similes/ metaphors/ symbols” (Rahman and S 155).

In the foreword of the text, the authors mentioned that they had attempted to reclaim the organic nature of learning (Rahman and S 5). So, the basic intent of the course and thus, the textbook written as an aid in teaching the course, were to reclaim the enjoyment in learning language and literature and to develop interest, engagement, and creativity in students. The course was designed to integrate the different aspects of language and literature, including grammar, linguistics, poetry appreciation, fiction, criticism, and theory. It tried to provide a holistic idea for the students in the process of learning language and literature, helping them to form their own analytical and critical skills, which was expected to enable them to criticize the literary pieces discussed on their own.

The approach of the course could be identified as targeting the “active language production” and “personal response (of the learners) to literature” (Kenneth J Kantor 177). When the course demands composition from the students, it expects the students to respond to the new ideas introduced, assimilating their existing knowledge. It attempted to weave together their existing knowledge and the new concepts introduced.

Conventionally, the BA English Language and Literature programme was designed based on a genre-wise division. The prescribed texts were arranged in separate courses on the basis of literary periods, socio-cultural backgrounds, and/or regional/national origins focusing on their thematic analyses. Other topics like Literary theory, criticism, technical aspects of literature, like metre, figures of speech were taught separately. Thus, towards the end of the programme, many students fail to achieve the ability to integrate this knowledge as they hardly apply the skills and practices learnt in one course to understand the literary works (poems, short stories or excerpts of novels, memoirs etc.) learnt in another course. These courses were the “...one(s) that emphasized knowledge about language and literature rather than knowing how to perform and respond in language (Kantor 175).” Here, after three years of lessons on literature, the students failed to identify the connect between different topics which enables them to practice the necessary skills of language and criticism. Hence the introduction of an initial course that could serve as a pathway to all the other courses on literature in the succeeding semesters was an innovative idea and the student-centric methodology that the course demanded had immense relevance.

Literature Review

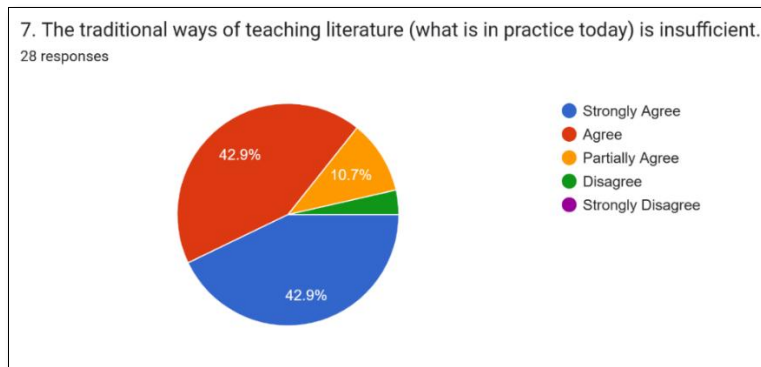
Recent scholarship in humanities education has increasingly emphasized student-centric learning, experiential pedagogy, and interdisciplinary engagement. These approaches challenge traditional lecture-based teaching models and advocate for learning environments that encourage active participation and critical inquiry. Educational theorists have long argued that effective learning requires moving beyond rote memorization toward higher-order cognitive skills. The revised taxonomy developed by David R. Krathwohl reinterprets the earlier framework of Benjamin Bloom by organizing learning objectives along a hierarchy that progresses from remembering and understanding to analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Within this framework, creativity and critical evaluation represent the highest levels of cognitive engagement.

In the context of literature teaching, scholars such as Kenneth J. Kantor have criticized traditional curricula that prioritize knowledge about literature rather than the ability to interpret and respond to literary texts. Kantor argues that English education should be oriented toward developing communicative and analytical competencies rather than merely transmitting canonical knowledge. Constructivist theories of learning further support this perspective. The cognitive psychologist Jerome Bruner proposed the concept of the spiral curriculum, according to which complex ideas can be introduced at an early stage in simplified forms and revisited later with increasing complexity. This model encourages progressive scaffolding and continuous engagement with key concepts. Contemporary pedagogical research also highlights the importance of integrating language learning with literary analysis, particularly in contexts where English functions as a second language. Activity-based learning strategies—such as creative writing, group discussions, and textual experimentation—have been shown to enhance both linguistic competence and interpretative skills. Within this theoretical landscape, the course *Introducing Literature* represents an attempt to integrate these pedagogical principles into undergraduate literary education. However, the effectiveness of such innovations depends not only on curricular design but also on institutional support, teacher training, and assessment practices.

Analysis

The analysis of survey responses and interview data reveals several key dimensions in the reception and implementation of the course. Almost all (except one out of 28) respondents opined that the conventional methods were insufficient to generate the competency to appreciate and critically respond to literature (See Figure.1).

Fig 1 - Responses on the insufficiency of conventional methods of learning Literature

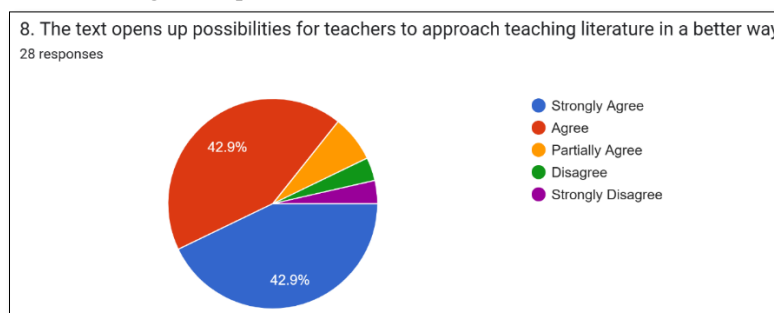


Introducing Literature attempts to bridge this discussed gap in learning language and literature, between theory and practice. It is meant to connect these different topics learned by the students as a part of the curriculum, before they step into the maze of literature.

Appealing to approach literature curriculum and its structure different from the curriculum design of science subjects, Kantor criticizes the “proposed view of English as a body of knowledge, drawn from the literary heritage, to be transmitted to students, rather than as a set of functional life adjustment skills (174)”. As *Introducing Literature* introduces major concepts and foundations of literature and trains the learners to learn and critique literature on their own in the first semester itself, provoking them to think instead of memorizing, demanding active language production and personal responses to literature, it sets a clear foundation for them to master the rest of the topics discussed in subsequent semesters. Most of the respondents thought the course gave them the space to approach teaching literature in a better and more effective way (See Figure.2). However, the course was critiqued by the educators as time consuming and not fit for the strict timeline of the university, which many respondents believed to be a one of the limitations of this approach.

Revised Bloom’s taxonomy and Krathwohl’s Affective Domain Taxonomy could be used to explicate the difference between the conventional method and the method introduced by the course under study. In conventional methods, the thrust of the objectives of the courses was on ‘lower order thinking’ and the cognitive domain of learning like ‘remembering’, ‘understanding’ and seldom on ‘applying’ (Krathwohl 215). *Introducing Literature* attempts to attain the ‘higher order thinking’ in students and its objective targets the ‘affective domain’ of knowledge, focusing on ‘analyzing’, ‘evaluating’ and eventually ‘creating’, which is on the highest rung in the taxonomy.

Fig 2 - Respondents on the Effectiveness of the Course

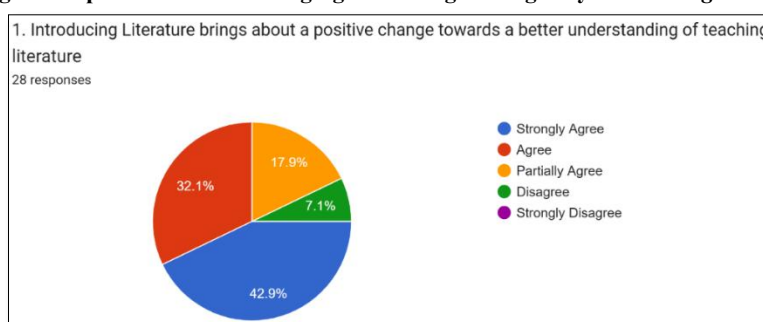


The first module of *Introducing Literature*, language and its literary nuances, touches upon two major concepts, the syntax and the poetic where the course introduces the poetic devices like *symbols, metaphors, meter, and other tropes*. The second module, polyphony in texts, introduces concepts of *point of view, polyphony, allusion and intertextuality*. The third module, Literature and Ideology, discusses the ideas of *power, hegemony, subjectivity, irony, interpellation and discourse*. The fourth module, Perspectives of the Subaltern, introduces the ideas of the *marginalization, gender, stereotype, class, subaltern, and sexuality*. Kenneth J. Kantor, in his essay “The English Curriculum and the Structure of the Disciplines” talks about how a content centered approach will not be the right approach for English curriculum and the teaching of English as a discipline (174). He elaborates on the problems and possibilities of a knowledge- based English curriculum. Building on similar lines, this paper argues that an activity based, student centered, interactive learning is essential in the English teaching, especially in ‘English as Second Language’ (ESL) teaching, and considers the introduction and implementation of *Introducing Literature* as a relevant case study on that front.

Kantor looks at English as a set of functional life adjustment skills rather than as a pool of knowledge. This is a very important debate at present as globally, many universities are discontinuing the English and other humanities programmes, they are currently offering, in favour of more niche areas like Project Management, Digital marketing and other technology-oriented fields. Thus, it is very important to reengineer humanities teaching and learning and significant research is crucial in this area. This study views *Introducing Literature* as an attempt to reclaim this objective of English learning preferred by eminent scholars like Kantor.

Among the 28 respondents, 42 percentage strongly agreed to the question whether the course brought in a positive change, 32 percent of the teachers agreed and only a 7 percent disagreed with the same (See Fig. 3).

Fig 3 - Respondents Acknowledging the Change Brought by *Introducing Literature*



Most of the respondents believed that the course is a right step in a right direction (See Figure .3). However, they also referred to a requirement of more support for teachers in the form of regular workshops during fixed intervals or detailed handbooks that would have enabled them to transact the course in a more effective manner (See Figure. 4). It is evident from many of the responses that, teachers who lack significant foundation in literature, literary criticism and theory, a good reading, and a quality teacher education found the text extremely challenging. One respondent said: “Teachers have a huge role in the effectiveness of the course as they have to tailor examples and activities for the individual students. Their interest, commitment and competency have a huge impact on how the text is transacted in the classroom.”

Another important factor to note is that in Kerala, collegiate education does not demand college teachers to have any formal teacher education or teaching practice unlike the school teachers who complete a Bachelor’s in Education (B.Ed.) to qualify as teachers. Teachers who lacked the competence and training to switch over to activity-based learning, given that they were used to content-based learning, found the course highly demanding since the onus was on them to design activities tailored for their students.

Some of the respondents opined that a continuous training programme focusing on technology integrated teaching and introducing technological tools to the teachers would have yielded better results. They shared the experiences where technology integrated learning had enabled an easy transaction of the course and its contents and further elaborated that choosing the right resources helped them in making classes interactive and effective.

A respondent noted in the detailed interview conducted that many tools she employed and taught in teaching poetics, in the first module had helped her students in the second semester while learning the poetry paper, *Appreciating Poetry*. Another response was that during the third year of the introduction of the course, teachers had significantly improved and had devised their own strategies in transacting the course module. These experiences reinforce that the effectiveness of the course is dependent on the transaction by the teacher. This refers to the fact that the teaching of this course in the desired approach takes practice, and teachers should have been given enough workshops and courses, with hands-on practice, before the introduction of the course (See Figure.4).

Fig 4 - Responses on the Necessity of Teacher Training

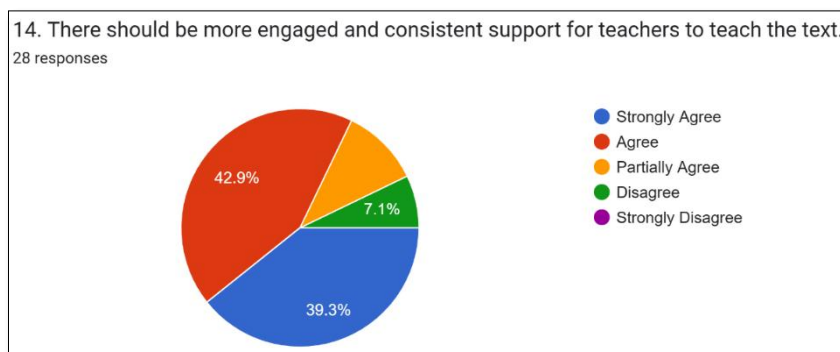
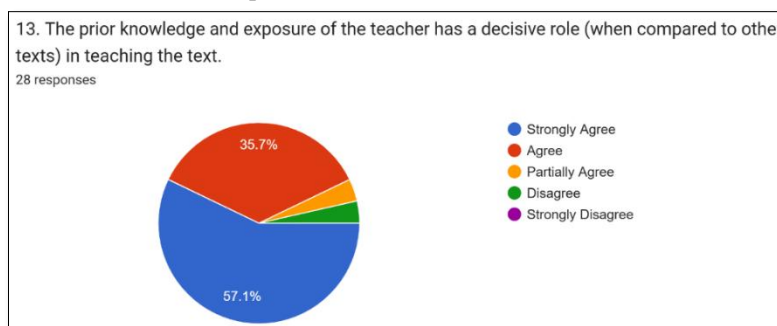


Fig 5 Responses on the Relationship between Effectiveness of the course and Teachers’ Competency



According to the responses, different modules of the course were taught simultaneously by different teachers. This was a major hindrance to achieving the objective of the course since the course had been designed in such a way that the modules had to be taught one by one.

Collaboration among the teachers who taught different modules of the course did not happen in some colleges due to time constraints.

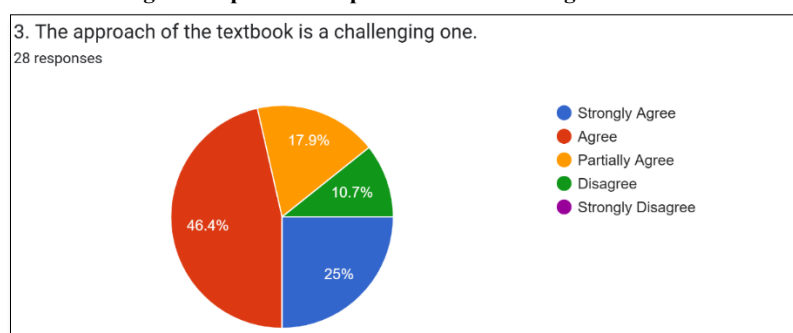
Regarding the question paper of the course that was a radical departure from the conventional method, most of the respondents welcomed the change. However, a point that all of them expressed their concern about was that though the question paper pattern was in consonance with the stated objectives of the course, in due course, the questions began to become more and more textual, deviating from the purpose. This was more of a systemic problem since question papers are designed by question paper setters who do not belong to the university and hence are not aware of the uniqueness and intentions of the course.

The respondents unanimously stated that the course equipped the learners with the competence to read literary texts and cultural phenomena critically at the initial stage of their under graduation, which otherwise they acquired only at their postgraduation. Complex concepts like ideology were imbibed by the learners and they responded positively. They also agreed that the difficulty for the learner lies in their being unable to express their understanding in a coherent language, as students hailing from rural background did not have proper command of the language. Many respondents had voiced their concerns that the competencies of their students were not up to the mark, that the whole course became tedious for the educators to transact and make effective in the classroom.

Challenges Posed by the text

The introduction of the course was fraught with many challenges due to multifarious reasons. Most of the respondents opined that the text was challenging on many levels, both for the teachers and for the students (See Figure. 6).

Fig 6 - Respondents' opinion on the challenges of the text



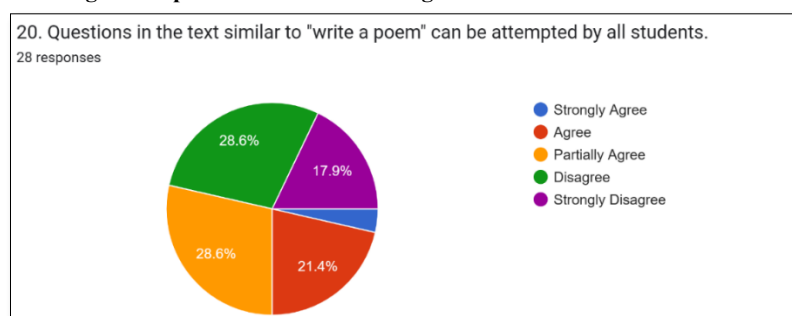
As the course was evidently very demanding for the teacher and a good amount of advance preparation was needed from their side to transact it decently, teachers were forced to break their comfort zones.

A major challenge noted by most of them was regarding the lack of an entry level competency in the students. The first semester students were not equipped enough to compose and personally respond to the literature discussed. And the added challenge of a heterogenous mix of students, where a class consisted of a few highly competent students to students who were unable to write a sentence properly in English made the teacher's task humongous and time consuming. The course was meant as a hands-on or experiential learning of literature

where the faculty facilitate the students to learn literature, analyze and criticize it on their own. In some colleges, the textbook introduced as an aid in doing so was seen as the ultimate syllabus and was taught word by word, focusing on the memorizing and understanding than analysing, evaluating, and composing. But this was an activity-oriented textbook where the classroom activities that enabled the students to practice the application of the ideas learnt was more important.

Most of the respondents opined questions that demanded creativity were not appropriate at this stage in the current system (See Figure 7).

Fig 7 - Respondents on the Challenges of Evaluation and Assessment



So, basically, the introduction of a course which demanded a new approach did not fully achieve the course outcome as it was introduced into a very rigid and conventional system.

Conclusion

The introduction of *Introducing Literature* into the undergraduate curriculum of the University of Calicut marks a significant pedagogical experiment aimed at transforming literature education from a content-based model to a skills-oriented and learner-centered approach. It represents a significant step toward rethinking literature pedagogy in Indian universities. By emphasizing critical thinking, creativity, and conceptual understanding, the course aligns with contemporary educational theories advocating higher-order cognitive engagement.

However, the success of such curricular innovations depends on broader institutional support. Teacher training programs, technological resources, and collaborative curriculum planning are essential for effectively implementing activity-based learning approaches.

The study also highlights the importance of aligning evaluation methods with pedagogical objectives. Although the course initially introduced creative and analytical examination questions, respondents observed that over time the question papers reverted to conventional textual questions. This inconsistency reflects systemic limitations in the assessment process.

The study demonstrates that the course has the potential to foster critical thinking, creativity, and interpretative competence among undergraduate students. By introducing theoretical concepts and analytical tools at an early stage, it provides a strong foundation for subsequent literary studies. However, the effectiveness of the course is constrained by several challenges, including limited teacher training, uneven language proficiency among students, and systemic issues related to curriculum implementation and assessment practices.

Future curriculum reforms should therefore focus on providing sustained pedagogical training for teachers, integrating technology-enhanced learning strategies, and ensuring that evaluation methods remain consistent with the course's innovative objectives.

Ultimately, meaningful innovation in literature teaching requires not only new curricular designs but also institutional structures capable of supporting pedagogical experimentation and continuous improvement. As Jerome Bruner, the leader of cognitive revolution and the founder of Centre for Cognitive Studies at Harvard University states, "Any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development." Bruner's Spiral Curriculum technique could be used in introduction of complex ideas and methods, where he advocates a continuous revisiting of concepts introduced in a simplified to more advanced levels (Stapleton and Stefaniak). The technique is also called as vertical integration or progressive scaffolding and introduces the concepts in foundational level in the first semester.

Thus, as many responses suggested, the course needs upgrading, using feedback, and requires follow ups by series of courses with similar approach, helping the students sustain this way of learning. A continuous revisiting of concepts through a gradual increase in the complexity levels is recommended. Implementing a gradual change, following up with similar courses, using a pilot to test the effectiveness and prioritizing formative assessments over summative assessments are other recommendations of the study for effective implementation of courses that mark significant change from the existing ones.

