

Singularities

a peer reviewed international transdisciplinary biannual research journal

Vol. 10 Issue 2, July 2023

EDITORIAL BOARD

Chief Editor

P. K. Babu., Ph. D

Principal, Al Shifa College of Arts and Science

Kizhattoor, Malappuram Dt. Kerala.

Executive Editor

Aswathi. M. P.

Asst. Professor, Dept of English

KAHM Unity Women's College, Manjeri, Kerala

Editorial Board Members

Professor Bill Ashcroft

Emeritus Professor,

School of English, Media and Performing Arts, UNSW Research,
Sydney, Australia.

Professor Jonathan Culler

Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Cornell University,
USA

Professor Ronald Strickland

Professor of Literature, Michigan Tech University, USA

Professor Udo Klaiber

DHBW Ravensburg, International Business, Germany

Dr. Darshana Samaraweera

Director at National Institute of Education, Sri Lanka

Professor Fabio Parasecoli

Professor of Food Studies, Director of the Food Studies Doctoral Program,
Nutrition and Food Studies Department, Steinhardt, New York University

Dr. Nivedita Menon

Professor, Centre for Comparative Politics & Political Theory,
School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Professor M. V. Narayanan
Fellow at Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla

Professor Muhammed Abdul Sami Siddiqui
Director, Center for Professional Development of Urdu Medium teachers,
Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Hyderabad

Dr. Ashley N.P.
Asst. Professor, St. Stephan's College, Delhi

Dr. N.S. Gundur
Chairman, Department of English studies,
Davengere University, Karnataka

Dr. K. K. Kunhammad
Asst. Professor,
Dept. of Studies in English, Kannur University

Dr. Suresh Frederick
Associate Professor and UG Head
Department of English, Bishop Heber College, Trichy, Tamil Nadu

Dr. Ronita Roy
Associate Professor and Head, Department of English,
Bangabasi Morning College, Kolkata, West Bengal

Mammad. N
Asst. Professor, Dept of English,
Govt. College. Malappuram, Kerala

Prof. Rajendra Chenni,
Professor, Kuvempu University, Shimoga

Dr. Priya. K. Nair
Asst. Professor,
Dept. of English, St. Teresa's College, Ernakulam.

Reena C. M
Assistant Professor
Department of English, KAHM Unity Women's College, Manjeri

Editor's Note

The July 2023 open issue of *Singularities* carries articles on a wide variety of subjects, ranging from Lacanian desires to identities recast. The opening article co-authored by Aiswarya Sureshan Dr. M Raja Vishwanathan argues how the Bride and the Bachelors in *The Large Glass* also known as 'The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even', by the French artist Marcel can be read in terms of the Lacanian theory of desire, analyzing the two principal realms in terms of "phallic jouissance" and "feminine jouissance" which according to Lacan characterizes the masculine and feminine structures. Race and its manifestations linger in the current issue, carrying on from the previous issue of the journal which focussed on the core theme of the previous edition of *Singularities International Conference*. Race gets identified and remarked upon as a poly-cultural marker through the medium of online reaction videos which gained mass popularity during the time of Covid, argues Anjana, in her study. She rejects the notion that of race as a 'global inherited ideology in the twenty-first-century modern world'. The paper argues that it is rather a 'socially and differentially imbibed imaginary construct that alters according to the ideologies and constructs introduced in the interactive social media'. Annliya Shaijan reads Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* from a feminist perspective. The author concludes that in the emerging globalized, polycultural, and transnational community, racial perspective are conceptualized on the basis of comparisons with multicultural aspects. Musing on the death of an Adivasi, Dr. Babu Rajan, grapples with the ideological and historical entanglements while seeks to put it in perspective. Genocides refuse to disappear even while apparently march forward with digital confidence and AI-induced narratives of resilience and reformation. The Uyghur Ethnic Genocide is put under the critical scanner by Basila Maisoon Dr. Hashmina Habeeb through an analysis of two narratives which centers on it: Jewher Ilham's *Because I Have To* and Nury Turkel's *No Escape*. Nation and its narration have been under increased exploration across the world as warp and weave of what constitutes nation and nationalism is

getting recontested and rethought. 'The Nation and its Representation in the Post-Truth Era' relies on Anderson's conceptualization of Nation as an imagined community, to probe into the agency of post-truth in materializing the concept of a nation. Harsha works on how post gendered subjectivities are achieved through posthuman art and the conceptualisation of body through it. Her research, based on the artworks named *The Bond* (2016), *The Long Awaited* (2008), *Teenage Metamorphosis* (2017), *The Dreamer* (2020), *The Young Family* (2002) by Patricia Piccinini, reflects on 'hybridisation of a seamless form' through de-territorializing the body and reformulation of the bodily boundaries.

Space-centred exploration returns with Mirfa's study of Sarita Mandanna's novel *Tiger Hills* in the light of Race and Space. Dislocation/disruption is a seminal domain in the contemporary thought. Reading Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, Mitali Bhattacharya foregrounds the troubling problematics of dislocated/disturbed Selves. Mughda Krishnan's study of the visual representation of the complex narratives of tribal communities, Salini's investigation to locate the 'Desi', or the Indian identity within the vast array of fan fiction written on typically white male characters that belong to the Western canon, Shifna's analysis of *We that are Young*, a revisionist retelling of William Shakespeare's famous tragedy *King Lear* in the form of a novel and Dr. Sindhu's critique of the recast identities in Prayaag Akbar's dystopic novel *Leila*, drawing attention to the effort to create a new racial breed and identity, terrifying in its homogeneity, intolerance and insularity-all these add to the diversity of complexity of thoughts which fill this issue of the journal.

P. K. Babu., Ph. D
Chief Editor

Contents

1. **Aiswarya Sureshan** 9 - 16
Dr. M Raja Vishwanathan
Mapping Lacanian Desire in
Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass*
2. **Anjana. S** 17 - 20
The Differential Multicultural Conceptualization of
Racism Through The Emerging Media of Online
Reaction Videos Trending in The Post-COVID era
3. **Anniya Shaijan** 21 - 24
Melancholy and Race :
A Feministic Reading of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*
4. **Dr. Babu Rajan P. P.** 25 - 31
Adivasi and Us :
Mourning the Death on the Margin
5. **Basila Maisoon** 32 - 38
Dr. Hashmina Habeeb
Diffusing the Boundary through Body Control :
An Analysis of Uyghur Ethnic Genocide
6. **Cerin Babu** 39 - 45
Memory and Narration : The Nation and its
Representation in the Post-Truth Era
7. **Harsha P. R** 46 - 52
Ontological Boundary Fissures
through Biomorphing of the Bodily Images
in Posthuman Art
8. **Mirfa K S** 53 - 60
Voices of Coorg : An Analysis of
Sarita Mandanna's *Tiger Hills*

9. **Mitali Bhattacharya** 61 - 66
Problematics of Dislocation :
A Reading of Select Works
10. **Mugdha G. Krishnan** 67 - 75
Unveiling The Layers of Life : Visual Representation
of Paniya Tribe Through Documentary Genre;
Analysis of “The Slave Genesis”
11. **Salini K.** 76 - 82
Fan Negotiations :
On 'Desifying' the Western Canon
12. **Shafna K. V.** 83 - 91
Into A Postcolonial Canvas : Revisioning King Lear in
Preeti Taneja's Novel *Wethatare Young*
13. **Dr. Sindhu J** 92 - 97
'Us' and 'Them': Recasting Identities
in Prayaag Akbar's Novel *Leila*

Mapping Lacanian Desire in Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass*

Abstract

Marcel Duchamp's magnum opus The Large Glass or The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even is illustrative of mechanical representation of sexuality and eroticism. The mechanical Bride suspended from the upper half of the assemblage remains remote and desirable yet unattainable to the mechanical bachelors occupying the lower domain, thus marking a failure in their erotic fulfillment with the Bride. Being out of reach, the Bride brings about a kind of desire that cannot be satisfied. Thus, she is turned to the desired object of the subjects. The impossibility to consummate the physical union that they desire and thereby attain "jouissance" makes the artwork an embodiment of the Lacanian theory of desire, of the objet petit a. The central objective of the present study is to show how the Bride and the Bachelors in The Large Glass can be read in terms of the Lacanian theory of desire and to analyze the two principal realms in terms of "phallic jouissance" and "feminine jouissance" which according to Lacan characterizes the masculine and feminine structures.