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Appendix

Questionnaire: To Teachers

Name:

Designation:

Institution:

Experience (in years):

1. Do you identify a change in the text *Introducing Literature* from the previous ones prescribed for the same level? If yes, do you identify it as a drastic change or a step in a gradual, productive change?
2. Did you find the textbook challenging? If yes, how? Was this a demanding text in the classroom (in terms of preparation, pedagogy and evaluation)?
3. Do you have any other suggestions for improving the effectiveness of your teaching experience? (eg. Workshop, detailed handbook etc.)?
4. Do you think all concepts discussed in the book could effectively be communicated to the students?
5. Do you think the prior exposure and training of each individual teacher and learner have any bearing on the effectiveness of teaching the textbook ?
6. How did the timetable constraints effect the teaching? Which part of the text was assigned to you? Did you collaborate with other teachers to approach the text?
7. How did the change in the approach of the textbook reflect in the examination results? What were the challenges regarding question paper setting?
8. How different the text was in holding the curiosity and interest of the students than the previous texts?
9. Do you think the text lives up to its expectations of reclaiming the organic nature of learning and focusing the process of meaning making?
10. Which module in the text was most challenging for you? Why?
11. How far could you attempt the assignments suggested in the textbook? Mention a few activities you attempted in the classroom.
12. Were the first semester students equipped to look at these topics as nuanced as you think they should?
13. How do you think the activity-oriented question paper pose challenges for the students?
14. What are the other challenges you met with while engaging the class with the text book?
15. What is your take on the content available in the market and online as aids in learning the text? Do you think your students rely on them?

Soft Skills and Conflict Resolution: A Humanistic Framework for Transformative Engagement

Cassiana Walter

Abstract

In contemporary workplaces and educational environments, soft skills such as communication, empathy, and emotional intelligence play a crucial role in resolving conflicts effectively. This study advances a humanistic framework that understands conflict as a dynamic, relational process rather than a mechanical task. By integrating dialogic interaction, narrative sense-making, and emotional intelligence, the research examines how individuals transform conflict into constructive engagement. A pre–post intervention involving role-play, problem-solving exercises, and reflective journaling was conducted over three months. Quantitative analysis using the Pearson correlation coefficient and paired-samples t-test shows a strong positive relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution ability. Findings indicate that authentic communication, empathy, and awareness significantly enhance outcomes and support sustainable resolution.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence; Conflict Resolution; Soft Skills; Humanistic Approach; Dialogic Interaction; Narrative Sense-Making

1. Introduction

In modern organizational and educational contexts, individuals collaborate across diverse perspectives and expectations, making interpersonal conflict inevitable. Rather than treating conflict solely as a disruption, contemporary perspectives position it as an opportunity for learning, innovation, and relational growth. The effectiveness of conflict resolution depends on soft skills—particularly emotional intelligence, communication, and empathy—which shape how individuals interpret, express, and regulate emotions. This study reframes conflict from a problem to be solved to a human experience to be understood, emphasizing meaning-making, dialogue, and emotional engagement.

2. Literature Review

Prior research highlights the centrality of soft skills in professional effectiveness and team performance. Emotional intelligence has been associated with improved stress management, interpersonal sensitivity, and decision-making in high-pressure situations. Dialogic perspectives emphasize that understanding emerges through genuine interaction and reciprocal recognition, while narrative perspectives explain how individuals construct meaning through stories that shape conflict perception.

Theoretical frameworks for conflict resolution provide important benchmarks for understanding how individuals approach disagreements. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument identifies five conflict-handling styles: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. The Dual Concern Model similarly conceptualizes conflict resolution along dimensions of concern for self and concern for others.

Recent scholarship notes that rapid technological and digital shifts have introduced conceptual ambiguity into the status of soft skills, blurring the line between technical and interpersonal competencies. In this context, a humanistic framework offers a stable way to define and develop these skills, grounding them in fundamental human capacities for empathy, dialogue, and meaning-making.

3. Research Gap

Despite extensive work on conflict resolution, many approaches emphasize structured procedures and quick solutions, often underrepresenting the emotional and relational dimensions of conflict. There remains a need for models that foreground lived experience, dialogue, and the role of underlying needs in shaping behaviour. This study addresses that gap through an experiential design that centres emotional awareness, authenticity, and collaborative meaning-making.

4. Objectives and Hypotheses

The study aims to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence and conflict resolution ability, and to evaluate the impact of experiential interventions on both constructs. The primary hypothesis is that increases in emotional intelligence will be positively associated with improvements in conflict resolution ability over time.

5. Methodology

5.1 Instruments

A pre-test and post-test design was employed. Emotional intelligence was measured using an eight-item Likert-scale instrument (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree), covering emotional awareness, regulation, empathy, and communication. Total scores ranged from 8 to 40. Conflict resolution ability was assessed using a five-item situational judgment test based on realistic scenarios.

5.2 Procedure

Following pre-testing, participants engaged weekly in structured role-plays, case-based discussions, and guided journaling prompts for three months. Facilitation emphasized respect, authenticity, and identification of underlying needs.

6. Data Analysis and Statistics

The study's sample was expanded to $n = 15$ participants to improve statistical power and generalizability.

Descriptive statistics indicated an increase in Emotional Intelligence (EI) from $M = 20.13$ ($SD = 1.46$) to $M = 32.27$ ($SD = 1.83$), and in Conflict Resolution Ability (CRA) from $M = 11.20$ ($SD = 1.61$) to $M = 21.33$ ($SD = 1.76$). The paired-samples t-test revealed that these increases were statistically significant for both EI ($t = 25.14$, $p < .001$) and CRA ($t = 22.18$, $p < .001$).

The Pearson correlation coefficient increased from $r = 0.22$ at pre-test to $r = 0.71$ at post-test, indicating a strong positive relationship after the intervention.

Expanded Participant Scores

Student	Pre-Intervention EI	Post-Intervention EI	Pre-Intervention CRA	Post-Intervention CRA
S 1	20	32	10	20
S 2	18	30	12	22
S 3	22	34	11	23
S 4	19	31	09	19
S 5	21	35	13	24
S 6	19	31	10	20
S 7	20	32	12	21
S 8	22	34	11	22
S 9	18	30	10	20
S 10	21	33	12	23
S 11	20	32	11	21
S 12	19	31	13	22
S 13	22	34	12	24
S 14	21	33	11	21
S 15	22	35	13	25

Figure 1. Relationship between EI and CRA

7. Results

The results demonstrate consistent improvement in both emotional intelligence and conflict resolution ability across the intervention period. Participants showed enhanced emotional awareness, improved regulation, and more effective communication in conflict scenarios. The strengthened correlation at post-test supports the hypothesis that gains in emotional intelligence are associated with better conflict resolution outcomes.

8. Discussion

Findings support a humanistic perspective in which conflict resolution is viewed as a relational and transformative process. By centering empathy, authenticity, and recognition of underlying needs, participants moved beyond surface-level disagreements toward collaborative solutions. The intervention appeared to develop specific soft skills that are key indicators of effective conflict handling.

9. Limitations and Future Behavioural Studies

While the study demonstrates significant positive outcomes, there are several limitations. First, while the sample size was expanded to $n = 15$ to improve statistical robustness, future studies should include larger, multi-site populations to improve the generalizability of the findings. Second, the reliance on self-report measures and role-play simulations may not fully predict real-world behaviour. To bridge this gap, future studies should focus on:

- **Observational Behavioural Studies:** Tracking participants during actual interpersonal conflicts in natural, high-stress environments to measure true behavioral adaptation.
- **Longitudinal Field Tracking:** Evaluating whether the competencies gained from experiential learning persist 6 to 12 months after the conclusion of the intervention.
- **Multimodal Assessment Integration:** Using supervisor or peer evaluations in conjunction with self-reports to reduce subjective bias.

10. Implications

The results suggest that integrating emotional intelligence training and experiential learning into curricula and professional development can enhance conflict resolution capacity. Organizations and institutions may benefit from embedding structured dialogue, reflective practices, and needs-based analysis into their conflict management strategies. The humanistic framework's emphasis on empathy, authenticity, and collaborative meaning-making offers a stable foundation for developing soft skills.

11. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that soft skills, particularly emotional intelligence, play a central role in transforming conflict into constructive engagement. A humanistic framework that emphasizes awareness, empathy, and authentic communication yields meaningful and lasting resolution. Sustainable outcomes arise not from rigid procedures but from the quality of human interaction and shared meaning.

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Efficacy of ESP Curriculum in Honing Employability Skills of Engineering Graduates at VFSTR - A Study

Nagendra Rao Howji, Sharada Allamneni & Vijaya Kumar Chavan

Abstract

This paper titled “*Efficacy of ESP Curriculum in Honing Employability of Engineering Graduates at VFSTR - A Study*” critically examines the relevance and impact of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum in enhancing the employment potential of engineering graduates at Vignan’s Foundation for Science, Technology & Research (VFSTR). Within the framework outlined by the National Board of Accreditation, especially PO-10, that stresses upon communication skills and workplace interaction, the paper argues how successive curricular revisions from R-9 →R-13→R-16 →R-19 →R-22 → R-25, indicate a progressive alignment with ESP Principles that is guided by a consistent and context-sensitive needs analysis. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study draws on quantitative data collected from a survey of 50 pre-final and 50 final year students of engineering from VFSTR and 38 alumni along with a qualitative analysis of curricula, document analysis and semi-structured interviews of faculty teaching English at VFSTR. The findings reveal how informed by employer expectations and student feedback, there has been a gradual shift in the curriculum design, in moving towards ESP, and how this shift has been yielding significantly improved outcomes in terms of students’ communication competencies and overall professionalism as evidenced in their confidence demonstrated during interviews, team skills and workplace interactions later in life. The paper contends that the ESP curriculum refined through successive syllabus design and outcome-driven initiatives has helped to effectively address the gap between industry and academia. It is illustrative of how a proper needs-analysis carried out prior to curriculum development can lead to a more relevant and employability-oriented language curriculum in engineering education.

Key Words: ESP, Efficacy, NBA, AICTE Model Curriculum, Curriculum Design, Workplace

1. Introduction

Engineering education in India is undergoing a decisive shift from content-coverage to capability-building, with employability as a central yardstick of quality. National policy and regulatory frameworks explicitly foreground transversal skills communication, teamwork, problem solving, ethics, and digital fluency alongside strong domain knowledge. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 urges higher education to develop higher-order cognitive capacities as well as social and emotional competencies that enable graduates to thrive in rapidly changing workplaces. (Education Ministry)

In parallel, sectoral reports tracking hiring and skills demand show that employers now prize a blended profile: technical proficiency complemented by communication, collaboration,

adaptability, and AI/data literacy. The India Skills Report 2025 highlights uneven but rising employability across Indian regions and underscores persistent gaps in business communication, problem-solving, and workplace readiness among fresh graduates. These findings reinforce the need for curricular designs that embed authentic, practice-oriented skill development within disciplinary programs. (wheebox.com)

Globally, the World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs 2023 identifies analytical thinking, creative thinking, communication, and technological literacy (including AI) as top skills on the rise through 2027. Indian employer sentiment maps closely to these trends, with recent surveys signalling growing career advantages for professionals who can combine core engineering with AI-adjacent and communication competencies. Together, these signals point to a durable realignment of graduate attributes that higher education must proactively address. (World Economic Forum, The Economic Times)

Within India's regulatory ecosystem, both AICTE's Model Curriculum **and** NBA's outcome-based accreditation framework institutionalize this shift. AICTE explicitly positions communication and professional skills as essential to enhancing employability and nurturing entrepreneurship. NBA's Programme Outcomes require graduates to communicate effectively on complex engineering activities, function on multidisciplinary teams, and demonstrate professional ethics—outcomes that are best cultivated through purposeful, context-rich language and communication training. (AICTE, AICTE India, submissions.ijskit.org)

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) provides a robust pedagogical pathway to deliver these outcomes. Unlike general English courses, ESP aligns language learning with learners' disciplinary needs and authentic communicative tasks—technical reporting, design reviews, safety briefings, documentation, client interactions, and presentations. Recent studies in technical and vocational contexts show that ESP, when grounded in authentic tasks and digital tools, improves learner motivation, transfer to workplace genres, and measurable performance in interviews, presentations and capabilities tightly coupled to employability. (Research Gate, E-Journal Gunung Jati)

At Vignan's Foundation for Science, Technology & Research (VFSTR), program documents already reflect this national emphasis. For example, the R-22 curriculum includes modules dedicated to personality development, presentations, group discussions, resume building, and interview skills - an explicit commitment to workplace readiness integrated within engineering programs. However, the key question for institutions is not whether these components exist on paper, but how effectively they translate into demonstrable gains in graduate employability. Systematic, context-specific evaluation is therefore essential. (Vignan University)

This chapter addresses that evaluative gap by investigating the efficacy of VFSTR's ESP curriculum in honing employability skills among engineering undergraduates. We conceptualize "efficacy" along three interlocking dimensions:

1. Skill Acquisition: Improvements in targeted ESP outcomes such as technical writing, oral presentations, and group communication;
2. Transfer and performance: Evidence of these skills in authentic or simulated hiring situations (résumés, interviews, group discussions, employer rubrics); and

3. **Employer Alignment:** Correspondence between the taught ESP competencies and current employer expectations as reflected in national and global skills reports and accreditation outcomes. Anchoring the study in NEP 2020, AICTE Model Curriculum, and NBA Programme Outcomes ensures policy relevance and comparability across Indian engineering programs. (Education Ministry, AICTE, AICTE India, submissions.ijskit.org)

Methodologically, the study adopts a mixed-methods approach: quantitative measures (pre/post-performance on ESP tasks, rubric-based assessments aligned to PO-level descriptors) complemented by qualitative evidence (student reflections, faculty observations, and employer/placement feedback). Triangulating these data allows us to move beyond self-report and course-completion proxies to a more rigorous account of capability gains and workplace relevance an approach consistent with outcome-based education and international trends in skills analytics. (submissions.ijskit.org, World Economic Forum) By situating VFSTR's ESP interventions within the broader skills landscape of 2023 - 2025, this chapter contributes three practical payoffs:

1. an evidence-backed map of which ESP components most strongly predict hiring performance;
2. a set of design principles for aligning ESP with rapidly evolving employer needs (including AI-mediated communication and data-rich documentation); and
3. a replicable evaluation framework that other engineering institutions can adapt to their contexts. In a labour market where fresher hiring sentiment fluctuates and competition intensifies, such institution-level evidence is indispensable for continuous improvement and stakeholder confidence. (The Economic Times)

Taken together, the policy signals, employer expectations, and pedagogical research converge on a clear imperative: ESP is no longer an auxiliary add-on but a strategic lever for employability in engineering education. Evaluating its real-world efficacy at VFSTR can inform course design, assessment practices, and placement strategies ultimately helping graduates demonstrate the communicative agility and professional polish that employers consistently demand. (Education Ministry, wheebox.com, World Economic Forum)

The employability of engineering graduates has been a recurrent concern in Indian higher education, with industry consistently highlighting the gap between technical knowledge and workplace readiness (FICCI & Ernst and Young, 2019). In this context, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has emerged as a strategic curricular intervention for bridging the academic–industry divide. Unlike General English, ESP focuses on discipline-specific, professional communication skills that directly support students' participation in technical, managerial, and workplace settings (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Anthony, 2018).

At the policy level, this emphasis on employability and professional skills is strongly reinforced by national frameworks. The AICTE Model Curriculum prescribes courses on communication skills, personality development, and professional ethics as integral to engineering programs, recognizing that engineers must function in multidisciplinary teams and global work environments (AICTE, 2018). Similarly, the National Board of Accreditation

(NBA) in India, through its Programme Outcomes (POs), particularly PO-10 (Communication), mandates that graduates demonstrate competence in writing, presenting, and engaging with diverse stakeholders in workplace contexts (NBA, 2020). Such policy directives create a clear framework within which institutions must innovate their curriculum.

In line with these directives, Vignan's Foundation for Science, Technology & Research (VFSTR) has undertaken successive curricular revisions across R-9, R-13, R-16, R-19, R-22, and now R-25, to strengthen the ESP orientation of its language curriculum. Each revision has incrementally addressed gaps identified through needs analysis a cornerstone of ESP pedagogy (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Basturkmen, 2010) by aligning course design with both employer expectations and student feedback. For example, later revisions incorporated modules on group discussions, mock interviews, workplace documentation, and presentation skills, reflecting a gradual yet systematic shift towards employability-focused outcomes.

This study situates VFSTR's experience within broader global and national skills discourse. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report (2023) identifies communication, problem-solving, and technological literacy as top future skills, while the India Skills Report 2025 emphasizes employability gaps in areas such as English communication, adaptability, and interpersonal skills. Together, these reinforce the urgency of institutional frameworks like VFSTR's ESP curriculum in producing "work-ready" engineers capable of navigating Industry 4.0 workplaces. The research reported in this chapter employs a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the efficacy of VFSTR's ESP curriculum:

- a) Quantitative evidence through surveys of 100 current students and 38 alumni, and
- b) Qualitative insights from document analysis and semi-structured interviews with English faculty. Findings indicate that ESP-focused revisions have produced tangible gains in communication competencies, interview performance, teamwork, and workplace professionalism. Moreover, alumni reflections underscore that ESP training provided during their undergraduate studies continues to inform their professional success, demonstrating the longitudinal impact of curriculum design choices.

By examining VFSTR's trajectory, this study contributes to both theory and practice:

- (i) it reinforces the role of needs analysis in ESP as essential for employability-driven curriculum design;
- (ii) it offers evidence that structured ESP interventions aligned to NBA and AICTE standards can measurably improve student outcomes; and
- (iii) it highlights a replicable institutional model that can be adapted by other engineering institutions in India and beyond. In doing so, the chapter situates VFSTR's ESP experience as a case study of how curriculum reforms can close the persistent industry - academia gap in engineering education.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research strategies to evaluate the efficacy of the ESP curriculum in honing employability skills of engineering graduates at VFSTR. A mixed-method design was particularly appropriate, as it allowed for the triangulation of perspectives from students, alumni, and faculty, as well as the interpretation of curricular documents. Such methodological blending is widely recommended in applied linguistics and education research when exploring curriculum efficacy and impact (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

The quantitative strand primarily utilized survey questionnaires to capture the perceptions of stakeholders, while the qualitative strand employed document analysis of syllabi, curriculum revisions, and semi-structured faculty interviews to provide contextual depth.



Figure - 2.1 Research design

2.2. Participants and Sampling

The participants comprised three categories:

- **Students:** A total of 100 students (50 pre-final year and 50 final year) from different branches of engineering at VFSTR.
- **Alumni:** 38 alumni from VFSTR who had graduated within the past five years, representing both national and international workplaces.
- **Faculty:** 13 English faculty members at VFSTR who have been directly involved in teaching ESP-oriented courses across successive curricula (R-9 to R-25).

A stratified random sampling method was used to ensure representation across gender, year of study, and specialization. This design minimized bias and provided a balanced view of curriculum impact.

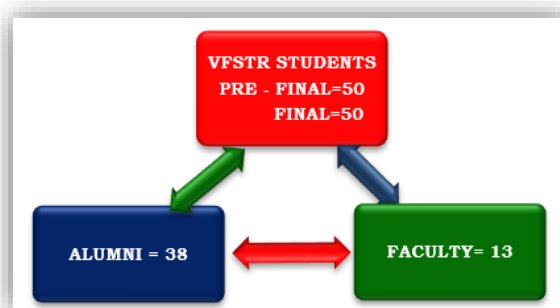


Figure 2. 2. Sample

2.3. Tools for Data Collection

A 23-item structured questionnaire was developed to gather both quantitative and qualitative data from the participants. The questionnaire comprised:

- 21 close-ended questions using a five-point Likert scale to assess perceptions of ESP curriculum relevance, pedagogy, materials, and skill acquisition.
- 2 open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed suggestions for curriculum improvement and reflections on workplace communication experiences.

The instrument was validated through expert review by two ELT specialists and a pilot study with a small group of students, alumni, and faculty. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's Alpha confirmed high internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.943$ for students; $\alpha = 0.844$ for faculty; $\alpha = 0.867$ for alumni), indicating that the tool was statistically robust for large-scale data collection (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Table 2.1 Tool

Q. No	Question
1.	How would you rate the relevance of English language skills in the field of engineering and technology?
2.	In your opinion, how important is it for engineering and technology students to have specialized English language training tailored to their field?
3.	Are you aware that your program has an ESP curriculum?
4.	Are you satisfied with the current curriculum content for English for Specific Purpose (ESP) designed for engineering and technology students?
5.	Are the topics covered in the ESP courses aligned with your specific field of study?
6.	How effective do you find the teaching methods used in the ESP Curriculum for engineering and technology students?
7.	Are the ESP resources (e.g., textbooks, multimedia materials) provided in the curriculum adequate for improving English language proficiency in engineering and technology contexts?
8.	How effective are the listening activities and exercises in the ESP curriculum for improving comprehension of technical lectures or presentations?