Key words: Duchamp, Lacan, *The Large Glass*, desire, phallic jouissance, feminine jouissance, *objet petit a*

"The object involved, the feminine object, is introduced oddly enough through the door of privation or inaccessibility, whatever the social position of him who functions in the role, the inaccessibility of the object is posited as a point of departure." (qtd. in Homer 107)

The Large Glass also known as *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even* by the French artist Marcel Duchamp is a mechanical representation of love and sexuality that facilitates the possibilities of working out the fantasies without actualizing the erotic fulfillment. Duchamp is one of the most influential artists of the 20th century who revolutionized the field of art by challenging the traditional mediums and pictorial conventions with his Ready-mades. Recognized as one of his groundbreaking works, *The Large Glass* is one such a multimedia art installation which is a compilation of glass, oil, varnish, lead, foil, wire, tubes, molds, sieves, dust etc. It is a highly philosophical work in which the artist has clubbed art, science, love and eroticism together with visual verbal and vocal elements to "portray the complex inner psychic course of unfulfilled sexual

desire via technical metaphors.” (Daniels111)

The artwork consists of two domains, namely, the Bride's domain and the Bachelor Apparatus occupying the upper and lower half of the Glass respectively. Although the work has elicited numerous critical reviews and comprehensive interpretations including Michael Carrouges' and Herald Szeemann's literary interpretation, Octavio Paz's the mythological interpretation, John Golding's alchemical interpretation, Linda Henderson's scientific and technical interpretation etc.; a psychoanalytic approach informed by the theory of Lacan has largely been overlooked.

From a psychoanalytic standpoint, Duchamp's artwork could be interpreted in terms of the Lacanian theory of desire for it manifests a bond with the Other “either by being its object of desire or by having it as the object of desire” (Meriem20). The feminine object in *The Large Glass* designated by the mechanical Bride also referred to as the “Motor-Desire” or “Wasp” or “Hanged Female” is positioned such that it serves as what Lacan calls the *objet petit a*, the unattainable object cause of desire which can be approached but never reached and truly possessed, for to do so would mean to break the spell. The seductive aura of the Bride is sustained due to its inaccessibility and “any subsequent lifting of the veil reveals not the expected sublime thing nostalgically prized by the drives, but as Lacan puts it, an ugly gift of shit” (qtd. in Johnston8). The Large Glass hence serves as a projection of desire, wherein the Bride is an idealized image, an instigator of the bachelors' desire. The notion of desire ultimately leads to *jouissance*, for “to desire or to be desired is aimed at *jouissance*” (Meriem20). The central objective of the present study is to show how the Bride and the bachelors in “The Large Glass” can be read as an embodiment of the Lacanian theory of desire and to analyze the two principal realms, the upper and lower halves in terms of “phallic *jouissance*” and “feminine *jouissance*” which according to Lacan characterizes the masculine and feminine structures.

The concept of desire in Lacanian psychoanalysis is the kernel or the pivotal point around which all other notions revolve including *objet petit a*, *das Ding*, the Other, *jouissance* and male and female subjectivity. The group of mechanical bachelors also referred to as “Nine Malic Moulds” or “Cemetery of Uniforms /Liveries” or “Eros' matrix” constituting the Bachelor Apparatus is separated from the Bride by a glass partition which denies any physical contact between the bachelors and the Bride. As the bachelors look through the obstructed passage of the glass, the figure of the Bride, described by Lebel as “a female figure wearing a hat and veil” appears to them as “an unknown object that in turn reveals itself and hides itself, unfolds itself and winds itself up in the folds and transparencies of the fourth dimension” (Paz 36, 126). Hence the Bride, represented in the upper left half as a black and gray silhouette, is known to the bachelors only in the form of a shadow or an apparition that evades signification Being out of reach, that is, in being beyond the phantasmatic threshold of the glass, the bride sustains the illusion and generates a kind of desire that cannot be satisfied. In other words, the beloved

is turned to the desired object cause of the subject or the *objet petit a*, the unattainable object cause of desire. It is the fundamental inaccessibility of the Bride, the distanced partner that makes her alluring, provocative and desirable to the bachelors. The Real thing, *das Ding* behind the veil of fantasies as Lacan puts it will be a traumatic thing and as Zizek notes, “the Real only appears desirable when coated by a thin layer of fantasizing, by a veil woven by imaginary and symbolic threads and this veil is functional exclusively in so far as the drive object is kept at a certain distance or is somehow out of reach” (qtd. in Johnston). Therefore, desire is inversely proportional to physical distance and the Bride insofar as it remains as a virtual other, keeps the Bachelors' desires alive. It is love not as possession but contemplation of an object that excites the bachelors and brings them alive. Rousseau in his autobiography also makes a similar claim with reference to the woman he called Mama wherein he says that “I only felt the full strength of my attachment to her when she was out of my sight... If I had ever in my life tasted the delights of love even once in their plenitude, I do not imagine that my frail existence would have been sufficient for them. I would have been dead in the act” (qtd. In Derridaxii).

Duchamp himself posited that “the erotic was more powerful and liberating than sex itself... and fantasizing about the erotic was the game rather than a meaningful relationship” (Dey 9,10). In *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even*, the two halves are made scarcely passable such that the Bride is never touched by the shots fired by the bachelors and the “splashes” of the Sieves in the lower domain are, according to Marquis, “dazzling sperm failing to reach their mark” (Marquis 172). This mechanism which encapsulates the impossibility of sexual relationship hence works in principle with Lacan's proposition that “there is no such thing as sexual relationship” (qtd. in Homer 95). Lacan here is alluding to the impossibility of a perfectly harmonious sexual union between two people because the act of sex for humans is so much caught up in our fantasies that “any contact with a 'real', flesh and blood other, any sexual pleasure that we find in touching the other human being is not something evident but inherently traumatic, and can be sustained only insofar as this other enters the subject's fantasy frame” (Zizek 82). This is why Lacan insists that a man's partner is *objet a*, not a woman as such. A man needs a woman not as a partner but as a substratum or medium of *objet a*. So basically, what the bachelors practice is voyeuristic masturbation, wherein they use the bride as a masturbatory prop to enact their fantasies.

Also, the malic molds constituting the bachelor apparatus are mounted on a sleigh-like apparatus that glides back and forth on runners, powered by an invisible waterfall. This waterfall is attributed with a scissor-like and threatening motion, which is symbolic of violent castration (Dey 21). Hence, they are forced to seek erotic fulfillment in themselves following their failed attempt at physically uniting with the Bride. Within the context of the Large Glass, the Chocolate Grinder, as the notes from the Green Box states, is the symbol for the male genitals and hence the bachelor grinding his chocolate himself

becomes a gesture for the bachelors' masturbation. It is said that his choice to incorporate a chocolate grinding machine in his work was inspired from his memory as a child when Marcel had a chance encounter with the machine that was displayed in a confectionery store and he envisaged his youthful narcissistic desires getting fulfilled (14).

In the introduction to Derrida's "Dissemination", Barbara Johnson says that "masturbation is both a symbolic form of ideal union, since in it the subject and object are truly one, and a radical alienation of the self from any contact with an other. The union that would perfectly fulfill desire would also perfectly exclude the space of its very possibility" (qtd. in Derrida). Hence it is her absence that gives the men immediate possession of her. According to Lacan, only the mythical father of the primal horde can have a true sexual relationship with a woman. In Duchamp's *Glass*, the bachelors are represented as a separate collectivity in their uniforms and they can hence be considered analogous to the sons of the father in Freud's myth about primitive father. The Duchampian myth says that "there is no hero (or lover) who, by breaking the circle of males, setting fire to his livery or uniform, crossing the zone of gravity, conquering the Bride, and liberating her from her prison, will open her and break her virginity" (Paz58). This is why Duchamp in his notes, describes *The Large Glass* as a "love making machine that does not work and cannot work" (qtd. in Olvera 9). The bachelors are doomed to remain in their bachelorhood and the bride is condemned to remain a virgin.