9.	Are there specific areas of listening skills (e.g., understanding accents, grasping technical terminology) that you believe require more emphasis in the curriculum?
10.	How well does the ESP curriculum develop students' ability to communicate effectively in technical discussions or presentations?
11.	Do you think there should be more opportunities for students to engage in speaking activities related to their field of engineering or technology?
12.	To what extent does the ESP curriculum enhance students' ability to comprehend and analyze technical texts, such as research papers or engineering journals?
13.	Are there specific types of reading materials (e.g., case studies, technical reports) that you believe should be incorporated into the curriculum to improve reading skills?
14.	How effective are the writing assignments and tasks in the ESP curriculum for developing students' ability to produce technical documents or reports?
15.	How effective are the writing assignments and tasks in the ESP curriculum for developing students' ability to produce technical documents or reports?
16.	In your opinion, which specific language skills or competencies do you think should be emphasized more in the curriculum? (Select all that apply)
17.	Overall, how satisfied are you with the ESP curriculum for engineering and technology students in terms of specific skill acquisition (LSRW)?
18.	Please provide any additional comments or suggestions related to the acquisition of specific language skills (LSRW) in the ESP curriculum:
19.	Do you believe that the current ESP curriculum adequately prepares engineering and technology students for employability in India?
20.	Do you believe that the current ESP curriculum adequately prepares engineering and technology students for higher education opportunities abroad?
21.	How confident do you think students are, (after doing the ESP course), in their ability to use English for the following purposes? - Reading technical documents - Writing technical reports and proposals - Giving presentations in English - Participating in technical discussions in English
22.	Do you have any suggestions or comments for improving the ESP curriculum for engineering and technology students?
23.	Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up interview to discuss your experiences with the ESP curriculum in more detail?

It is evident from the table that the responses from all stakeholders were overwhelmingly positive.

2.4. Data Collection Procedure

The data collection was carried out in three phases:

1. **Survey administration** - The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms to the identified participants. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, in line with ethical research practices.
2. **Semi-structured interviews** - Faculty interviews were conducted to capture nuanced insights into pedagogical practices, challenges in ESP delivery, and reflections on curriculum revisions.

3. **Document analysis** - Curricular documents from R-9 to R-25 at VFSTR were systematically analyzed to trace the evolution of ESP elements in syllabus design, instructional materials, and assessment practices.

2.5 Data Analysis

- **Quantitative Data:** Responses from the surveys were coded and analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (mean scores, percentages) and inferential tests (Chi-square) were employed to identify patterns and test relationships between variables.
- **Qualitative Data:** Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was applied to interview transcripts and open-ended responses. Curricular documents were comparatively analyzed against AICTE's Model Curriculum and NBA's Programme Outcomes (PO-10) to assess alignment with national benchmarks.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

All participants were briefed about the purpose of the study and informed consent was obtained. Data confidentiality was maintained, and responses were used solely for research purposes. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines of educational research (BERA, 2018).

3. Results And Discussion

3.1. Relevance and Awareness of ESP (Q1-Q3)

A majority of students (60% of 3rd years; 46% of 4th years) and nearly all alumni (87%) rated English language skills as "very relevant" to engineering, while faculty unanimously agreed on its importance. This confirms the centrality of communication skills to employability. These results echo findings by Kaur & Khan (2010) and Singh & Sharma (2018), who reported that engineering employers consistently prioritize communicative competence alongside technical skills. Regarding the need for specialized ESP training (Q2), 76% of 3rd year students, 48% of 4th years, 95% of alumni, and 77% of faculty considered it "extremely important." This reinforces Hutchinson & Waters' (1987) argument that ESP must be field-specific and needs-based. Awareness of ESP (Q3) improved with seniority: 62% of 3rd years vs. 88% of 4th years were aware of their ESP curriculum, suggesting greater curricular visibility as students' approach placement

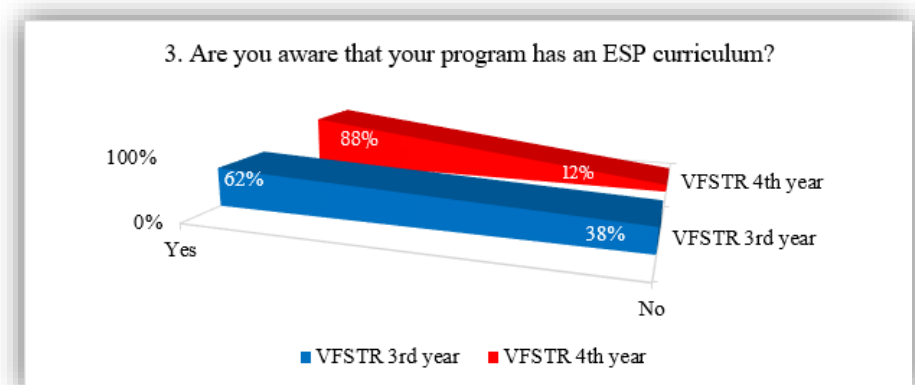
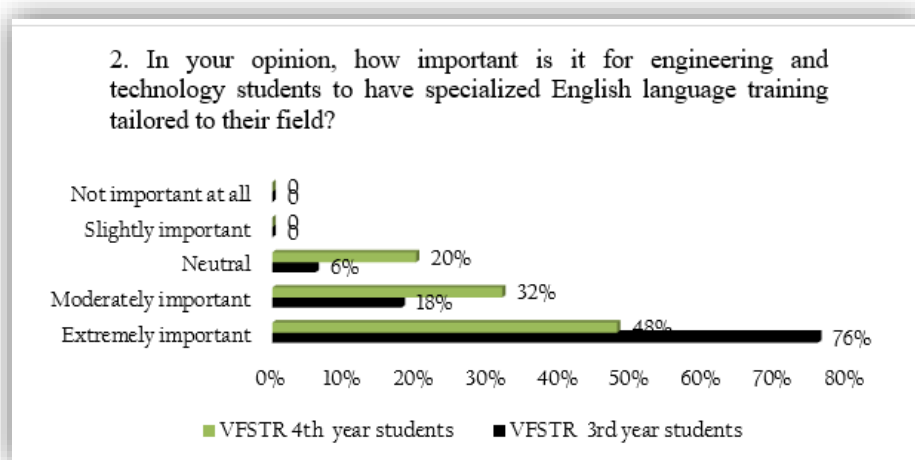
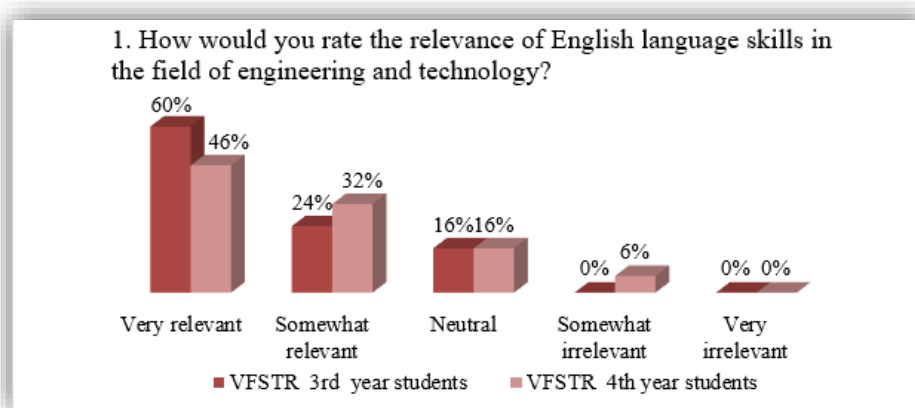


Figure 3.1 - Q 1, Q 2 & Q 3 Responses of VFSTR University 3rd and 4th year students

3.2 Curriculum Content and Alignment (Q 4 - Q 5)

Satisfaction levels with ESP curriculum content varied: only 34% of 3rd years and 44% of 4th years reported being completely satisfied, compared with 74% of alumni and 100% of faculty. This reflects a common phenomenon in curriculum evaluation where students perceive gaps in immediate skill utility, but alumni retrospectively recognize its workplace relevance (Anthony, 2018).

Alignment of ESP topics with field of study (Q5) was affirmed by 80% of students, 96% of alumni, and 84% of faculty. This suggests ESP at VFSTR is progressively industry-aligned, confirming Dudley-Evans & St. John’s (1998) principle of specificity as a measure of ESP efficacy.

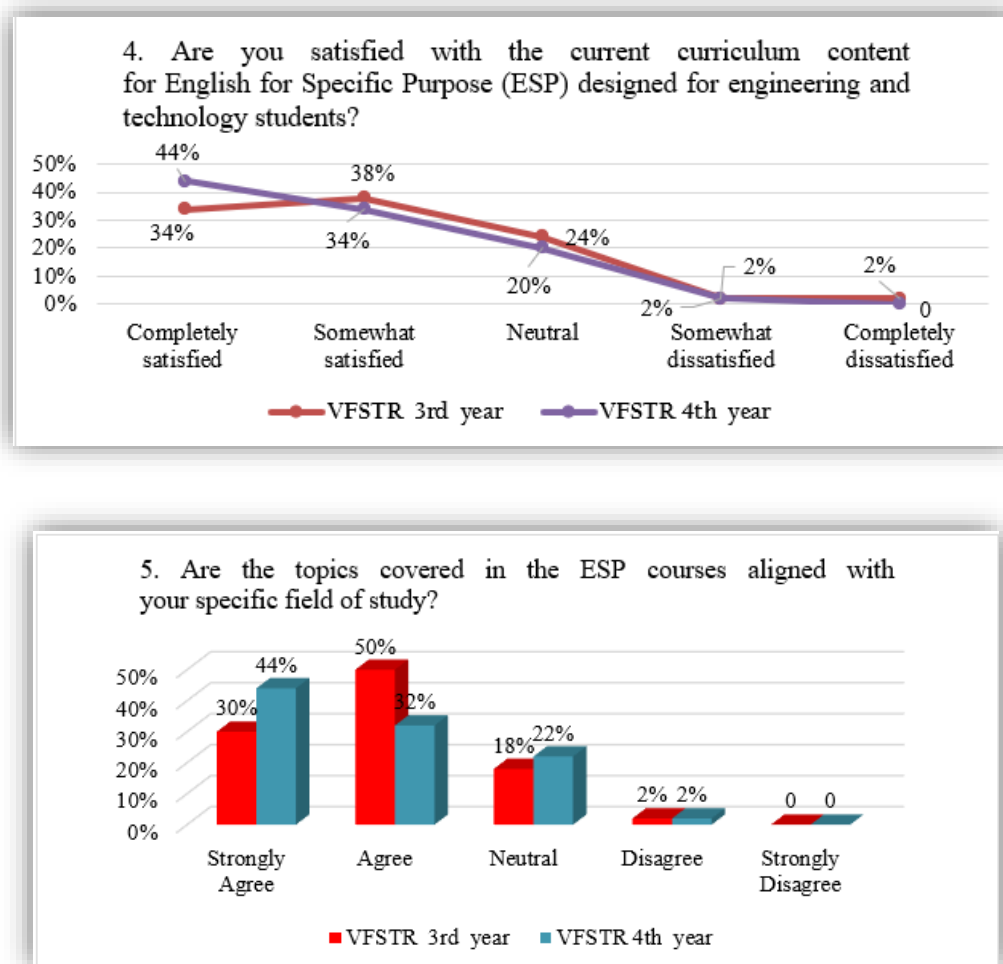


Figure 3. 2. Q 4 & Q 5 Responses of VFSTR University 3rd and 4th year students

3. 3. Pedagogy and Resources (Q6 - Q7)

Teaching methods (Q6) were rated “very effective” by 40% of students, but 74% of alumni were more emphatic about their value, likely reflecting workplace hindsight. Faculty (77%) rated them as “moderately effective,” suggesting room for pedagogical innovation (e.g., task-based learning, simulations). On resources (Q7), 70–74% of students and 92% of alumni found materials adequate, while faculty were more cautious (61.5%), pointing to the need for enhanced multimedia and ICT integration. Prior studies (Li, 2020; Basturkmen, 2010) emphasize that resource authenticity is critical for ESP’s workplace transferability.

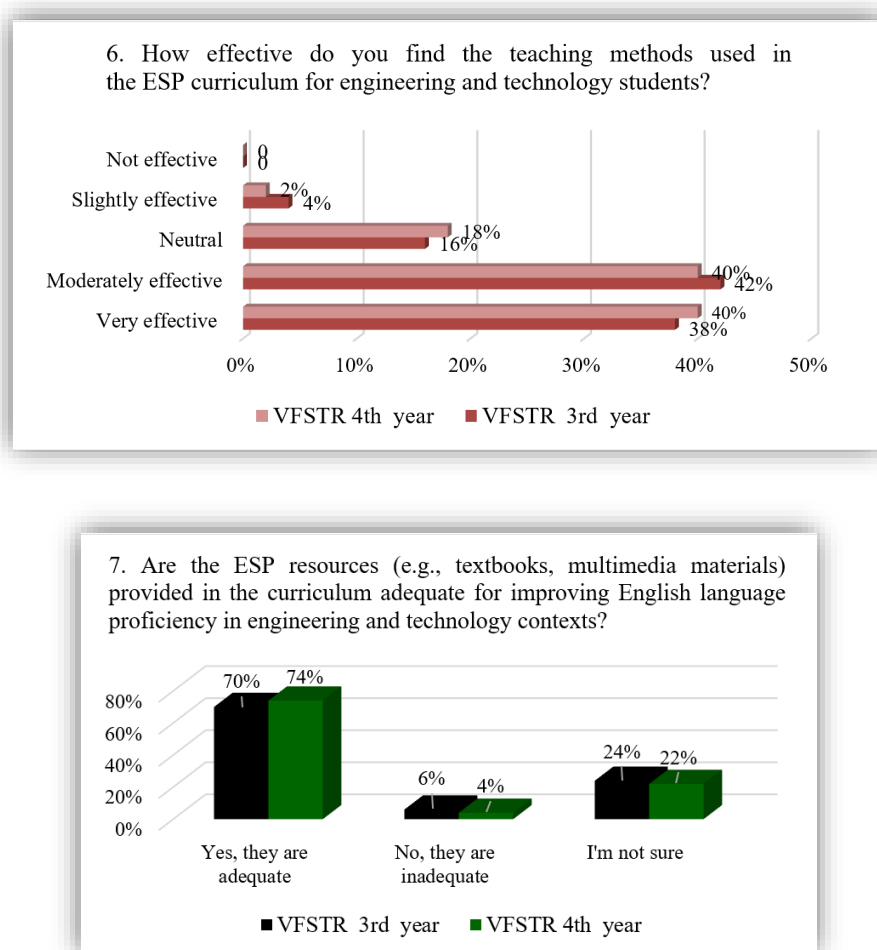
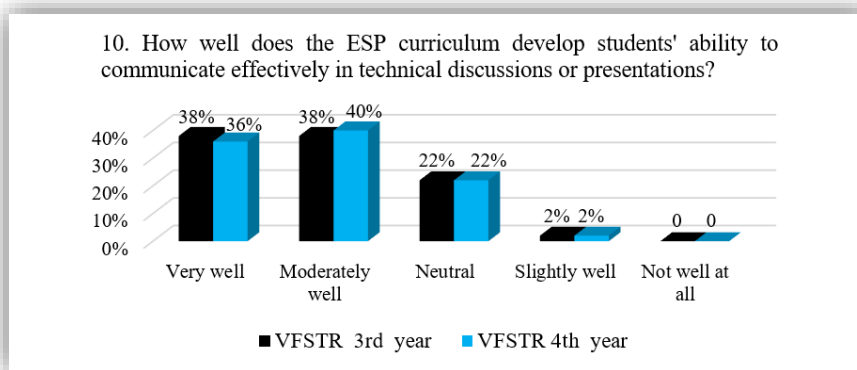
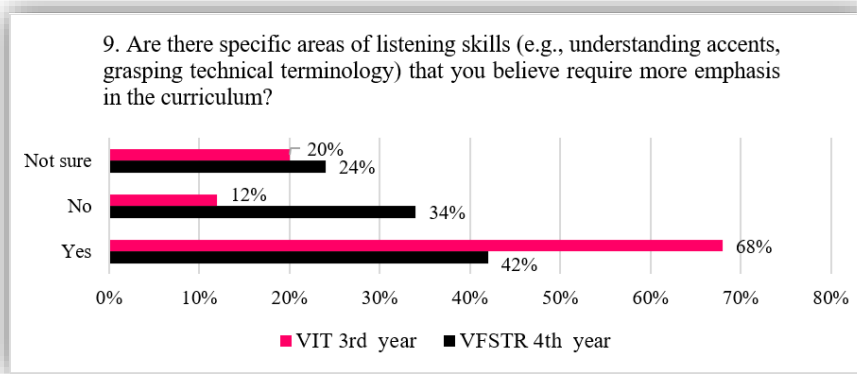
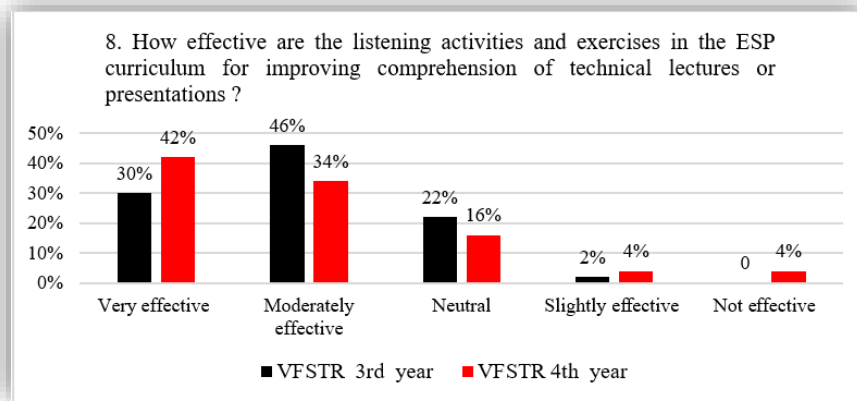


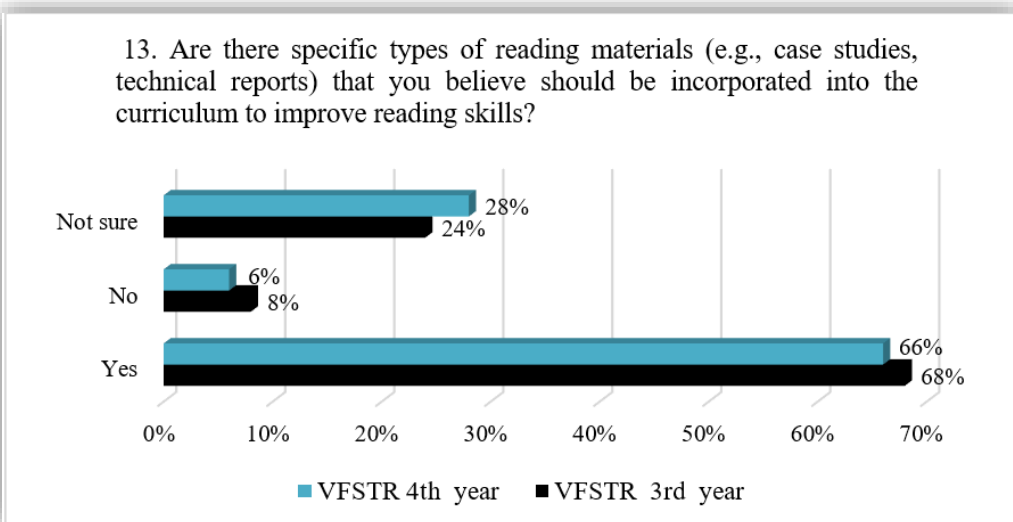
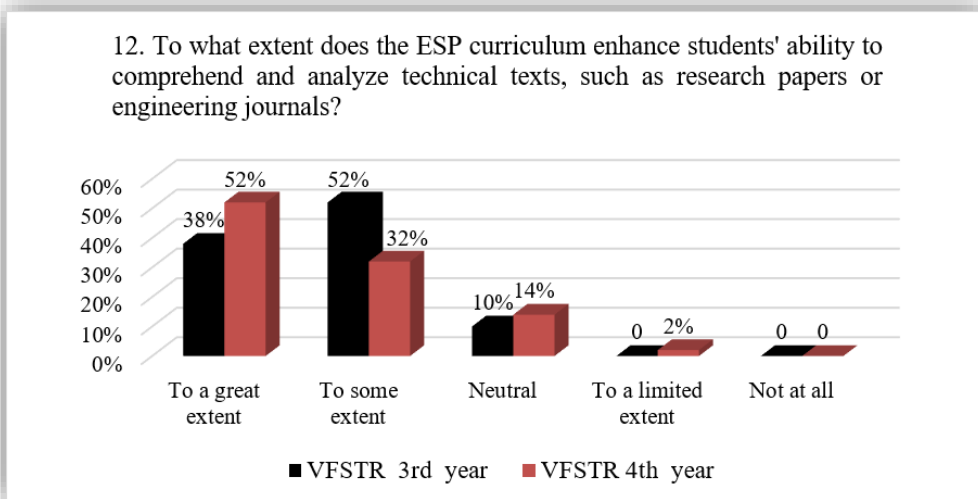
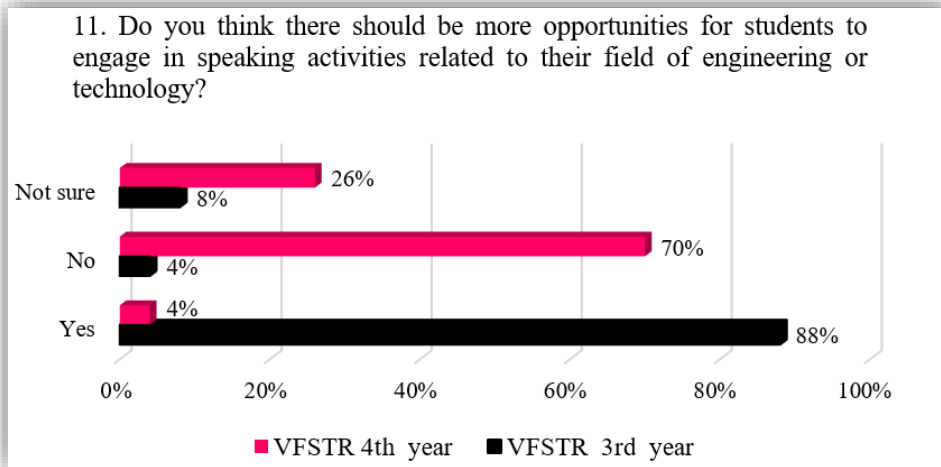
Figure 3.3. Q 6 & Q 7 Responses of VFSTR University 3rd and 4th year students

3.4. Skill Development: Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing (Q8 - Q16)

- **Listening Skills (Q8 - Q9):** Only 30 - 42% of students found listening activities “very effective,” while 63% of alumni and 77% of faculty did so. Still, most students (74% of 3rd years) demanded greater focus on listening to accents and technical terminology echoing global ESP findings (Flowerdew, 2013).
- **Speaking Skills (Q10 - Q11):** While 36 - 40% of students felt speaking was developed “very well,” 68% of alumni agreed strongly, validating the curriculum’s workplace transfer. However, 88% of 3rd years requested more opportunities for speaking activities a gap echoed in research by Evans & Green (2007) in Hong Kong engineering ESP contexts.
- **Reading Skills (Q12 - Q13):** 52% of 4th years and 73% of alumni found ESP highly useful in reading technical texts. About 66 - 68% of students demanded more technical reports and case studies, suggesting a shift towards genre-based ESP approaches (Hyland, 2002).
- **Writing Skills (Q14 - Q15):** Writing tasks were rated “very effective” by 40 - 50% of students and 63% of alumni, while 85% of faculty strongly endorsed them. Importantly, 70% of students and 65% of alumni requested more technical writing focus (e.g., proposals, manuals), consistent with industry expectations (Riemer, 2007).

- Skills Prioritization (Q16):** Across groups, oral communication (48% of students, 60% of alumni, 100% of faculty) emerged as the top priority, followed by technical vocabulary. This aligns with the World Economic Forum’s Future of Jobs Report (2023), which lists communication and collaboration as top skills.





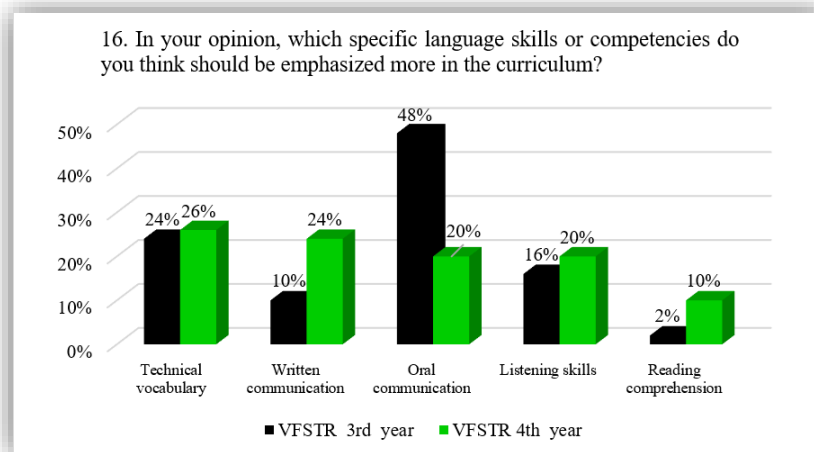
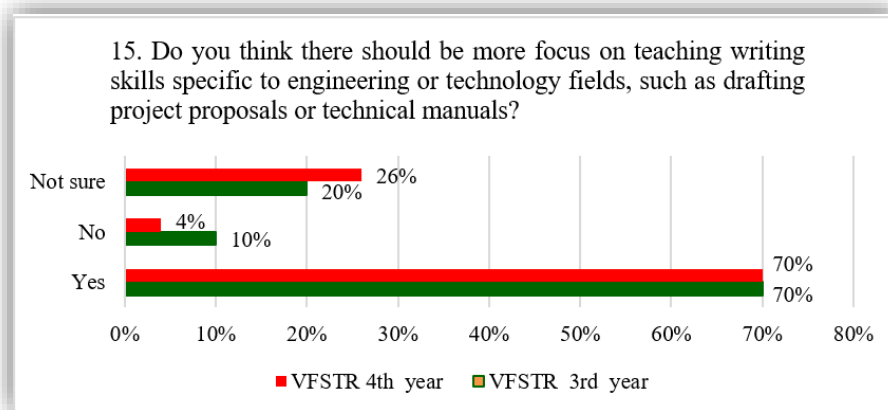
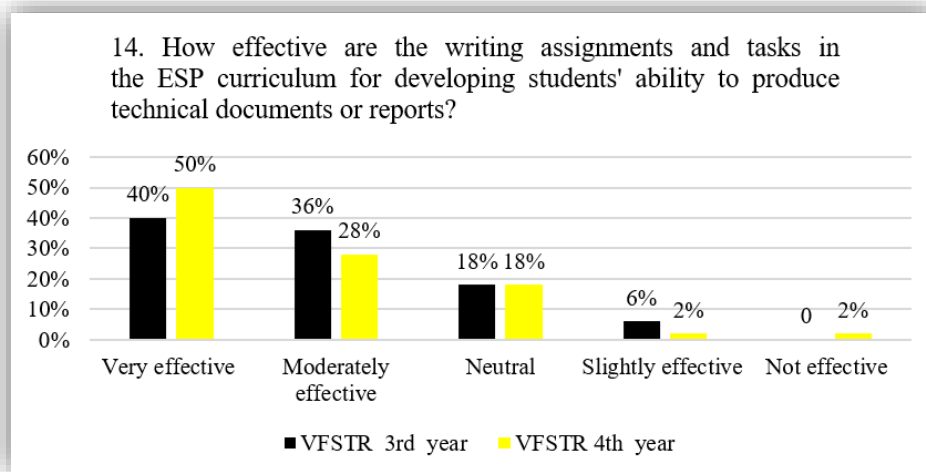


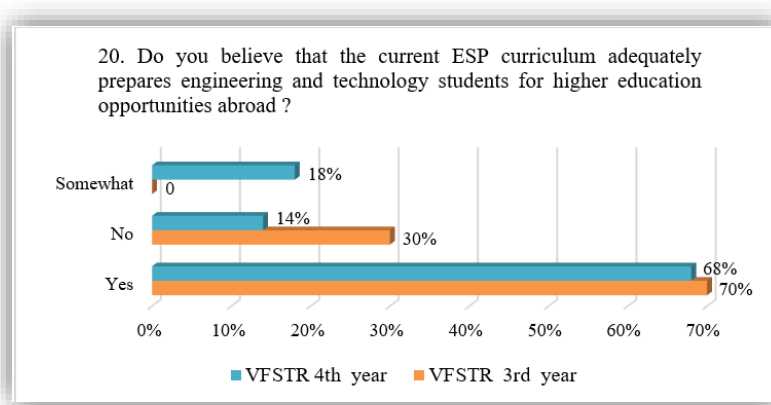
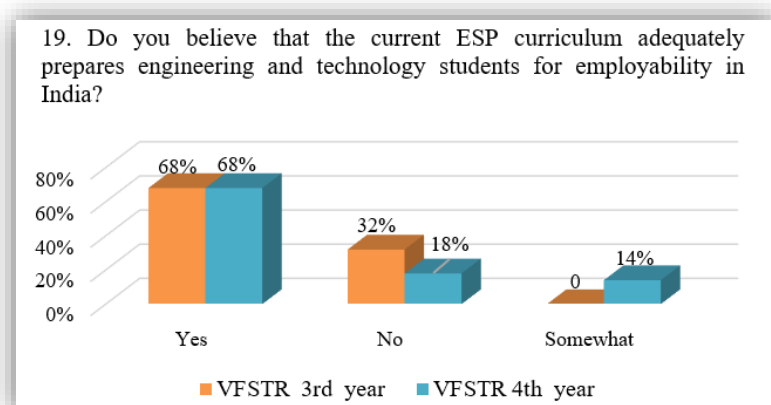
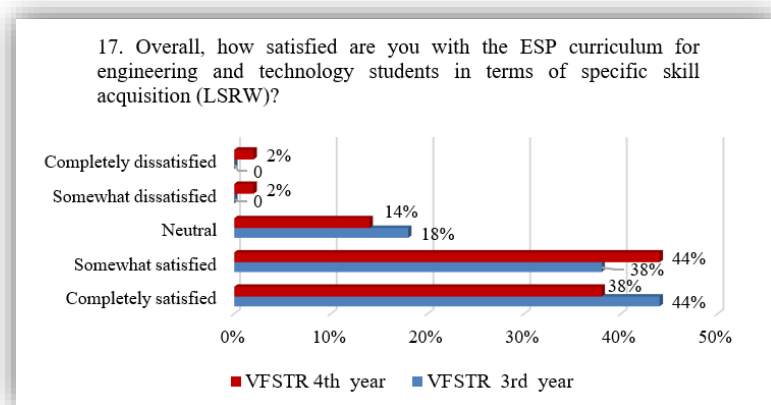
Figure 3. 4 Q 8 to Q 16. Responses of VFSTR University 3rd and 4th year students

3.5 Overall Satisfaction and Employability Impact (Q17–Q21)

General satisfaction with ESP (Q17) was high: 44% of 3rd years, 38% of 4th years, and 79% of alumni were completely satisfied. Faculty largely supported this (61.5%).

Employability (Q19): 68% of students believed ESP prepared them for Indian employability, but alumni were more divided (47% yes, 31% somewhat), reflecting workplace variability. Similar findings were reported in Indian Skills Reports (Wheebox, 2025), where fresh graduates often perceive themselves better prepared than employers assess.

Higher education abroad (Q20): 70% of 3rd years, 68% of 4th years, and 89% of alumni agreed ESP prepared them for overseas study. Interestingly, 53% of faculty disagreed, indicating that academic English and research communication may need stronger integration for international readiness.



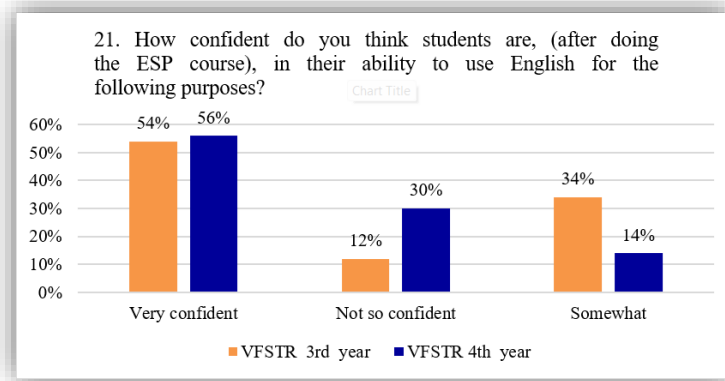


Figure 3.5. - Q 17 & Q 21 Responses of VFSTR University 3rd and 4th year students

Confidence (Q21): Over 80% of alumni felt confident using ESP skills in documentation, reporting, and presentations, compared with about 54 - 56% of current students. This suggests that ESP benefits mature fully in workplace contexts (Basturkmen, 2010).

3.6 Stakeholder Engagement (Q 23)

Willingness to participate in further ESP-related activities was highest among alumni (68%), followed by 40% of 3rd year students and 46% of faculty. This indicates sustained stakeholder interest in curriculum feedback loops, aligning with needs-analysis models of ESP curriculum design (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987).

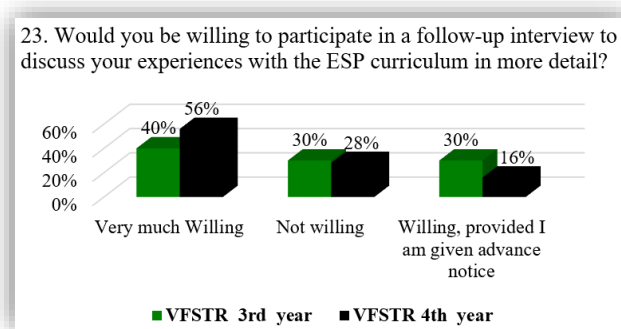


Figure 3.3. Q 23. Responses of VFSTR University 3rd and 4th year students

3.7. Comparative Discussion with Literature

The VFSTR data largely corroborates international ESP research:

- Like Evans & Green (2007), students desire more interactive oral practice.
- As Hyland (2002) stresses, genre-based reading and writing tasks (reports, proposals) are key to employability and were strongly requested by VFSTR students.
- Alumni confidence in ESP mirrors findings by Anthony (2018) that ESP’s efficacy often becomes clearer post-graduation.

- Faculty caution on international readiness echoes Li (2020), who emphasized that ESP must balance global academic communication with local workplace needs.

Thus, VFSTR's ESP curriculum demonstrates measurable efficacy in employability but requires greater alignment to global academic English and expanded oral practice opportunities.

4. Conclusion

This study set out to evaluate the efficacy of the ESP curriculum at VFSTR in enhancing the employability of engineering graduates within the broader national framework of NBA Programme Outcomes (especially PO-10) and the AICTE Model Curriculum. The analysis of responses from students, alumni, and faculty reveals a progressive strengthening of ESP orientation across successive curricular revisions (R-9 through R-25), with demonstrable gains in communication competence, workplace readiness, and learner confidence.

A novel contribution of this study lies in its triangulation of perspectives: current students articulate immediate needs, alumni provide long-term validation of workplace relevance, and faculty foreground pedagogical feasibility. This tripartite evaluation goes beyond traditional student-centred curriculum reviews, offering a 360-degree assessment model that could serve as a replicable framework for other engineering institutions in India.

The results indicate that VFSTR's ESP curriculum has successfully addressed the "academic -industry gap" by prioritizing oral communication, technical writing, and confidence-building activities. Alumni evidence, in particular, demonstrates that skills acquired through ESP courses continue to inform their professional success in interviews, teamwork, and cross-cultural workplace interactions. This longitudinal impact underscores the value of ESP not merely as an academic subject but as a strategic employability enabler.

At the same time, findings reveal areas for enhancement:

- Students and faculty alike called for greater oral practice opportunities and integration of multimedia resources, aligning with global ESP pedagogy.
- Alumni highlighted the curriculum's strength for Indian employability but signalled a need for stronger alignment with international academic communication to support higher education abroad.
- Faculty reflections emphasized the importance of continual needs analysis to keep pace with rapidly evolving industry and technological demands (e.g., AI-mediated communication, global project collaboration).

Thus, the novelty of this research lies not only in documenting the outcomes of VFSTR's ESP trajectory but also in proposing a dynamic, feedback-driven curriculum model where continuous stakeholder engagement ensures relevance, adaptability, and sustainability. By embedding ESP as a core driver of employability rather than a peripheral language course, VFSTR offers a case study of institutional best practice in Indian engineering education.

Looking forward, future research could expand this study by linking ESP performance metrics with placement outcomes or by developing AI-enabled assessment tools for real-time

evaluation of communication skills. Such innovations could make ESP curricula even more agile, measurable, and future-ready.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that ESP at VFSTR has evolved into a powerful bridge between academia and industry, equipping graduates not only with linguistic proficiency but with the confidence, adaptability, and professionalism demanded by today's global workplaces. By continuously refining its ESP curriculum through stakeholder-driven revisions, VFSTR has illustrated that employability is not an incidental by-product of education, but a deliberate, curriculum-embedded outcome.

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The Impact of GenAI-Supported Speaking Practice on EFL Learners' Speaking Anxiety, Self-Confidence, and Willingness to Take Oral Risks

Samrat Halder

Abstract

The integration of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction introduces a non-judgmental interlocutor that impacts the affective dynamics of language acquisition. While literature notes GenAI's role in reducing speaking anxiety, current studies often rely on self-reported perceptions during AI use. They rarely measure longitudinal effects on cognitive agency, phonetic competence, and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) after algorithmic support is removed. Grounded in Cognitive Load Theory, Self-Efficacy Theory, and the Situational Model of WTC, this study investigates the psycholinguistic impacts of GenAI reliance. Using a longitudinal, explanatory sequential mixed-methods design across five semesters with 2,380 undergraduate EFL learners, the intervention transitioned students from initial hesitation, through AI-supported roleplay, to unassisted evaluation. Results indicate that while GenAI lowers the affective filter and encourages initial oral risk-taking, exclusive reliance creates an "illusion of fluency" marked by phonological deficits and reduced linguistic diversity. The findings demonstrate that GenAI functions best as a transitional tool rather than an autonomous educator. Linguistic self-efficacy and pragmatic resilience require coupling AI structuring with, and eventually withdrawing it in favour of, human pedagogical oversight, safeguarding the cognitive friction necessary for authentic language acquisition.

Keywords: Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI), Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), Willingness to Communicate (WTC), Human-AI Symbiosis, Cognitive Agency, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Linguistic Self-Efficacy

1. Introduction

1.1. The Enduring Crisis of Communicative Paralysis in EFL Contexts

The globalization of the English language has fundamentally mandated its acquisition not merely as a subject of academic inquiry, but as a critical, operational prerequisite for international mobility, professional advancement, and cross-cultural discourse. Accordingly, worldwide higher educational institutions have universally integrated mandatory English communication courses into their undergraduate course curricula. However, a pervasive and enduring paradox haunts the landscape of English as a Foreign Language (henceforth, EFL) instruction: despite years of rigorous morphological and syntactic training, a vast demographic of learners remains utterly paralyzed when required to produce spoken language in authentic, unscripted contexts spontaneously. This phenomenon of communicative withdrawal is not

indicative of an intellectual deficit, but rather a profound psychological blockage historically defined within the framework of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (henceforth, FLCA) (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Horwitz et al., (1986), in their seminal establishment of the FLCA construct, have identified that the unique, highly evaluative environment of the language classroom triggers a specific complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours that severely disrupt the cognitive processing required for speech generation. When an EFL learner is prompted to speak, they are forced to articulate complex, pre-articulated thoughts through an underdeveloped linguistic medium, often under the immediate, evaluative gaze of both peers and instructors. This environment inherently weaponizes the fear of negative evaluation. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) have demonstrated that this resulting anxiety acts as a potent affective filter, effectively short-circuiting the working memory and preventing the retrieval of known lexical and grammatical items. As a direct consequence, the learner's Willingness to Communicate (henceforth, WTC)—defined as the readiness to enter into L2 discourse at a specific time with a specific person (MacIntyre et al., 1998)—collapses. The gravity of this issue cannot be overstated. Traditional pedagogical paradigms, which emphasize public performance and immediate instructor correction, frequently exacerbate this anxiety, creating a systemic educational environment where the vast majority of students opt for silence, defaulting to their native languages (L1) rather than risking the extreme social embarrassments associated with flawed L2 pronunciation and grammatical inaccuracy.