The Bride's sexual function centers around a motor, at the base of which is a "reservoir of love gasoline" or "automobile". This lubricating liquid or the erotic gasoline explodes and as a consequence the virgin who has attained her desire will blossom. The Bride or *pendu femelle* (hanging woman) in *The Large Glass* is described as "a desiring motor that desires herself" (Paz 47). According to Lacanian psychoanalysis, to desire or to be desiring is aimed at jouissance. The Bride's threefold blossoming, which is a consequence of her stripping and the antecedent of her orgasm can be considered to be the best representative examples of "Other jouissance" or "feminine jouissance." The Other jouissance that characterizes the feminine structure as Lacan insists, is beyond jouissance- that is, "it is something of which many women speak without being able to say exactly what it consists of, like something felt but unexplainable" (Braunstein111). It is a jouissance that overwhelms the subject and transcends the possibility to be distinguished.

The Other, which in the context of *The Glass* is the Bride, as she is being stripped, is engulfed by a flawless ecstatic pleasure. The threefold joy as she reaches the fullness of delight is materialized in the moment of her blossoming as the "Milky Way". As is evident from the cloud-like emanation floating at the top, which symbolizes the "halo of the bride" or "the sum total of her splendid vibrations", her ecstasy operates beyond the body and is not centralized around *objet a*. In *The Large Glass*, while the males or bachelors have no existence in their own right; the Bride on the other hand enjoys a certain autonomy because of her Motor- Desire. The fact that her desire is independent of the bachelors is evident in that she is referred to as the "virgin who has reached the goal of her

desire" or "this virgin who has attained her desire—a desire already fulfilled within her virgin state of bridehood" (Seigel94). Unlike phallic jouissance, the Other jouissance says Lacan is "a kind of bodily, corporeal jouissance that is not localized in the genitals, the way phallic jouissance is" (qtd. in Fink120). Lacan illustrates this with the example of Bernini's' statue of St Teresa swooning in ecstasy in response to the arrow pierced by the angel above. In a similar fashion, the Bride blossoms, opens out in unimaginable forms and "shines with the pale, impersonal beauty of some primeval moon goddess" (Golding53). This experience of intense feeling, of unspeakable ecstasy brought about through the imagined orgasm and as manifested in her magical blossoming, makes the Bride's mechanism an embodiment of the Other jouissance, also defined as an "ineffable mystery, beyond words, outside the symbolic, beyond the phallus" (Braunstein111).

In "Salt seller", Duchamp makes a distinction between the Bride's 'vertical and 'horizontal' blossoming. The horizontal aspect of her cinematic blossoming is an imagined orgasm that takes place in her mind and is associated with voluntary imaginative stripping of herself. Bruce Fink defines Other jouissance as the jouissance that the Other gets out of us...but then again it could be our enjoyment of the Other or even our enjoyment as the Other. The Bride sees herself naked in the gaze of the bachelors and "strips herself bare in the look that looks at her" (Paz 103). Here, the vision of her nudity excites the Bride, produces in her a kind of self blossoming culminating in an auto-erotic climax.

The "vertical blossoming" as identified by Duchamp is associated "with stripping or tugging on her garment by the Bachelors' boxing Match mechanism" (Henderson 117). The sight of the Bride's delight or her actual fulfillment in stripping herself bare sets the bachelors in motion. The subject (the bachelor in this context) thinks the Other (Bride) is having a jouissance beyond the one it has. In other words, The Other triggers the subject's own jouissance by presenting an encore of a better jouissance. The draft pistons or inscriptions on the top transmits the Bride's discharges/ sensations to the Bachelors. Duchamp incorporated advanced scientific theories to depict the way the Bride communicates her erotic feelings to the Bachelors realm below. The electric discharges or the commands issued by the Bride awaken the life in them and "excite the bachelors to attempt the stripping which they partially achieve (the Bride's dress, originally represented by a thin strip of glass, now rests invisibly below her on the boundaries between the two glass panels), but which they lack the freedom and vitality to pursue to its ultimate conclusions" (Golding53). After being overcome by a false assumption that he has located the original lost object or the Thing, the subject experiences momentary satisfaction, however the tension between what he strives for and what he obtains leaves him in an incessant quest for the true cause of desire. So, what is at stake here is the inability of the bachelors to achieve the anticipated full satisfaction or jouissance. Hence, the refrain of jouissance as with desire says Lacan is "ce n'est pas ça", translated as "that's not it." As Lacan puts it,

That's not it' is the very cry by which the jouissance obtained is distinguished from the jouissance expected.... The 'jouissance expected' is an illusory, mythicized 'full satisfaction,'... the decisive, final quelling of the incessant clamoring of the drives. However, what the subject always gets (i.e., the 'jouissance obtained') is, at best, a pleasure that falls short of the idealized standard... Full satisfaction implies a kind of 'psychical death,' an evacuation of the tension of dissatisfaction that perpetually drives the libidinal economy. One consequently arrives at a paradoxical point in Lacanian theory: jouissance is an enjoyment that is enjoyable only insofar as it doesn't get what it's allegedly after.” (qtd. in Johnston7)

Duchamp's use of the “illuminating gas” is indicative of the bachelors' desire and the illuminating gas leaping upwards symbolizes the malic molds prancing after the object of their desire, maddened by passion. As Octavio Paz in his reading of *The Large Glass* as a satire on the vision of love writes:

The theme of desire is that of pursuit of a ceaselessly fleeing object, whether this is a body, an idea, or an idea made body. The pursuance of an ever-receding object implies an equally endless movement... A race in which the subject reaches its object only to let go and run after it again. A hunt that has no end (144).

The Bachelors' lust remains unquenched since it is transmitted technically as electric signals to the Bride without any actual physical contact. It is the fundamental inaccessibility of the desired object that sustains the fantasy and pushes the subject to enjoy an impossible jouissance. This gives the possibility of associating the mechanism of the bachelor apparatus with phallic jouissance in that “it is susceptible to failure and fundamentally misses our partner”(Homer 104). The subject hence reduces the Other to what Lacan calls as the *objet petit a*, that partial object that serves as the cause of desire. If we seek *objet petit a* in the other, we are approaching it from a masculine position which in turn is characterized by phallic jouissance.

Phallic jouissance according to Bruce Fink “is centered on a false and artificial assumption about the Other, that the other can and shall provide the subject with a satisfaction, the one that is desired” (qtd. in Meriem 22). This jouissance is hence attached to failure because though the Bride whom Duchamp likened to an alluring naked pole dancer stands for the irresistible promise of pleasure and increases desire in the male audience, this *objet a* fails to fulfill the desire of the subject, and makes of desire something recurring and repetitive, in search for the signified that truly qualifies for the signifier (23). The bachelors or the malic molds are forbidden from penetrating the Showalterian wild zone (the Bride zone), which is closed to women. As a consequence,

the stripping as mentioned in the title never takes place. The imagined nudity exists only at the level of desire and fantasy.