1.2. The Advent of Generative AI

For decades, researchers and educators have sought to dismantle this affective barrier through various iterations of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (henceforth, CALL). Early technological interventions, however, were fundamentally limited by their behaviourist architectures (Bax, 2003). Traditional CALL software provided static, asynchronous exercises—such as fill-in-the-blank grammar drills and rudimentary speech-to-text pronunciation models—which, while mildly effective for rote memorization, has entirely failed to replicate the unpredictable, dynamic nature of authentic human discourse. These tools could not function as genuine conversational partners, and therefore, they could not adequately prepare the anxious learner for the socio-cognitive demands of real-time roleplay or unscripted interaction (Bashori et al., 2022).

The recent, explosive proliferation of Generative Artificial Intelligence (henceforth, GenAI) and Large Language Models (henceforth, LLMs) represents an unprecedented ontological shift in the trajectory of educational technology. GenAI does not operate as a static repository of pre-programmed responses; it functions as a highly sophisticated, multimodal, artificial interlocutor (Klimova et al., 2024). Driven by advanced natural language processing and deep learning architectures, modern conversational AI possesses the capability to parse error-laden, disorganized learner input, negotiate contextual meaning, and generate morpho-syntactically flawless, pragmatically appropriate responses in real-time. This technological leap introduces a novel phenomenon into the EFL ecosystem: the creation of a decentralized, digitized psychological “sandbox” (Du & Alm, 2024).

By substituting the human interlocutor with a non-sentient algorithm, GenAI extensively alters the affective dynamics of language practice. AI provides a judgment-free zone. It does not exhibit impatience, it does not perceive social standing, and it cannot form adverse opinions regarding a learner's intellectual capacity or phonological deficits. Hence, the fear of negative evaluation is instantaneously neutralized. Initial observations of this phenomenon suggest that when paralyzed EFL learners are permitted to use GenAI to draft responses, simulate interviews, or generate conversational scripts, their affective filter dramatically lowers, resulting in a sudden and an intense spike in their apparent Willingness to Communicate (Wang et al., 2024).

1.3. Algorithmic Scaffolding and the Illusion of Fluency

While the immediate affective relief provided by GenAI is seductively promising, the unchecked integration of this technology introduces deeply insidious psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic threats that threaten the very core of language acquisition (Klimova et al., 2024; Zaim et al., 2025). The seriousness of these issues stems from the fundamental mechanics of cognitive load and neural plasticity. Sweller's (2020) Cognitive Load Theory posits that deep learning requires a productive level of internal cognitive friction; the brain must actively struggle to retrieve vocabulary, organize syntax, and map meaning onto a new linguistic framework to forge permanent neural pathways. GenAI, by its very design, seeks to eradicate friction. When a learner offloads the complex task of syntactic generation to an algorithm, the machine performs the cognitive heavy lifting (Yao & Fan, 2025). The learner is subsequently reduced to a passive acoustic transducer, vocalizing a flawless script generated by artificial intelligence rather than by their own creative, natural intelligence.

This dynamic gives birth to a dangerous pedagogical phenomenon recently theorized as the "illusion of fluency" (see Kohnke et al., 2023). GenAI provides the learners with advanced vocabulary and perfect grammatical structures, masking their underlying sociolinguistic incompetencies. However, because the technology currently functions predominantly in the realm of texts and syntactically generated audio, it entirely bypasses the physical and pragmatic realities of speech execution (Wang, 2026). Learners utilizing AI-generated scripts frequently exhibit severe deficits in prosody, intonation, and phonemic accuracy. They read complex conditional sentences while entirely mispronouncing foundational consonants, or artificially vocalize punctuation markers, demonstrating a complete disconnect between morphological generation and phonetic realization (Wang, 2026).

Furthermore, such heavy reliance on GenAI introduces the severe risk of algorithmic homogenization. As Bender et al. (2021) have critically noted, LLMs are trained overwhelmingly on WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) datasets. When global EFL learners, operating from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, rely on GenAI for conversational structuring, they are implicitly forced to conform to a standardized, Anglo-centric iteration of English. The unique interlanguage, localized pragmatic strategies, and cultural identities of the learners are systematically overwritten by statistical probability (Phillipson, 2024). Thus, the technology intended to give students a voice actively threatens to replace their authentic sociolinguistic identity with a uniform, algorithmically sanitized persona.

1.4. The Deficit in Transitional and Longitudinal Pedagogical Frameworks

A rigorous review of the contemporary literature surrounding GenAI in language education reveals a critical, widening research gap. The current corpus is heavily skewed toward short-term, quantitative assessments of user perceptions, predominantly relying on self-reported affective metrics (Lo, 2023; Ghimire et al., 2024). Studies consistently demonstrate that students feel more confident, report lower anxiety, and exhibit higher enjoyment when interacting with chatbots (Zhang et al., 2024; Alwehebi, 2025). However, this literature suffers from a fatal methodological myopia: it conflates the localized relief of algorithmic framing with the genuine acquisition of transferable linguistic competence (Godwin-Jones, 2023).

The extant literature largely observes learners strictly while they are immersed in the technological intervention. There is a profound scarcity of longitudinal, explanatory sequential research that tracks the transitional mechanics of AI withdrawal (Firat, 2023). Crucially, the academic community needs robust empirical data on what happens to a learner's psychological disposition and linguistic output when the GenAI platform is abruptly removed, and the student is forced to return to unassisted, human-to-human evaluation (Yan, 2023). Does the AI-induced confidence evaporate alongside the algorithm, exposing an atrophied cognitive state? Or does the temporary lowering of the affective filter catalyze a permanent shift in the learner's self-efficacy, even in the absence of technological support (Bandura, 1997)?

Furthermore, much of the existing research treats EFL populations as monolithic entities, failing to account for the massive disparity in baseline proficiency (Hwang & Chang, 2023). The literature frequently studies the utility of AI for structural refinement among already capable speakers, utterly ignoring the nuanced, highly specific crisis of the vast majority—the lower-proficiency learners for whom speaking anxiety manifests as total communicative paralysis (Kohnke et al., 2023). This study identifies that evaluating GenAI's efficacy requires stratifying the participant pool to isolate how algorithmic structuring impacts entirely non-communicative cohorts versus their highly proficient peers. The gap in the literature demands a methodology that explicitly bridges the divide between artificial syntactic generation and human pragmatic execution (Godwin-Jones, 2023).

1.5. Human-AI Symbiosis in EFL Curricula

To address these critical gaps and navigate the complex intersection of cognitive agency, speaking anxiety, and technological reliance, this research proposes a novel, highly structured pedagogical paradigm. The central thesis of this study posits that GenAI cannot function as an autonomous surrogate educator, nor can it be dismissed as a mere academic shortcut; rather, it must be operationalized as a strictly bounded, transitional psychological object within a broader framework of human-AI symbiosis (Hwang et al., 2023).

This study introduces an innovative tri-phasic intervention model designed to empirically track the psychological and linguistic metamorphosis of EFL learners over a sustained, longitudinal period of five semesters since 2024. By utilizing an exhaustive sample of undergraduate students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, the research seeks to systematically categorize learners based on baseline unassisted performance, effectively isolating the demographic suffering from severe communicative paralysis. The core innovation

of the proposed methodology lies in the deliberate application and subsequent withdrawal of GenAI support (Saarela et al., 2026).

Initially, GenAI is deployed exclusively as a low-stakes affective buffer, permitting highly anxious learners to bypass the paralyzing fear of peer evaluation and generate complex roleplay scripts (Hayashi & Sato, 2024; Hegazy, 2024). This phase aims to break the initial psychological deadlock, fostering a preliminary Willingness to Communicate by allowing students to interact with a non-judgmental algorithmic entity (Peng & Liang, 2025). However, to combat the illusion of fluency and prevent the erosion of cognitive agency, the intervention mandates a final, critical phase wherein the GenAI framing is completely removed. Students are subsequently required to perform unassisted oral tasks subjected to rigorous human evaluation.

Through this progressive methodology, the research aims to determine whether the temporary use of GenAI cultivates a resilient growth mindset and genuine self-efficacy that survives the withdrawal of the technology. The study theorizes that while GenAI is unparalleled in its capacity to dismantle the affective filter and provide syntactical structuring, it is devoid of the epistemological grounding required for language acquisition (Godwin-Jones, 2024; Meng, 2026). It cannot read pragmatic context, it cannot simulate authentic empathy, and it cannot provide the localized phonetic calibration necessary for true fluency. Therefore, the innovative framework proposed herein demands that AI-supported practice must function permanently in tandem with human pedagogical oversight (Rashid et al., 2024). Human instructors must remain the ultimate evaluators, tasked with transforming the algorithmically generated “broken English” of the emerging learner into authentic, socio-linguistically competent discourse. By rigorously analyzing the data across these developmental stages, this research aspires to provide a definitive, empirically grounded blueprint for integrating generative artificial intelligence into higher education curricula—safeguarding the cognitive autonomy of the learner while tailor-made curing the systemic crisis of EFL speaking anxiety (Hegazy, 2024; Saarela et al., 2026).

2. Literature Review

2.1. Anxiety and Willingness to Communicate

The intersection of human emotional psychology and Second Language Acquisition (henceforth, SLA) has long been a focal point of applied linguistics, anchored by the recognition that linguistic competence cannot be isolated from the learners' affective state. Central to this paradigm is the construct of FLCA, operationalized by Horwitz et al. (1986). They defined FLCA as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. In traditional EFL contexts, this anxiety manifests as a paralyzing apprehension of negative evaluation, particularly during oral performance tasks where learners are required to articulate unformed thoughts before an audience of peers and instructors. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) have further expanded upon this, demonstrating that anxiety subtly but pervasively disrupts the cognitive processing of linguistic input, bottlenecking the transition of pre-articulated L1 thought into L2 materialized speech. The literature overwhelmingly agrees that traditional

pedagogical models, which emphasize immediate oral accuracy and public correction, often exacerbate this affective filter, forcing students into states of communicative withdrawal (Rassaei, 2015).

Consequently, the concept of WTC has emerged as a critical metric. MacIntyre et al. (1998) have conceptualized WTC in a second language as a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using an L2. WTC is situation sensitive and influenced by perceived communicative competence and interpersonal anxiety (Peng & Woodrow, 2010; Yashima, 2002). For decades, researchers have documented the struggle to foster WTC in large EFL classrooms, where the sheer volume of students and the scarcity of individualized speaking opportunities render the development of a low-anxiety, highly interactive environment structurally impossible (Cao & Philp, 2006). Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) highlight this dichotomy by exploring the “two faces of Janus” in language learning— anxiety and enjoyment—arguing that true pedagogical success requires not merely the suppression of anxiety, but the active cultivation of foreign language enjoyment. However, achieving this dual mandate within the constraints of traditional human-to-human instructional paradigms has proven systematically elusive, paving the way for technological interventions to mediate the affective dimensions of language learning (c.f., Rassaei, 2015).

2.2. The Evolution of CALL and the Emergence of Conversational AI

The integration of technological scaffolding into language education has been encapsulated within the framework of CALL (Chapelle, 2001). Early iterations of CALL were predominantly structuralist and behaviourist, offering static, drill-and-practice exercises that, while useful for morphological memorization, have failed to replicate the dynamic, unscripted nature of human interaction required to build oral communicative competence (Lamy & Hampel, 2007). However, the advent of LLMs and GenAI represents an unprecedented ontological shift in the nature of educational technology. As Klimova et al. (2024) observe, GenAI transcends the limitations of traditional software by functioning not as a static repository of information, but as a responsive, adaptable, and sophisticated artificial interlocutor.

This transition from static input to generative dialogue has significant implications for SLA. Contemporary research emphasizes that AI chatbots, such as ChatGPT, simulate authentic conversational environments where learners can engage in open-ended discourse, negotiate meaning, and receive instantaneous, contextually relevant feedback. Unlike previous automated systems that relied on rigid decision trees, multimodal GenAI models leverage Natural Language Processing (NLP) to parse complex, error-laden learner input and generate coherent, pragmatically appropriate responses. This capability effectively operationalizes Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) within a digital continuum, where the algorithm provides the precise level of lexical and syntactic scaffolding necessary for the learner to achieve communicative goals they could not manage independently. Karataş et al. (2024) note that this responsive framing alters the power dynamics of language practice. In a traditional classroom, the locus of linguistic authority resides exclusively with the human instructor, whose evaluative gaze often triggers performance anxiety. GenAI, conversely, democratizes this authority, offering learners a private, decentralized space to test linguistic hypotheses without the socio-cognitive risk associated with human judgment. Therefore, the

literature surrounding modern CALL has rapidly pivoted to examine how these artificial systems function as affective buffers, effectively absorbing the psychological friction that has hindered L2 oral risk-taking.

2.3. Artificial Scaffolding and the Mitigation of the Affective Filter

An expanding body of empirical literature has begun to document the immediate psychological benefits of integrating GenAI into EFL speaking practice, focusing on its capacity to mitigate speaking anxiety and elevate WTC. Saptiany et al. (2024) have investigated the use of voice-enabled conversational AI among EFL learners and reported statistically significant reductions in anticipatory anxiety. Their findings indicate that learners explicitly value the non-judgmental, infinitely patient nature of the AI, which allow for repetitive, low-stakes practice devoid of the social embarrassment associated with peer-to-peer interaction. This aligns with Wang et al. (2024), who posit that artificial conversational agents create a psychologically safe “sandbox” where the fear of negative evaluation is entirely neutralized. Because the machine lacks sentience and social perception, it cannot form adverse opinions regarding the learners’ intellectual capacity or linguistic deficits. This removal of the social evaluative threat effectively lowers the affective filter, permitting learners to allocate their cognitive resources entirely to the task of linguistic formulation rather than emotional regulation.

Furthermore, Zhang et al. (2024) have demonstrated that this reduction in anxiety is often accompanied by a parallel increase in Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE). By providing instantaneous, personalized responses and allowing learners to dictate the pace and topic of the conversation, GenAI fosters a strong sense of learner autonomy—a core component of Self-Determination Theory*. Alwehebi (2025) corroborates this, arguing that when learners exercise agency over their communicative practice environments, their intrinsic motivation to engage with the target language escalates. The extant literature thus paints an optimistic portrait of GenAI as an ultimate solution to the affective barriers in SLA. However, a critical review of this contemporary corpus reveals a concerning methodological trend: an overwhelming reliance on self-reported psychological metrics—such as perceived confidence and enjoyment—at the expense of rigorous, objective evaluations of the actual linguistic output produced during these AI-mediated interactions. While it is undeniable that GenAI makes learners feel more confident, the literature conflates this artificially supported WTC with genuine, transferable linguistic competence, thereby necessitating a more critical examination of the cognitive mechanics underlying AI-assisted speech.

2.4. Investigating the Illusion of Fluency

This gap in the literature brings us to the cognitive ramifications of algorithmic output and the phenomenon characterized by Kohnke et al., (2023) as the “illusion of fluency”. While the affective benefits of GenAI are well-documented, the psycholinguistic consequences of offloading syntactic generation to an algorithm remain underexplored and theoretically contentious. From a cognitive load perspective, Sweller (2020) argues that learning requires a productive level of cognitive friction; the brain must actively struggle to organize new schemas in the working memory before transferring them to long-term memory. In the context of L2

speaking, this friction occurs precisely during the internal, messy process of lexical retrieval and syntactic assembly. However, when learners utilize GenAI to pre-fabricate conversational scripts or roleplay responses, they effectively bypass this crucial neural processing stage. The algorithmic system performs the heavy cognitive lifting, delivering a morpho-syntactically flawless output that the learners merely vocalize.

Al-Zahrani (2025) has noted that while such practices increase the volume of L2 speech produced in a session, they compromise the authenticity of the communicative act. The literature on Input Processing Theory (c.f., Benati, 2017) emphasizes that exposure to comprehensible input must be coupled with “pushed outputs”—the internal cognitive mandate to produce accurate language autonomously. By providing frictionless solutions, GenAI risks pacifying this drive. Furthermore, scholars in the domain of phonology and pragmatics have raised alarms regarding the superficiality of AI-assisted oral practice (Yan, 2025). Despite reading advanced, AI-generated vocabulary, learners frequently exhibit severe deficiencies in prosody, intonation, and phonemic accuracy. The literature has yet to adequately address how reliance on text-based or mechanized voice AI inadvertently decouples syntactic complexity from phonological execution (Ye et al., 2022). If a learner can articulate a complex conditional sentence generated by an LLM but cannot execute the appropriate pragmatic intonation or phonetic stress required to make that sentence comprehensible to a human listener, their communicative competence is fundamentally illusory (Gilmore, 2011). Therefore, a critical tension exists within the current literature: the very technology that has been celebrated for breaking the affective barrier simultaneously threatens to atrophy the learners’ innate cognitive agency and phonetic development if utilized as a substitute for, rather than a scaffold to, autonomous neural processing.

2.5. Standardization and Algorithmic Homogenization in GenAI

Beyond the cognitive mechanics of SLA, the literature surrounding GenAI integration requires scrutinization through a sociolinguistic lens, particularly concerning the risks of algorithmic homogenization and linguistic imperialism. Second language acquisition is not merely the adoption of a neutral communicative code; it is an act of identity reconstruction and cultural negotiation (Kramsch, 2009). The foundational architecture of contemporary LLMs is overwhelmingly trained on massive datasets derived from what Bender et al. (2021) classify as “Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic” demographics. Therefore, the syntactical preferences, idiomatic expressions, and pragmatic norms generated by these algorithms are not culturally neutral; they represent a specific, hegemonic iteration of standardized Global English.

Phillipson’s (2024) seminal work on linguistic imperialism has posited that the dominance of English is maintained through structural and cultural inequalities. In the modern era, this imperialism is becoming automated. When diverse EFL learners across varying global contexts rely on GenAI to generate their speaking prompts and roleplay scenarios, they are subtly subjected to an algorithmic enforcement of Anglo-centric communicative norms. Extant literature on AI in education frequently fails to critically evaluate how this technology impacts the development of localized Englishes or the pragmatic strategies that non-native speakers naturally employ to signal their cultural identities. Ortega (2019) argues for an equitable

multilingualism that validates the hybrid, interlanguage variations produced by L2 learners as authentic expressions of cognitive agency. However, GenAI models operate on statistical probability, systematically smoothing out these individualized linguistic variations in favour of the most mathematically predictable—and thereby standardized—outputs (Alvero et al., 2025). As learners increasingly internalize the AI's generative patterns, there is a tangible risk documented by critical sociolinguists that the EFL classroom will suffer from a profound homogenization of discourse (Grieve et al., 2025). The unique, culturally embedded voices of the learners' risks being overwritten by a monolithic algorithmic persona. The literature indicates a pressing need to investigate whether AI scaffolding genuinely empowers learners to express their localized realities, or if it merely trains them to mimic the statistical averages of a dominant global corpus, thereby stripping the L2 acquisition process of its rich sociolinguistic diversity (Chapelle et al., 2024).

2.6. The Symbiosis of AI Scaffolding and Human Pedagogical Agency

The synthesis of these affective, cognitive, and sociolinguistic dimensions inevitably leads to a critical re-evaluation of pedagogical agency within technology-enhanced learning environments. The prevailing narrative in early AI literature has occasionally bordered on techno-solutionism, suggesting that advanced conversational agents could function as autonomous surrogate educators (Bozkurt et al., 2024). However, recent critical scholarship explicitly rejects this paradigm, advocating instead for a model of human-AI symbiosis. Hwang et al. (2023) argue that while AI excels at data processing and simulating routine interactions, it possesses zero epistemological grounding, emotional intelligence, or genuine pragmatic awareness. Hence, the technology must be structurally subordinated to human pedagogical oversight (Alhusaiyan, 2024).

This necessity is particularly evident when examining the construct of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997), genuine self-efficacy is forged through authentic mastery experiences—successes are achieved through the learner's independent cognitive efforts and resilience in the face of failure. Wang and Sun (2024), in their exploration of L2 speaking efficacy, highlight that confidence derived solely from technological scaffolding is inherently fragile. If an EFL learner's willingness to communicate is strictly dependent on an algorithm generating their responses, their self-efficacy is anchored to the tool, not to their internal cognitive capacity. Therefore, the literature mandates a pedagogical framework where GenAI is utilized explicitly as a transitional object (Wahyuni et al., 2024). It must serve as the initial, low-stakes bridge that safely guides the highly anxious learner across the affective filter, but it must be systematically withdrawn to force unassisted, autonomous outputs. Furthermore, human instructors remain irreplaceable in providing the sociolinguistic calibration and emotional validation that algorithms cannot simulate. As it has been recognized by recent empirical studies, when an AI fails to correct a phonological error or generates a pragmatically inappropriate response, it is the human educator who must intervene to contextualize and remediate the error within the learner's specific cultural and academic reality (Alhusaiyan, 2024). The literature thus underscores that the optimization of AI in language learning is not a question of technological deployment, but of intentional pedagogical design, where human friction is deliberately maintained to ensure deep cognitive acquisition (Bozkurt et al., 2024).