It could also be argued that *The Large Glass* is a self-portrait of the artist himself because the Glass' French title "La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même" reveals that "it contains an amalgam of Duchamp's first name – MAR(iée) and CÉL(ibataires)" (Rogakos62). It has been established that Duchamp had erotic yearnings for his mother as well as his sister and that this artwork was triggered by these feelings. The Glass can be read as representing Duchamp's private world, wherein it mirrors his fragmented identity and acts as a repository of the unrealizable feelings for his mother and his sister Suzanne. As Alice Marquis observed, it is the feelings of disillusionment, of loss and of separation as "the neglected son and beloved brother who had been abandoned in favor of a father and a husband" that culminated in the whole concept of the Glass (Marquis 171). Hence *The Large Glass* was said to be a "symbol or icon pointing to a specific thought process, and a record of personal events, often poetic by nature, which played out through the artist's life, embracing the movements of the unconscious starry heavens set within, and the shadows sheltering deep in the unconscious" (Dey25). The fact that Duchamp placed "the eight molds in space along one imaginary horizontal plane based on their penis" ultimately points to the idea of castrated desire (Rogakos178). The fear associated with symbolic castration made him to project his desire and frustrated yearning for the two most important women in his life into an artwork, through which he can "speak symbolically in the idiom of a machine" and materialize his desire and enjoy a certain euphoria at least in his imaginations (Marquis172).

Duchamp's decision to leave the *Large Glass* unfinished further highlights the theme of desire because "not finishing the Glass was one more way for it to be a "delay," leaving the expectations it aroused unfulfilled. It remained permanently suspended in time, like its subject, a condition it would have to renounce the moment it descended from potentiality to actualization. Unfinished, it remains always just beyond our grasp; completed, it would be subject to the same disillusionment" (Seigel106). In leaving the work incomplete, Duchamp refuses to reveal the "real" meaning of the artwork or in other words, he refuses to strip the work bare before us. This incompleteness or delay in stripping is what makes the work exciting, for it both holds our attention but at the same time remains out of reach. We try to remove veil after veil and attempt to derive the meaning out of it only to realize that this is not what the artist really hinted at or this is only one of the possible meanings of it because the artist himself proclaimed that "I force myself to contradict myself in order to avoid conforming to my own taste" (qtd. in Olvera 5). Duchamp's preference to keep the *Bride and the Bachelors* joined at the horizon but forever apart also echoes Jacques Derrida's notion of difference or infinite deferral. Hence the *Large Glass* as such can be considered to be the *Bride* that can never be stripped bare because we can never arrive at a conclusion and this in turn guarantees independence of

imagination and paves way for plurality of the Glass' reading. As Morris Zapp in analyzing Duchamp's various works and his life says, “of course there will be other readings, and still others, and indeed the striptease will never end” (Seigel161).

The story of the unfulfillable desire of the bachelors for the bride in a four-dimensional world is also a Duchampian way of depicting a larger truth about the world that we inhabit because even in everyday life, any attempt at satisfying desire through the possession of material objects in the external world is accompanied by disillusionment. “We are always searching for fulfillment, for knowledge, for possessions, for love, and whenever we achieve these goals there is always something more we desire; we cannot quite pinpoint it but we know that it is there” (Homer87). As Oscar Wilde in his play *Lady Windermere's Fan* puts it, “there are only two tragedies. One is not getting what one wants and the other is getting it” (Wilde45).