2.7. Situating the Current Study within the Extant Literature

Despite the rapid proliferation of studies examining GenAI in L2 contexts, a significant empirical void persists in understanding the transitional mechanics between AI-supported practice and unassisted human communication (Ibrahim & Kirkpatrick, 2024). While scholars have robustly quantified the affective relief provided by AI chatbots and theorized the cognitive risks of over-reliance, there is a conspicuous lack of longitudinal, mixed-methods research that tracks learners as they move sequentially from baseline anxiety, through algorithmic framing, and finally back into unsupported human-to-human evaluation (Godwin-Jones et al., 2024). Much of the existing literature observes learners strictly while they are using the AI, failing to measure the residual psychological and linguistic competencies that remain once the technological crutch is removed (Shaikh et al., 2023).. Furthermore, the literature rarely stratifies massive student populations to analyze how AI structuring impacts different proficiency tiers distinctively, often treating EFL cohorts as monolithic entities. This oversight obscures the nuanced reality that while high-proficiency learners might use AI for stylistic refinement, the vast majority of low-proficiency learners utilize it for basic psychological survival in the classroom (Jolley & Maimone, 2022; Shaikh et al., 2023). By situating the present research within this theoretical nexus—balancing the affective benefits of motivation theory with the cognitive demands of input-output mechanics and the sociolinguistic imperatives of human-centric pedagogy—this study aims to bridge the identified gaps and provide a robust empirical foundation for the future of AI-integrated language instruction.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a longitudinal, explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design to systematically investigate the impact of GenAI on EFL learners' speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and willingness to take oral risks. By adopting a mixed-methods paradigm, this research addresses the complex psychological and cognitive dimensions of language acquisition that cannot be fully captured through isolated quantitative or qualitative lenses (Ding & Yusof, 2025). The research was conducted over a sustained period of five semesters between 2024 and mid-2026, allowing for a robust temporal analysis of how learners' communicative behaviours evolved when they were exposed to, and subsequently removed from, GenAI-supported pedagogical foundation.

The independent variable in this study was the integration of GenAI-supported speaking practices, specifically tailored to function as a low-stakes conversational interlocutor and speech-generation tools such as ChatGPT's Voice Mode and Google Gemini Live. The dependent variables—speaking anxiety, self-confidence, and willingness to communicate—were operationalized as observable behavioural shifts during unscripted and scripted oral interactions. Recent empirical literature underscores that conversational AI chatbots can significantly mitigate foreign language speaking anxiety by providing a judgment-free zone for preliminary linguistic experimentation (Wang et al., 2024). However, to assess whether this technological intervention translates into genuine cognitive and psychological growth rather

than mere algorithmic dependence, the research design incorporated a multiphase data collection strategy. This strategy deliberately transitioned students from baseline autonomous speaking to GenAI-assisted speaking, and finally back to unassisted human-evaluated speaking.

3.2. Participants and Research Context

The participant cohort consisted of an exhaustive sample of 2,380 undergraduate students. These students were enrolled across various academic programs that mandated an English communication course in their first semester, first year in college/university/institute. To account for institutional variations in nomenclature, these courses operate under various titles, including Professional English Communication, General English, Communicative English, and English Communication. The study's duration spanned five semesters, ensuring a wide, longitudinal capture of student data across different academic intakes.

The linguistic demographic of the cohort was highly diverse. Crucially, no student in the sample population spoke English as their native language (L1). The participants represented a broad spectrum of linguistic backgrounds, meaning English functioned strictly as a foreign or second language. Within this demographic, a specific subset of students had previously attended English-medium schools where English served as their primary language of instruction, providing them with advanced baseline exposure compared to their peers who transitioned from regional-language educational mediums.

To manage the extensive participant pool, the 2,380 students were systematically divided into 32 distinct sections across the five semesters under the supervision of the program specific coordinator(s). This structural division has facilitated detailed, localized observation of oral risk-taking behaviours.

Based on baseline diagnostic evaluations conducted during the initial phase of the research, the student population was stratified into three distinct performance categories. Each data point from this stratification has been correctly mapped to an exact percentage to maximize the precision of the research engagement:

- I. **Category 1: High-Proficiency Speakers (5.67% of the total population):** A total of exactly 135 students has demonstrated high levels of speaking confidence, utilizing correct grammar, accurate pronunciation, and robust vocabulary. Interestingly, this high-performing demographic was geographically isolated within the cohort, appearing in only 11 of the 32 sections. Within these 11 sections, the distribution of Category 1 students ranged from 7 – 17 per section.
- II. **Category 2: Moderate-to-Low Proficiency Speakers (10.29% of the total population):** A total of 245 students exhibited relatively poor speaking performance characterized by low self-confidence, restricted lexical resources (i.e., poor vocabulary), and significant syntactic and grammatical errors. This category was distributed across the sections in varying ranges of 4 – 9 students per respective section. While these students struggled, they demonstrated a foundational, albeit flawed, attempt at English communication.

- III. **Category 3: Non-Initiative / L1-Reliant Speakers (84.04% of the total population):** The overwhelming majority of the cohort, comprising exactly 2,000 students, has exhibited profound foreign language speaking anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). These students were observed at a volume of more than 50 individuals per section. They have demonstrated absolutely no initiative to speak in English. When prompted, this demographic consistently has defaulted to their native languages, explicitly stating, “Can we use our native language? We cannot speak English”. This massive demographic represents the critical target for the GenAI pedagogical intervention, as their willingness to communicate was virtually non-existent.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data collection was structured into three distinct, progressive stages designed to isolate the impact of GenAI on the learners’ psychological readiness and linguistic output.

3.3.1. Stage 1: Baseline Oral Assessment and Categorization

At the initial stage of data collection, researchers sought to establish the baseline self-confidence and willingness to communicate of the students prior to any technological intervention. The students were randomly selected and subjected to a progressively complex series of conversational prompts.

The first tier of questioning focused on low-cognitive-load, self-referential introductory prompts. Students were interchangeably asked to answer in English:

- “Could you please introduce yourself...?”
- “Could you please tell us about yourself...?”
- “How would you describe yourself...?”

The second tier of questioning escalated the cognitive demand, requiring students to articulate abstract concepts such as future aspirations and academic motivations. These interchangeable prompts included:

- “What are your expectations from this course...?”
- “What is your aim...?”
- “Where do you want to see yourself in the next 3 years...?”

The third tier of Stage 1 had introduced a complex pedagogical instrument: simulated roleplay. Operationalizing MacIntyre et al. (1998)’s model of Willingness to Communicate, researchers had assigned students the role of an interviewer, while another peer acted as the interviewee. To simulate authentic, high-stakes communicative environments, students were assigned distinct professional personas. These included corporate roles (a manager, a financial officer, a human resource representative), service and hospitality roles (a receptionist, a restaurant employee handling customers online, offline, and over phone calls), and civic roles (a helper or guide in a hospital or office).

It was during this rigorous three-tier Stage 1 assessment that the stark categorization of the 2,380 students (into the 5.67% high performers, 10.29% struggling performers, and 84.04% non-participants) became empirically evident. The Category 1 students had performed these complex roleplays brilliantly, whereas the Category 2 and Category 3 students had succumbed to linguistic anxiety and either performed poorly or withdrew entirely.

3.3.2. Stage 2: GenAI-Supported Intervention

The second stage of data collection had deliberately targeted the 2,245 students comprising Category 2 (10.29%) and Category 3 (84.04%). Recognizing the paralyzing effect of peer and instructor evaluation on these cohorts, the methodology introduced GenAI as a non-judgmental scaffolding tool. The students were explicitly instructed and guided on how to utilize generative AI platforms to draft short speeches and generate interviewer-style questions tailored to the exact roleplay prompts utilized in Stage 1.

The results of this intervention were immediate but complex. With the algorithmic support of GenAI, both the second and third-category students had exhibited a sudden and marked increase in their speaking ability and willingness to take oral risks. The affective filter—the psychological barrier that prevents language acquisition—was visibly lowered, corroborating findings by Zhang et al. (2024) regarding AI's impact on communicative enjoyment and anxiety reduction.

However, critical qualitative data was observed during this stage regarding the limitations of technological reliance. Despite reading directly from AI-generated scripts, these students exhibited severe phonological and grammatical deficiencies. Some of the prominent issues included chronic mispronunciation, poor prosody, complete omission of crucial grammatical elements, and conversely, “overreading” of grammatical elements (e.g., vocalizing punctuation or unnatural syntactic markers). During this stage, the Category 1 students were observed continuing to perform brilliantly, maintaining their high baseline established in Stage 1 without needing algorithmic assistance.

3.3.3. Stage 3: Unassisted Post-Intervention Assessment

To measure the true internalization of self-confidence and the transferability of GenAI-supported practice to authentic human communication, Stage 3 has explicitly prohibited the use of GenAI or any written documentation. The students were required to perform oral tasks relying solely on their intrinsic cognitive and linguistic resources.

The data collected in this final stage has revealed a profound psychological shift in the middle and lower-category students. While their linguistic output consisted of “broken English”, has laden with incorrect pronunciation and persistent grammatical errors, their speaking confidence had relatively improved. The crippling speaking anxiety observed in Stage 1 (where 84.04% of students refused to speak) was largely mitigated. They have demonstrated a newfound willingness to initiate communication, even when aware of their linguistic deficits.

Crucially, when human instructors had pointed out their grammatical and phonological mistakes during this stage, the students had exhibited high receptivity to corrective feedback. They had openly accepted their mistakes and explicitly articulated a psychological realization:

they acknowledged that if they receive consistent, structured training of this nature, their oral performances will improve. This realization marks a transition from a fixed mindset of linguistic inability to a growth mindset characterized by academic agency.

3.4. The Synergy of GenAI and Human Instruction

The empirical data extracted from these three stages necessitates a critical discussion on the methodological framework required for future EFL curricula. The data clearly indicates that while GenAI is a powerful catalyst for breaking the initial barriers of speaking anxiety and fostering a willingness to communicate, it is insufficient as a standalone educational tool. If relied upon exclusively, it might cause risks reinforcing mispronunciation and superficial linguistic engagement, as evidenced in Stage 2.

Therefore, this research methodology operates on the pedagogical premise that GenAI and human instructors must function synchronously—coming hand in hand to resolve the crisis of EFL speaking anxiety. The GenAI serves the vital function of an untiring, low-pressure conversational partner and content generator, allowing lower-proficiency students to practice without the fear of social embarrassment. It provides the initial scaffold that brings the student to the threshold of verbalization.

However, as the data dictates, a student's performance requires to be justified, judged, and refined by human instructors. Human educators provide the indispensable elements of phonetic correction, pragmatic context, emotional intelligence, and critical evaluation that GenAI currently lacks. This proceeding discussion posits that proper utilization of GenAI within academia can guide thousands of paralyzed learners toward functional English speaking. To achieve this, the course curricula must be systematically improved to integrate GenAI contents for private practice and conceptual underpinning.

This dual-layered approach—technological practice paired with human evaluation—if adopted, the educational system will significantly lower the risks of a severe detriment to the cognitive ability and help psychological improvement of these students. However, over-reliance on AI without human instructional oversight maximizes the possibility to lead to a mechanized illusion of fluency, stripping the learner of the cognitive friction required for deep neural processing and true language acquisition. Hence, the methodology of this study proves that maximizing the potential of the 94.33% of students struggling with EFL speaking requires a highly structured, human-in-the-loop AI integration model.

3.5. Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected across five semesters was subjected to a rigorous mixed-methods analysis. Quantitative data, representing the shifts in the categorization percentages (the movement of students from non-communicative states to active participation), was analyzed using descriptive statistics to map the exact trajectories of the 2,380 participants. The qualitative data, comprising the observational notes on student pronunciation, grammatical accuracy during GenAI reading, and their verbalized realizations during Stage 3 feedback sessions, was analyzed using thematic coding. This triangulated approach ensured that the behavioural metrics of willingness to take oral risks were contextualized by the psychological metrics of

self-confidence and reduced anxiety, providing a comprehensive evaluation of the synergistic pedagogical intervention.

4. Results

The results of this longitudinal, mixed-methods study reveal a complex interplay between GenAI structuring and the psychological dimensions of EFL speaking performance. Initial baseline oral assessments (Stage 1) have empirically confirmed severe foreign language speaking anxiety across the vast majority of the 2,380 undergraduate participants. During unassisted roleplay scenarios, only 5.67% ($N = 135$) of the cohort has demonstrated spontaneous oral risk-taking, accurate pronunciation, and robust grammatical command. Contrariwise, 10.29% ($N = 245$) has exhibited intense hesitation and low self-confidence. Most critically, an overwhelming 84.04% ($N = 2,000$) has demonstrated absolute communicative withdrawal, explicitly refusing to engage in L2 discourse and defaulting to their native language. This avoidance behaviour closely aligns with Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014)' findings on the paralyzing effects of peer-induced linguistic anxiety in traditional classroom settings.

The introduction of GenAI-supported speaking practices (Stage 2) has yielded immediate, statistically significant shifts in the learners' WTC. When they were provided with algorithmic framing to generate conversational scripts, the previously non-communicative Category 3 students have exhibited a near-universal participation rate in the roleplay tasks. The GenAI interface has functioned as an affective buffer, lowering the psychological barriers to speech initiation. However, the qualitative thematic analysis has revealed critical, persistent linguistic deficits. Despite reading directly from AI-generated scripts, these learners have displayed severe phonological inaccuracies, mechanical prosody, and a tendency to inappropriately vocalize syntactic markers. This directly corroborates empirical warnings by Kohnke et al. (2023) regarding the risk of GenAI inducing a superficial illusion of fluency. The data proves that while AI can successfully lower the anxiety rate, it masks underlying morphological and phonological incompetence if they are left unmonitored.

The most crucial psychological outcomes have emerged during Stage 3, where algorithmic support was explicitly prohibited. While the linguistic output of Category 2 and 3 students have predictably regressed to broken English with heavy L1-influenced pronunciation, their underlying psychological disposition had fundamentally transformed. The crippling speaking anxiety observed during the baseline was markedly mitigated. The students have demonstrated a newly sustained willingness to take oral risks, initiating unassisted discourse despite an acute awareness of their grammatical limitations. This indicates that the intervention has successfully cultivated self-efficacy—the learners' belief in their capacity to execute communicative behaviours (Bandura, 1997)—even though their linguistic competence remained underdeveloped. The empirical data suggests that GenAI serves primarily as a psychological catalyst, corroborating findings that AI reduces the affective filter but cannot independently construct complex L2 neural pathways (Zhang et al., 2024).

Furthermore, Stage 3 feedback sessions have highlighted a critical metacognitive awakening among lower-proficiency cohorts. When human instructors have pointed out specific grammatical and phonological errors produced during unassisted speaking, learners

have exhibited unprecedented receptivity. This metacognitive shift from a fixed mindset of linguistic inability to a growth mindset of academic agency is paramount. The qualitative data indicates these students have explicitly recognized GenAI's limitations as a standalone tool. They have acknowledged their mistakes and articulated that algorithmic practice must be coupled with structured human instruction to achieve proficiency. This realization supports the theoretical premise of human-AI symbiosis in language education, proving human pedagogy remains indispensable for providing the pragmatic and phonetic calibration necessary for authentic acquisition (Hwang et al., 2023).

Ultimately, integrating GenAI successfully circumvents the psychological paralysis affecting 94.33% of the student population. However, the evidence establishes that GenAI cannot operate in an instructional vacuum. The cognitive development of middle and lower-proficiency learners depends entirely on a blended model: GenAI provides the low-stakes scaffolding for risk-taking, while human instructors provide the critical judgment and corrective feedback required for genuine linguistic mastery. Without this dual-layered approach, educators risk leaving students in a state of mechanized, inaccurate dependency.

5. Discussion

The empirical findings of this longitudinal investigation necessitate a critical re-evaluation of how language acquisition is mediated in technologically saturated educational environments. While the quantitative trajectory of the study demonstrates that GenAI successfully mitigates communicative paralysis in foreign language learners, interpreting these outcomes strictly through the lens of performance metrics obscures psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic implications. This discussion transcends the immediate behavioural outcomes to examine the deeper epistemological shifts occurring when artificial neural networks intercept human cognitive processes. By analyzing the intersection of speaking anxiety, algorithmic dependence, and pedagogical intervention, this research elucidates the delicate balance required to foster genuine linguistic competence without compromising the learners' innate cognitive agency.

5.1. The Deconstruction of Linguistic Anxiety and the Mediation of Pre-articulated Thought

The baseline data has highlighted a systemic pedagogical failure wherein traditional instructional paradigms inadvertently weaponize peer and instructor evaluation, culminating in widespread phonetic withdrawal among the vast majority of learners. This withdrawal is not merely a refusal to participate; it represents a psychological bottleneck where pre-articulated thought is trapped by the affective filter before it can be successfully translated into material speech (MacIntyre et al., 1998). The introduction of GenAI as an intermediary structuring tool has altered this dynamic. By interacting with a non-sentient, non-judgmental interlocutor, learners have experienced a localized suspension of social risk. The AI functions as a transitional psychological object, providing a digitized zone of proximal development where the cognitive load of simultaneous syntactic formulation and phonological execution was significantly reduced.

However, the psychological relief provided by this intervention requires nuanced theoretical unpacking. The reduction in anxiety observed during the GenAI-supported tasks does not equate to the acquisition of self-efficacy in the traditional sense. Bandura (1997) posits that self-efficacy is rooted in mastery experiences—the authentic, internalized belief that one possesses the capability to execute a task. When learners have utilized GenAI to draft their conversational inputs, the locus of control has temporarily shifted from the human to the machine. The AI assumes the heavy cognitive lifting of lexical selection and syntactic structuring (Rashid et al., 2024). Therefore, the observed increase in the learners' WTC was intrinsically contingent upon algorithmic support. This dynamic reveals a paradoxical reality in contemporary computer-assisted language learning: the technology successfully facilitates the transition of pre-articulated thought into a materialized script, but in doing so, it intercepts the internal neural friction that is fundamental to deep language acquisition (Chang & Zhang, 2018). The learner is freed from the anxiety of composition, but they are simultaneously alienated from the cognitive struggle required to independently forge new linguistic pathways.

5.2. The Erosion of Creative Natural Intelligence and the Risk of Algorithmic Homogenization

The qualitative observations recorded during the GenAI-assisted phase expose the most critical vulnerability of integrating LLMs into EFL curricula: the threat to the learners' cognitive agency. While the technology has provided immediate infrastructure, it simultaneously functioned as an intellectual crutch, bypassing the learners' creative, natural intelligence. In a healthy pedagogical environment, language production is an organic, messy, and highly individualized process. The errors, pauses, and structural circumlocutions a student employs are not merely defects; they are the active manifestation of cognitive agency attempting to map meaning onto a foreign linguistic framework (Ortega, 2019).

When students outsourced their conversational generation to GenAI, this individualized process was overwritten by statistical probability. LLMs operate by predicting the most statistically likely sequence of tokens based on their training data. Accordingly, the language they produce, while grammatically immaculate, is intrinsically standardized and devoid of the learners' authentic voice. This phenomenon introduces a severe risk of algorithmic homogenization within the classroom (Selwyn, 2022). Instead of 2,380 distinct students developing customized communicative strategies tailored to their specific linguistic backgrounds and cognitive architectures, the intervention risks producing a monolithic, algorithmically standardized output.

The consequences of this homogenization extend beyond the classroom. If the cognitive heavy lifting of language generation is consistently delegated to artificial systems, the learner's intrinsic capacity for creative, spontaneous syntactic assembly may atrophy. The brain's neural plasticity relies on the active, unassisted struggle to construct meaning. By providing instantaneous, frictionless solutions, GenAI removes the cognitive dissonance that drives intellectual growth (Sweller, 2020). The students reading flawlessly generated texts with severe phonological errors vividly illustrated this disconnect; they were engaging in mechanical vocalization rather than semantic realization. Their cognitive agency was entirely bypassed, relegated to the role of a passive acoustic transducer for an algorithmic script.

5.3. The Linguistic Imperialism of Large Language Models in L2 Acquisition

Beyond the cognitive implications, the reliance on GenAI in the EFL context introduces urgent sociolinguistic concerns regarding power, representation, and the linguistic imperialism of LLMs. The foundational architecture of current generative AI models is overwhelmingly trained on corpora derived from “WEIRD” demographics (Bender et al., 2021). As a result, the syntactic structures, pragmatic norms, and cultural idioms generated by these models inherently prioritize a specific, hegemonic iteration of the English language.

When diverse EFL learners—none of whom speak English as a native language—utilize these tools to configure their speaking practice, they are not merely receiving grammatical assistance; they are being subtly subjected to a dominant linguistic ideology. The AI does not accommodate the rich, hybrid variations of global Englishes or the localized pragmatic strategies that learners naturally develop. Instead, it enforces a rigid conformity to a standardized, largely Anglo-centric linguistic model. This dynamic acts as a modernized, automated form of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 2024), wherein the technological infrastructure implicitly devalues the learners’ native linguistic intuitions and enforces an external, homogenized standard.

For the students in the moderate to low-proficiency categories, this algorithmic imposition is particularly detrimental. Language acquisition should ideally empower students to articulate their localized realities through a new medium. However, when an LLM pre-fabricates their discourse, it dictates not only *how* they speak but often *what* they speak, embedding Western corporate or social norms into the generated roleplays. The technology, therefore, risks erasing the sociolinguistic diversity of the classroom, replacing the multifaceted identities of the learners with a uniform, algorithmically sanitized communicative persona. Here, educators’ role must focus on critically assessing whether integrating GenAI fosters genuine multilingual competence or simply trains students to mimic the statistical averages of a dominant global corpus (Kramersch, 2009).

5.4. The Illusion of Fluency and the Deficit of Pragmatic Competence

The empirical disconnect between the morphological perfection of the AI-generated scripts and the students’ flawed oral delivery exposes the phenomenon of the “illusion of fluency”. The capacity to read a complex syntactic structure aloud does not correlate with the internalization of that structure. The qualitative data has highlighted that students have frequently mispronounced words, ignored prosody, and artificially vocalized syntactic markers when reading from GenAI outputs. This reveals a fundamental deficit in pragmatic competence—the ability to use language effectively in context to achieve a specific communicative purpose (Taguchi, 2015).

Pragmatic competence cannot be acquired through asynchronous interactions with an algorithm. GenAI can provide the semantic and syntactic building blocks, but it cannot teach the rhythm, intonation, and emotional resonance required for authentic human communication (Bozkurt et al., 2024). The algorithmic architecture has effectively masked the learners’ underlying incompetence, creating a deceptive veneer of proficiency that collapsed immediately when the technological support was removed in the final phase of the study. This

collapse is highly instructive. It demonstrates that while GenAI is a powerful tool for lexical retrieval and structural organization, it possesses zero capacity for sociolinguistic calibration (c.f., Hwang et al., 2023). It cannot read the room, it cannot perceive the emotional state of the human interlocutor, and it cannot adjust its register in real-time based on subtle, non-verbal cues.

Therefore, utilizing GenAI as an isolated pedagogical strategy is not only insufficient; it is potentially regressive. It trains learners to interact with a highly predictable, infinitely patient algorithmic entity, which wholly fails to prepare them for the unpredictable, highly contextual, and emotionally fraught reality of human-to-human interaction (Warschauer, 2023). The anxiety that paralyzes EFL learners is often less about grammatical perfection and more about the fear of social rupture—the fear of failing to navigate the complex, unscripted pragmatics of a live conversation. The GenAI circumvents this social reality rather than preparing the learner to navigate it.

5.5. The Epistemological Mandate for Human-Centric Pedagogical Configuration

The culmination of these findings points to an absolute epistemological mandate: the irreplaceable necessity of the human educator in the loop of technologically assisted language acquisition (Yan, 2025; Abdelhalim et al., 2025). The positive psychological shifts observed during the final, unassisted phase of the research were not merely the residual effects of AI practice; they were explicitly catalyzed by the learners' interactions with human instructors. When the students have presented their flawed, unassisted speech and received targeted, empathetic correction, they have experienced a metacognitive awakening. They have recognized the boundaries of their algorithmic reliance and actively sought the localized, contextualized expertise that only a human could provide.

This dynamic reinstates the human educators as the essential anchors against algorithmic drift. While GenAI can optimize the initial stages of vocabulary acquisition and structural formulation, it lacks the epistemological grounding to judge the *appropriateness* of a communicative act within a specific human context (Holmes et al., 2023). The human instructor does not merely correct mispronunciations; they interpret the intent behind the error. They understand the socio-cultural background of the learner, they recognize the specific interference patterns caused by the learners' native language, and they provide the emotional validation required to transform a mistake into a moment of genuine acquisition.

The proposed pedagogical framework resulting from this research is one of strict, intentional symbiosis. GenAI requires to be relegated to its highly effective, yet epistemologically limited, role as a preparatory support. It should be deployed to dismantle the initial affective barriers, allowing paralyzed learners a private, low-stakes environment to transition their pre-articulated thoughts into initial drafts. However, this digitized practice requires strict bound and systematically integrated into a curriculum where the ultimate evaluation, pragmatic calibration, and emotional validation are exclusively the domain of the human instructor (Wang, 2026).

Failing to mandate this human oversight, and logistical temptations of fully automated language instruction might affect the cognitive development of learners severely. The resulting generation of EFL students may possess the ability to generate texts fast via LLMs, but they

will suffer a significant deficit in their creativity using their natural intelligence, their pragmatic adaptability, and their authentic communicative agency. The future of language instruction does not lie in the eradication of human friction through algorithmic efficiency, but in the deliberate, pedagogically sound management of that friction by human experts who utilize technology to serve, rather than supersede, the human mind.

6. Conclusion

The advent of GenAI fundamentally destabilizes traditional EFL proficiency metrics. While it effectively neutralizes the affective filters hindering L2 communication, its utility remains strictly preparatory. The empirical trajectory of 2,380 learners underscores that technological intervention shifts, rather than diminishes, the cognitive struggle of language acquisition. Consequently, communicative competence must be recalibrated. As algorithms democratize mechanical accuracy, L2 pedagogy must pivot toward cultivating “evaluative linguistic literacy” and “pragmatic resilience” (Hockly, 2023). Learners must be trained to critically audit, curate, and humanize AI outputs, shifting assessment rubrics from rote grammatical replication to sociolinguistic nuance and emotional intelligence (Godwin-Jones, 2023). Administratively, this paradigm refutes the organizational logic of leveraging GenAI to scale class sizes or reduce human faculty. Without context-aware instructors, students regress into automated mimicry devoid of pragmatic substance. Integrating AI elevates the educator from a primary linguistic input source to a sophisticated facilitator of critical discourse, demanding strategic reinvestment in faculty development (Moorhouse et al., 2023). Ethically, language education must preserve “productive friction”. Because GenAI is architecturally designed to eradicate this friction, its passive adoption risks fostering cognitive atrophy and an inability to sustain empathetic interpersonal connection (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001). Instructors must design environments where technological support is strategically withdrawn, forcing authentic, unscripted human interaction to maintain neural plasticity. Ultimately, resolving EFL speaking anxiety relies on the perfection of pedagogical application, not the artificial intelligence itself. By anchoring generative technologies within an instructor-guided, humanistic framework, applied linguistics can harness artificial neural networks to unlock—rather than replace—the creative, natural intelligence of global learners.

7. Limitations of the Study

Despite a robust longitudinal design involving 2,380 students, this study presents three key limitations. First, the five-semester timeframe captures only the transitional phase of GenAI adoption. This period remains insufficient to determine the long-term psycholinguistic consequences of algorithmic reliance, specifically whether it permanently alters L2 syntactic processing. Second, treating participants as a monolithic cohort of non-native speakers obscures cross-linguistic transfer effects, failing to account for how L1 typological proximity to English influences algorithmic homogenization across diverse language families. Finally, the study operationalizes GenAI as a static intervention limited to text and rudimentary voice features. As Large Language Models rapidly evolve into multimodal systems capable of

simulating prosodic empathy, current findings regarding the “illusion of fluency” and lack of sociolinguistic calibration may lose temporal generalizability.

8. Future Scope

Future research on GenAI in language acquisition must prioritize longitudinal tracking of cognitive agency. Neuroimaging could determine if chronic GenAI reliance permanently modifies neural pathways responsible for unassisted L2 generation. Additionally, methodologies must adopt a cross-linguistic approach to evaluate whether WEIRD-trained LLM exert algorithmic homogenization across different L1 families. Furthermore, as GenAI transitions to real-time, emotionally responsive agents, experiments must test how AI mimicking human prosody affects a learner’s pragmatic resilience, distinguishing genuine sociolinguistic acquisition from technological mimicry. Finally, applied pedagogical research must design new assessment rubrics to evaluate “evaluative linguistic literacy”—the learner’s ability to critically curate, correct, and humanize AI discourse. By shifting focus to how learners critically supervise algorithmic systems, the academic community can establish resilient, ethically grounded methodologies for global language instruction.

End Note

* Self-Determination Theory (SDT), originally developed by psychologists Edward L. Deci and Richard M. Ryan, is a macro-theory of human motivation and personality. It posits that individuals are driven by three universal, innate psychological needs: autonomy (the need to feel in control of one’s own behaviours and goals), competence (the need to feel effective, capable, and mastery over tasks), and relatedness (the need to feel a sense of belonging and meaningful connection to others). SDT suggests that when environments support these three needs, individuals experience higher psychological well-being and are primarily driven by intrinsic motivation (doing an activity for its inherent satisfaction) rather than extrinsic rewards (see Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985), *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*).

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Teacher Immediacy and Enthusiasm in Relation to Learner Engagement: Exploring Motivation and Emotion in the Omani EFL Classroom

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between teacher immediacy, enthusiasm, and learner engagement within the context of an Omani English as a Foreign Language (EFL) foundation programme. Drawing on principles of Positive Psychology, the study responds to increasing scholarly attention to the role of emotions in second language learning and the importance of creating emotionally supportive classroom environments that promote Foreign Language Enjoyment (Wu & Kabilan, 2025). Previous research has highlighted the influence of enjoyment, anxiety, and boredom on language learning experiences (Zawodniak & Kruk, 2019), yet the role of teacher emotional expression and interpersonal behaviour in shaping these experiences remains underexplored in Gulf classroom contexts.

This pilot study adopts a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design to investigate how teacher immediacy and enthusiasm relate to learners' emotional engagement, motivation, and classroom participation. Data were collected over one academic semester from two General English Level 1 (GE1) foundation classes at a government university in Oman. Student perceptions were gathered through a structured Likert-scale survey, while reflective teacher journal entries documented classroom interaction patterns, emotional climate, and student responses to enthusiastic and immediate teaching behaviours.

Findings suggest that students experienced greater interest, enjoyment, and attentiveness during lessons in which the teacher displayed visible enthusiasm, humour, expressive communication, and supportive interpersonal interaction. Reflective observations further indicate that teacher non-verbal behaviours, encouragement, and relational engagement contributed to positive classroom atmosphere and increased learner participation. The study contributes to emerging research on affective dimensions of language learning in the Gulf region by highlighting the potential pedagogical value of teacher immediacy and enthusiasm in shaping emotionally supportive learning environments for foundation-level EFL students.

Keywords: Teacher enthusiasm, Teacher immediacy, Learner engagement, EFL classrooms, Positive Psychology, Student motivation, Classroom emotions, Foreign Language Enjoyment, Teacher–student interaction, Omani EFL context

Introduction

The emotional dimension of language learning has received increasing attention within contemporary Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research, particularly through the lens of Positive Psychology. Early SLA studies tended to focus primarily on negative affective variables such as anxiety, stress, and communication apprehension. More recent scholarship,

however, emphasises the constructive role of positive emotional experiences in supporting engagement, motivation, and sustained learning. Positive Psychology highlights how emotions such as enjoyment, curiosity, and interest broaden learners' cognitive and psychological resources, enabling them to participate more confidently and persist in challenging learning situations.

Within the context of foreign language learning, positive classroom emotions have been shown to play a significant role in shaping learner engagement. Oladrostam et al. (2022) argue that emotional experiences such as enjoyment and classroom happiness contribute to increased motivation and more active learner participation. Their research highlights that positive emotional classroom climates are often influenced by teacher behaviours, including warmth, humour, encouragement, and enthusiasm. From this perspective, the teacher's emotional presence becomes a central element in shaping the classroom learning environment.

The importance of interpersonal relationships within the EFL classroom further reinforces this view. Derakhshan et al. (2023) emphasise that successful language learning outcomes are strongly influenced by the quality of teacher–student relationships. Effective instruction therefore requires not only linguistic competence but also emotional awareness and interpersonal sensitivity on the part of the teacher. When learners perceive their teacher as supportive, approachable, and responsive, they are more likely to engage actively with classroom activities and participate in communicative interaction.

Maintaining learner attention and motivation has become increasingly complex within contemporary educational contexts. Many learners are accustomed to technology-rich environments and rapid forms of interaction, which can make sustained classroom focus more challenging. In response, researchers have highlighted the importance of teaching practices that actively capture and maintain learner attention. One such factor is teacher immediacy, which refers to verbal and non-verbal behaviours that reduce psychological distance between teachers and students (Shoaib, 2023). These behaviours include eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, vocal variation, movement around the classroom, and supportive verbal interaction. When teachers display immediacy behaviours, learners often perceive the classroom as more emotionally comfortable and are more willing to participate.

Teacher enthusiasm is closely related to immediacy and can be understood as one of the most visible expressions of interpersonal engagement in teaching. Enthusiastic teaching behaviours, including energetic delivery, expressive communication, humour, and positive tone, help create an atmosphere in which students feel encouraged to interact and participate. From a Positive Psychology perspective, such emotionally supportive behaviours can contribute to learner enjoyment and motivation, Oladrostam et al. (2022). Examining teacher enthusiasm alongside immediacy therefore provides a useful framework for understanding how teacher behaviour may influence learners' emotional experiences within the classroom.

Cultural context also plays an important role in shaping classroom interaction. In many Arab educational settings, including Oman and the wider Gulf region, teacher–student relationships are influenced by cultural norms that emphasise respect for authority and hierarchical structures within the classroom. Al Harthi & Al Khulufi (2025) note that teachers are often perceived as figures of authority, which can influence patterns of classroom communication and student participation. In high power-distance educational cultures, learners

may be less accustomed to informal interaction with teachers or spontaneous participation in classroom discussions.

Research focusing specifically on the Omani educational context also highlights the influence of social and affective factors on learner engagement. Al Amrani (2019) suggests that contextual variables, including cultural expectations and language anxiety, can influence students' willingness to communicate in English. Similarly, Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2015) observe that perceptions of effective teaching within Oman are shaped by cultural understandings of respect, interpersonal relationships, and classroom authority. These contextual factors suggest that emotionally supportive teacher behaviours may play an especially important role in encouraging participation and engagement in Omani EFL classrooms.

Despite increasing recognition of the importance of affective factors in language learning, relatively limited research has explored how teacher enthusiasm and immediacy influence emotional engagement in Gulf EFL contexts. Foundation-level English programmes in Oman often include learners with varying levels of language proficiency and confidence, making emotional engagement and classroom atmosphere particularly relevant to learning outcomes. Understanding how teacher interpersonal behaviour shapes these experiences may therefore provide valuable insight for language educators working in similar contexts.

Research Questions

In response to these considerations, the present study investigates the relationship between teacher enthusiasm, immediacy, and learner engagement in an Omani EFL foundation classroom. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do foundation-level EFL students perceive teacher enthusiasm and immediacy within the Omani classroom context?
2. To what extent do students associate teacher enthusiasm and immediacy with their emotional engagement, motivation, and classroom participation?
3. How are teacher enthusiasm and immediacy enacted in classroom practice over the course of one academic semester?

Literature Review

Positive Emotions and Engagement in EFL Learning

In recent years, research in Second Language Acquisition has increasingly emphasised the role of emotions in shaping learners' engagement and motivation. This shift has been strongly influenced by the emergence of Positive Psychology within language education, which focuses on understanding how positive emotional experiences support effective learning processes. Rather than concentrating solely on negative emotional states such as anxiety and frustration, Positive Psychology encourages educators to explore how emotions such as enjoyment, curiosity, and interest contribute to sustained learner engagement and language development. Oladrostam et al. (2022) highlight the importance of positive emotional experiences within the EFL classroom, arguing that emotions such as enjoyment and classroom happiness play a

significant role in fostering motivation and participation. Their work suggests that when learners experience positive emotions during language learning, they are more likely to remain attentive, take risks in communication, and maintain persistence in challenging learning situations. In this sense, emotional experiences become closely intertwined with learners' cognitive engagement and willingness to participate.

Similarly, Shi & Liu (2025) emphasise that positive emotions help learners develop cognitive and psychological resources that facilitate second language acquisition. According to their findings, positive emotional states broaden learners' attention and support deeper engagement with learning tasks. In contrast, negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, and frustration tend to narrow learners' attentional focus and may create barriers to effective learning. These findings suggest that emotional balance within the classroom environment is essential for maintaining learner motivation and sustained engagement.

Within EFL contexts, teachers play a particularly important role in shaping these emotional experiences. Positive emotional climates are often influenced by teachers' interpersonal behaviours, teaching style, and overall classroom presence. Oladrostam et al. (2022) note that teacher warmth, humour, encouragement, and enthusiasm can significantly influence how learners perceive the classroom environment. When teachers demonstrate genuine interest in their students and display positive emotional energy during lessons, learners are more likely to feel comfortable participating and interacting in the target language.

Teacher enthusiasm has therefore been increasingly recognised as an important interpersonal teaching behaviour. Al Ghambi & Khadawardi (2024) conceptualise teacher enthusiasm as consisting of two interconnected dimensions: experienced enthusiasm and displayed enthusiasm. Experienced enthusiasm refers to the emotional energy teachers feel while teaching and interacting with students, whereas displayed enthusiasm refers to the outward behavioural expressions of that energy. These expressions may include vocal variation, expressive gestures, facial expressions, classroom movement, and animated delivery. Together, these behaviours communicate positive emotional engagement and help create a more dynamic learning environment.

From this perspective, enthusiasm is not simply a personality trait but also a pedagogical behaviour that can influence learners' emotional experiences. When teachers display enthusiasm during instruction, they communicate interest and excitement about the subject matter, which may encourage learners to adopt a more positive attitude towards the learning process.

Teacher Immediacy, Enthusiasm, and Learner Engagement

Closely related to teacher enthusiasm is the concept of teacher immediacy, which refers to behaviours that reduce psychological and emotional distance between teachers and students. Teacher immediacy includes both verbal and non-verbal behaviours that promote interpersonal closeness and create a more supportive classroom atmosphere.

Hu and Wang (2023) describe teacher immediacy as encompassing behaviours such as eye contact, facial expressions, gestures, movement within the classroom, and encouraging verbal interaction. These behaviours signal approachability and relational openness, helping learners feel more comfortable interacting with the teacher. Their research suggests that

immediacy behaviours contribute to a supportive emotional climate that reduces anxiety and increases students' willingness to communicate in the target language.

Teacher immediacy has also been linked to greater learner engagement and participation. When students perceive their teacher as approachable and supportive, they are more likely to ask questions, contribute to classroom discussions, and participate actively in learning activities. Hu and Wang (2023) further suggest that immediacy behaviours enhance students' attention and focus, as learners feel more psychologically connected to the teacher and the learning process.

Teacher enthusiasm often functions as a visible expression of immediacy. Enthusiastic teaching behaviours, including expressive tone, energetic delivery, humour, and interactive communication, can strengthen the sense of interpersonal connection within the classroom. Al Ghambi and Khadawardi (2024) identify teacher enthusiasm as one of the most influential factors affecting student engagement. Their research highlights how variation in vocal tone, movement around the classroom, and the use of real-life examples can make lessons more engaging and meaningful for learners.

Similarly, Yuan (2024) emphasises that expressive and clear teacher communication contributes to stronger teacher-student interaction and increased learner participation. According to this research, teacher immediacy behaviours not only enhance emotional connection but also help shape the overall classroom environment. Teachers who demonstrate empathy, respect, and attentiveness create learning conditions in which students feel supported both emotionally and academically. This sense of belonging within the classroom can significantly influence learners' willingness to engage with learning tasks.

The relationship between teacher enthusiasm and immediacy therefore highlights the importance of interpersonal teaching behaviours in shaping learner engagement. When teachers combine expressive communication with supportive interaction, they create learning environments that encourage participation and sustained attention.

Teacher Behaviour, Attitude, and Boredom in the EFL Classroom

Another important affective factor influencing learner engagement is classroom boredom. Boredom has been identified as a common challenge in language learning contexts, particularly when instructional methods lack variation or emotional engagement. Zawodniak & Kruk (2019) argue that boredom in the language classroom is closely linked to teacher behaviour and instructional delivery rather than solely to learner motivation.

Their research suggests that monotonous teaching styles, limited emotional expression, and repetitive instructional patterns can contribute to disengagement and reduced learner attention. When learners perceive classroom activities as predictable or emotionally uninteresting, they may experience decreased motivation and reduced willingness to participate.

Conversely, responsive and emotionally expressive teaching behaviours can help reduce boredom and sustain learner interest. Teachers who incorporate humour, variation in tone, expressive gestures, and interactive communication create more stimulating learning environments. These behaviours help maintain learners' attention and encourage more active engagement with lesson content.

Teacher enthusiasm therefore plays an important role in mitigating boredom. Al Ghambi & Khadawardi (2024) highlight how enthusiastic teaching behaviours, including animated delivery, real-world examples, and personalised interaction, can enhance learner involvement and participation. Students who experience engaging lessons are more likely to remain focused and develop stronger emotional connections to the learning process.

Emotional Transmission and the Teacher–Learner Relationship

The relationship between teacher emotion and learner engagement can also be understood through the concept of emotional contagion, which suggests that emotional states can be transmitted between individuals through observation and interaction. Shi & Liu (2025) note that emotional experiences within classroom settings are often socially mediated, meaning that teachers' emotional expressions may influence learners' emotional responses.

When teachers display positive emotions such as enthusiasm, encouragement, and humour, learners may respond with similar emotional reactions. These emotional exchanges contribute to the overall classroom atmosphere and can influence levels of motivation and participation. In this way, teacher emotional expression may shape learners' attitudes towards both the subject matter and the learning environment.

Al Ghambi & Khadawardi (2024) similarly suggest that teacher enthusiasm can evoke comparable emotional responses among learners. However, they also caution that excessive or exaggerated expressions of enthusiasm may be perceived as inauthentic, particularly in cultural contexts where emotional expression is typically more restrained. These findings highlight the importance of maintaining culturally appropriate and balanced expressions of enthusiasm within classroom interaction.

In addition to emotional transmission, the quality of the teacher–student relationship also influences learner engagement. Al Harthi & Al Khulufi (2025) discuss the concept of referent power, which emerges from supportive and trusting teacher/student relationships. When students feel respected, valued, and emotionally supported by their teacher, they are more likely to engage actively in classroom learning. Referent power allows teachers to influence learners through relational trust rather than authority alone.

These interpersonal dynamics may be particularly relevant within Arab educational contexts. In Oman and other Gulf countries, classroom interaction is often shaped by cultural norms that emphasise respect for authority and hierarchical teacher/student relationships. As a result, learners may initially feel hesitant to participate openly in communicative classroom activities. Teacher behaviours that reduce psychological distance, such as immediacy and enthusiasm, may therefore play an important role in encouraging participation and creating emotionally supportive learning environments.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design to explore the relationship between teacher immediacy, enthusiasm, and learner engagement within an Omani EFL

classroom. A mixed-methods approach was considered appropriate as it allowed for the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions alongside observed classroom practices. While the survey data offered measurable insight into students' perceptions of engagement and motivation, the reflective journal provided contextual depth by capturing real-time classroom interactions, emotional climate, and behavioural patterns over an extended period. The study was conducted as a pilot classroom-based investigation, aiming to generate exploratory insights rather than establish causal relationships. This approach aligns with practitioner research in language education, where the focus is on understanding classroom dynamics within specific contexts.

Participants

Participants consisted of 40 foundation-level students enrolled in two General English Level 1 (GE1) classes at a government higher education institution in Oman. The students were typically aged between 17 and 19 years and represented a range of English language proficiency levels within the foundation programme.

These classes were selected based on accessibility, as they were taught by the researcher. Although this sampling method reflects a convenience sample, it also enabled sustained observation and detailed reflective documentation over the course of the semester. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and responses were collected anonymously to ensure confidentiality and reduce response bias.

Data Collection

Data were collected over one academic semester using two complementary instruments:

Student Survey

A structured questionnaire was administered towards the end of the semester to capture students' perceptions of teacher enthusiasm, immediacy, and classroom engagement over the duration of the course. The survey consisted of Likert-scale items measuring agreement with statements related to lesson interest, motivation, focus, participation, and boredom reduction. To ensure accessibility and comprehension, the questionnaire was presented in both English and Arabic. A four-point Likert scale (agree, strongly agree, disagree, strongly disagree) was used to encourage clear responses and reduce neutrality. The survey provided quantifiable data reflecting students' overall perceptions of how teacher behaviours influenced their engagement across the semester.

Reflective Teacher Journal

In addition to the survey, a reflective teaching journal was maintained throughout the semester. The journal documented classroom observations, student reactions, emotional shifts, and

interactional moments where teacher enthusiasm and immediacy appeared to influence learner engagement.

Entries focused on:

- classroom atmosphere
- student participation patterns
- responses to humour, encouragement, and expressive teaching
- interaction with quieter or disengaged learners

The journal served as a qualitative data source, allowing for deeper insight into how teacher behaviours were enacted in practice and how students responded in real classroom contexts. It also enabled the identification of recurring patterns across different lessons.

Data Analysis

Survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics, with responses presented as percentage distributions to identify general trends in student perceptions. This approach allowed for clear representation of how students collectively responded to items related to enthusiasm, motivation, focus, and boredom.

Reflective journal entries were analysed thematically. Recurring patterns were identified and organised into key themes, including:

- positive emotions and engagement
- teacher immediacy and participation
- boredom reduction
- emotional interaction and classroom climate

The combination of quantitative and qualitative data enabled triangulation, strengthening the credibility of the findings by linking student reported perceptions with observed classroom behaviour. While the analysis does not claim causality, it provides a coherent account of how teacher enthusiasm and immediacy were associated with learner engagement within this specific classroom context.

Findings

The survey results indicate consistently high levels of agreement across all items related to teacher enthusiasm, engagement, and motivation. Table 1 summarises students' responses, showing the distribution of agreement levels for each statement. Overall, the findings demonstrate strong positive perceptions of teacher enthusiasm and its influence on learner engagement, with total agreement ranging from 79% to 95% across items.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of Teacher Enthusiasm and Engagement (N = 40)

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Agreement
Lesson more interesting	9 (23%)	28 (72%)	2 (5%)	0 (0%)	95%
Helped me stay focused	6 (15%)	25 (64%)	8 (21%)	0 (0%)	79%
Enjoy lessons more	16 (41%)	21 (54%)	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	95%
Motivates me to study	16 (41%)	21 (54%)	2 (5%)	0 (0%)	95%
Feel more interested	14 (36%)	22 (56%)	3 (8%)	0 (0%)	92%
Encourages participation	12 (31%)	22 (56%)	5 (13%)	0 (0%)	87%
Enjoy English lessons	11 (28%)	25 (64%)	3 (8%)	0 (0%)	92%
Less boring	11 (28%)	26 (67%)	1 (3%)	1 (2%)	95%

Positive Emotions and Engagement in EFL Learning

Student survey responses indicate a strong perceived relationship between teacher enthusiasm and learners' emotional engagement. A majority of students reported that lessons were more interesting when the teacher displayed enthusiasm, with 72% agreeing and 23% strongly agreeing that teacher enthusiasm made the lesson more engaging. Similarly, 54% agreed and 41% strongly agreed that the teacher's positive attitude motivated them to study English.

These responses suggest that visible expressions of enthusiasm and positive energy were associated with increased learner interest and motivation. Students appeared to value not only the content of the lesson but also the manner in which it was delivered.

Reflective journal entries provide further insight into these perceptions. Lessons characterised by high teacher energy, humour, and expressive delivery were consistently described as having a more positive and relaxed classroom atmosphere. Students were observed smiling, laughing, and engaging more actively with lesson activities during such sessions.

One notable example involved the introduction of a narrative writing task. The teacher expressed personal enthusiasm for the topic, explaining that it was a favourite area of teaching as it allowed insight into students' personal experiences and stories. This disclosure was followed by visible student reactions, including smiling and increased attentiveness. Students appeared to respond positively to the idea that their personal experiences were valued,

suggesting that teacher enthusiasm may also influence how learners perceive the relevance and purpose of classroom tasks.

Teacher Immediacy, Enthusiasm, and Learner Engagement

Survey findings further highlight the role of teacher immediacy and encouragement in supporting learner focus and participation. 64% of students agreed and 15% strongly agreed that the teacher's energy and attitude helped them stay focused during lessons. In addition, 56% agreed and 31% strongly agreed that teacher encouragement made them more willing to participate in class activities.

These responses suggest that teacher enthusiasm was not perceived solely as an affective quality but also as a factor contributing to cognitive engagement and sustained attention.

Reflective journal data illustrate how these behaviours were enacted in classroom practice. The teacher frequently used non-verbal immediacy behaviours, including smiling, eye contact, thumbs-up gestures to check understanding, and varied vocal tone. These behaviours were often reciprocated by students through smiles, gestures, and attentive engagement, indicating a shared interactional dynamic.

The teacher also made deliberate efforts to reduce psychological distance by arriving early to class, engaging in informal conversation, and welcoming students individually. These pre-lesson interactions appeared to ease the transition into learning, helping students feel more relaxed and prepared to engage with lesson tasks.

Humour was also used as a strategy to support engagement. For example, when introducing grammar related to narrative writing, the teacher jokingly suggested that students were "super excited" to learn past simple forms. This comment was met with collective laughter, which contributed to a lighter classroom atmosphere. Following this interaction, students began engaging with the task with greater willingness, suggesting that humour and enthusiasm may help reduce resistance to challenging or less preferred activities.

Teacher Behaviour, Attitude, and Boredom

Survey data indicate that teacher enthusiasm may also influence learners' perceptions of boredom. A significant proportion of students (67% agree and 28% strongly agree) reported that the teacher's enthusiasm made learning English less boring. Only a small percentage of students expressed disagreement across items related to interest and engagement, suggesting generally positive perceptions of classroom experience.

Reflective journal entries provide detailed insight into how teacher behaviour influenced student engagement during potentially monotonous tasks. Writing activities, in particular, were often initially met with reluctance. However, the use of humour, expressive communication, and encouragement appeared to shift student responses.

In one instance, a student who was not engaging with the assigned writing task was instead drawing in his notebook. Upon closer observation, the teacher noted that the student had drawn a detailed image of a scorpion. Rather than addressing the behaviour as off-task, the teacher expressed genuine interest in the student's drawing and initiated a conversation about

his artistic abilities and interests. The student responded positively, becoming more communicative and engaged in interaction. This moment marked a shift from disengagement to participation.

Similar patterns were observed with quieter or less confident students. The teacher noted that learners who were typically withdrawn responded more positively when approached with friendliness, encouragement, and personalised interaction. These students appeared more willing to engage when they felt supported rather than corrected or criticised. These observations suggest that teacher attitude and responsiveness may play a role in mitigating boredom and encouraging re-engagement during lessons.

Emotional Transmission and the Teacher/Learner Relationship

Across both data sources, patterns suggest the presence of a reciprocal emotional relationship between teacher and learners. Students frequently responded to teacher behaviours such as smiling, humour, and expressive gestures with similar emotional reactions, including laughter, smiles, and increased attentiveness.

Reflective journal entries indicate that teacher mood appeared to influence classroom atmosphere more broadly. Lessons in which the teacher reported feeling enthusiastic and energetic were associated with more fluid interaction, increased participation, and a generally positive classroom environment.

The use of expressive teaching strategies further contributed to this dynamic. For example, when teaching adjectives of feeling, the teacher used exaggerated facial expressions to represent emotions such as happiness, anger, surprise, and fear. These actions generated immediate laughter among students and appeared to capture their attention. Following this interaction, students demonstrated increased focus and engagement with the lesson content.

Culturally relevant interactions also contributed to strengthening teacher/student relationships. In one instance, discussion of Omani food led to enthusiastic student participation, as learners engaged with a topic that was personally meaningful to them. Such moments appeared to enhance relational connection and contribute to a sense of shared experience within the classroom.

The findings also suggest that certain groups of learners, particularly lower-achieving students, required ongoing reassurance and encouragement to remain engaged. The teacher's use of supportive language, gestures, and personalised interaction appeared to contribute to maintaining student focus and participation.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that teacher enthusiasm and immediacy are closely associated with increased learner interest, enjoyment, focus, and classroom participation within the Omani EFL foundation context. These perceptions were reinforced by reflective journal observations, which documented increased participation, more positive classroom moods, and greater willingness to engage during lessons characterised by humour, expressiveness, and interactive teaching practices. Taken together, these findings suggest that teacher behaviour

plays a meaningful role in shaping the emotional climate of the classroom and influencing how learners respond to both the content and structure of lessons.

From a Positive Psychology perspective, these findings support the view that positive emotional experiences contribute to sustained learner engagement and motivation. Oladrostam et al. (2022) emphasise the role of enjoyment and interest in promoting active participation, while Shi and Liu (2025) highlight how positive emotions broaden learners' cognitive and psychological resources. The present study reflects these theoretical perspectives, as students appeared more attentive, participative, and willing to engage when lessons were delivered in an enthusiastic and emotionally supportive manner. At the same time, the findings relating to boredom suggest that teacher enthusiasm may help counteract disengagement, aligning with Zawodniak and Kruk's (2019) identification of monotonous teaching as a key contributor to classroom boredom.

The role of teacher immediacy emerges as particularly significant in understanding how these effects are enacted in practice. Behaviours such as smiling, eye contact, movement around the classroom, humour, and informal interaction appeared to reduce psychological distance between teacher and students, creating a more approachable and supportive learning environment. Hu and Wang (2023) describe immediacy as a mechanism for fostering emotional safety and increasing willingness to communicate, and the present findings reflect this relationship. Students not only reported increased focus and participation but were also observed engaging more actively when the teacher adopted an immediate and expressive teaching style. These behaviours appeared to facilitate interaction by making students feel more comfortable and less hesitant to participate.

Teacher enthusiasm can also be interpreted as a visible manifestation of interpersonal connection within the classroom. Al Ghambi & Khadawardi (2024) conceptualise enthusiasm as both an internal emotional state and an external behavioural expression. In the present study, displayed enthusiasm through expressive tone, humour, gestures, and animated delivery, appeared to influence how students perceived the lesson and their role within it. When the teacher communicated personal interest in lesson topics, such as narrative writing, students responded with increased attentiveness and engagement, suggesting that enthusiasm may enhance learners' perception of task relevance and personal value.

The findings also provide insight into the role of emotional transmission within classroom interaction. Consistent with Shi and Liu's (2025) discussion of emotional contagion, students appeared to mirror the teacher's emotional expressions. Smiles, laughter, and positive gestures were often reciprocated, contributing to a shared emotional atmosphere within the classroom. This reciprocal dynamic suggests that teacher emotional expression does not operate in isolation but interacts with learner responses to shape the overall classroom environment. However, as noted by Al Ghambi & Khadawardi (2024), the expression of enthusiasm must remain balanced and contextually appropriate, as excessive or exaggerated behaviour may be perceived as inauthentic in certain cultural settings.

Cultural context provides an important lens through which these findings can be interpreted. In the Omani educational environment, where teacher/student relationships are often characterised by respect and hierarchical structure Alharthi & Alkhulifi (2025), students may initially be less accustomed to informal interaction or expressive classroom behaviour. The findings of this study suggest that teacher immediacy and enthusiasm may help bridge this

relational distance, creating a more accessible and supportive classroom atmosphere. Through behaviours such as informal conversation, humour, and personalised interaction, the teacher was able to establish rapport and encourage participation, particularly among quieter or less confident learners.

This relational dimension can also be understood through the concept of referent power. When students perceive the teacher as approachable, supportive, and genuinely interested in their learning, influence operates through trust rather than authority. In the present study, interactions such as acknowledging students' personal interests, discussing culturally relevant topics, and responding positively to off-task behaviour appeared to strengthen teacher/student relationships. These behaviours suggest that enthusiasm and immediacy may contribute to the development of referent power, which in turn supports learner engagement and participation. At the same time, the findings highlight that enthusiasm alone is not sufficient to address all learning challenges. The reflective data suggest that some students, particularly those with lower confidence or proficiency, required ongoing reassurance and encouragement to remain engaged. Reflective observations suggest that supportive teacher behaviours, including encouragement and responsiveness, contributed to maintaining participation, particularly among less confident learners. This indicates that enthusiasm must be accompanied by responsiveness and sensitivity to individual learner needs in order to be effective.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that teacher enthusiasm and immediacy function as interconnected interpersonal behaviours that contribute to positive emotional classroom climates. By reducing psychological distance, fostering relational connection, and promoting positive emotional experiences, these behaviours appear to support learner motivation, engagement, and participation within the Omani EFL classroom. While the study is limited in scale, it provides meaningful insight into how emotionally supportive teaching practices can influence learner experiences in foundation-level language programmes.

Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between teacher immediacy, enthusiasm, and learner engagement within an Omani EFL foundation classroom. The findings indicate that students perceived greater interest, enjoyment, and motivation during lessons characterised by visible teacher enthusiasm, expressive communication, and supportive interpersonal interaction. Reflective observations further suggest that behaviours such as humour, non-verbal immediacy, and personalised engagement contributed to a more positive classroom atmosphere and increased learner participation.

From an affective perspective, the study highlights the importance of emotional experience in language learning. Teacher enthusiasm and immediacy appeared to support engagement by reducing psychological distance, fostering a sense of safety and belonging, and encouraging learners to participate more actively. These findings are particularly relevant within the Omani context, where cultural norms surrounding classroom hierarchy may influence student interaction and willingness to communicate.

While the study is limited in scope, it provides preliminary insight into the pedagogical value of teacher emotional presence in EFL classrooms. The results suggest that effective teaching extends beyond content delivery to include the relational and emotional dimensions

of classroom interaction. Developing awareness of how enthusiasm and immediacy influence learner engagement may therefore be beneficial for teachers working in similar contexts. Future research could expand this work by exploring different subject areas, educational levels, and teacher perspectives to further understand how these interpersonal behaviours operate across diverse learning environments.

***Note:** AI tools were used for grammar and language refinement only. All academic content and analysis are the author's own.

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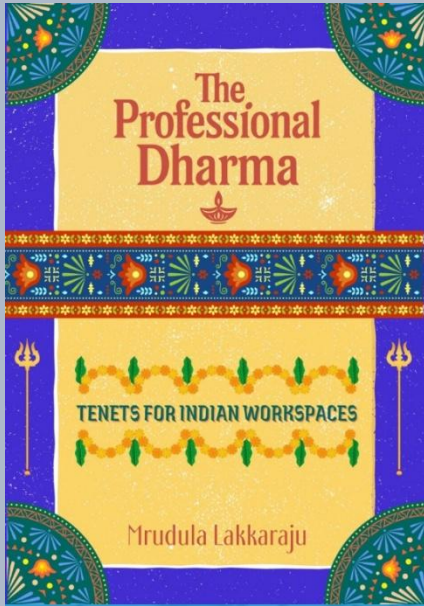
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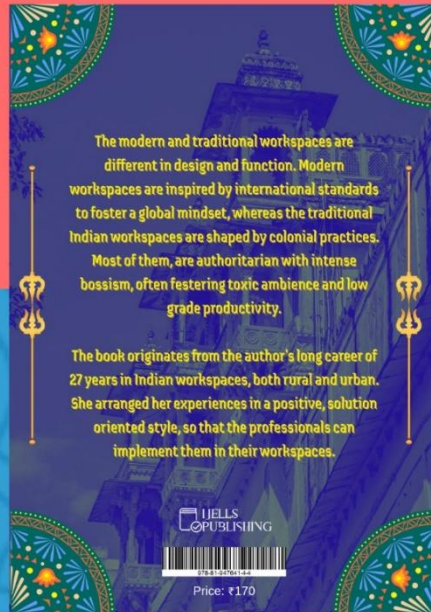
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