References

- Braunstein, Nestor A. “Desire and jouissance in the teachings of Lacan.” *The Cambridge Companion to Lacan*, edited by Jean Michel Rabate, Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Daniels, Dieter. “Duchamp: Interface: Turing: A Hypothetical Encounter between the Bachelor Machine and the Universal Machine.” *Media Art Histories*, edited by Oliver Grau, MIT Press, 2007.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Dissemination*. Translated by Barabara Johnson, University Press, 1981
- Dey, Derek. “Duchamp: The Large Glass Analyzed.” *Aesthetics and Ethics*, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/16046920/Duchamp_The_Large_Glass_Analyzed
- Fink, Bruce. *The Lacanian Subject: Between Language and Jouissance*. Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Golding, John. *Marcel Duchamp: The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even*, edited by John Fleming and Hugh Honour, Viking Press, 1973.
- Henderson, Linda Dalrymple. “The 'Large Glass' Seen Anew: Reflections of Contemporary Science and Technology in Marcel Duchamp's 'Hilarious Picture.'” *Leonardo*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1999, JSTOR, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1576694>
- Homer Sean. *Jacque Lacan*. Routledge 2004.
- Johnston, Adrian. “The Forced Choice of Enjoyment: Jouissance between Expectations and Actualisations.” [lacan.com](http://www.lacan.com/forced.htm), <http://www.lacan.com/forced.htm>.
- Marquis, Alice Goldfarb. *Marcel Duchamp The Bachelor Stripped Bare*. MFA Publications, 2002.
- Meriem Helmi Ben. *Pleasant Escapes: Incestuous and Homosexual Dynamics in D. H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers, A Lacanian Reading*. 2014. University of Sousse, MA
Dissertation https://www.academia.edu/39943225/_Pleasant_Escapes_Incestuous_and_Homosocial_Dynamics_in_D_H_Lawrence_s_Sons_and_Lovers_A_Lacanian_Reading
- Olvera, Karen M. Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass as a Negation of Women*. 1986, Denton, Texas, MA
Dissertation. https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc935841/m2/1/high_res_d/1002775378-Olvera.pdf
- Paz Octavio. *Marcel Duchamp Appearance Stripped Bare*. Viking Press 1978.
- Rogakos, Megakles. *A Joycean Exegesis of The Large Glass Homeric Traces in the Postmodernism of Marcel Duchamp*. 2016. University of Essex, PhD thesis.
- Seigel, Jerrold. *The Private Worlds of Marcel Duchamp: Desire, Liberation, and the Self in Modern Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995. <http://ark.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/ft9h4nb688/>
- Wilde, Oscar. *Lady Windermere's Fan: A Play About a Good Woman*, London: The Bodley Head, 1893.

The Differential Multicultural Conceptualization of Racism Through The Emerging Media of Online Reaction Videos Trending in The Post-COVID era

Abstract:

The present world has been more divided than ever, in terms of multiplicities and differentiations nearly all of which in its primary inception were meant to act as catalysts for uniting the whole of humanity. The differentiating ideas of race, creed, colour, gender, nationalities, and so on were identified as cultural markers of different histories, cultures, and identities formed over the years. The twenty-first post-COVID world has become more transparent and accessible due to the multitude of social media platforms, some of which have proved to be evident reality constructors promoting new levels of symbolic interactionism.

The paper wishes to foreground how race gets identified and remarked upon as a polycultural marker through the medium of online reaction videos which gained mass popularity during the time of Covid. The various platforms of social media like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and so on, through their variety of interactive features, serve as essential communal spaces, but also actively formulates themselves as agents of active simulators of reality and thus effective reality constructors of the world around. The paper takes into account certain international online reaction channels like “Our Stupid Reactions” and “Jaby Koay reactions” where the primary focus is on Indian cultural artifacts including Indian movies, food, and such. The primary objective of the paper is to inspect how such reaction videos creatively and often unconsciously act as Polycultural agents constructing and often moulding a global understanding of races and cultures.

The paper through careful and methodical research and introspection aims to dispel the idea of race as a global inherited ideology in the twenty-first-century modern world, and that it is rather a socially and differentially imbibed imaginary construct that alters according to the ideologies and constructs introduced in the interactive social media that are accessible and visible to them on a daily basis.

Keywords: polyculturalism, symbolic interactionism, racial construct, online reaction videos, social media

Multiplicities and differentiations form the elemental entities of our cultures, and though nearly all of them in their primary inception were formulated to act as catalysts for promoting the union of the whole of humanity, history has proved to us how the same has led to a world that has become more divided than ever. Upon close introspection the differentiating ideas of race, creed, colour, gender, nationalities, and so on, reveal

themselves to be the foundational stones of the different societal structures, which in the long run, were further identified as cultural markers of different histories, cultures, and identities formed over the years. Hence, the idea that the cultural and social foundations of one's reality are in many ways intricately connected to the personal identities of race, gender, and such stands true. A world so connected and more so virtually in the twenty-first century calls for a reconceptualization of said factions. Such a reconceptualized perspective of racism and race would ascribe to markers across cultures, drawing on similarities rather than historical signifiers. The online reaction videos popularized during the Covid period can be taken as an example to ascertain the same.

Race, in its original sense, refers to a “permanent inherited biological difference,” but with time it came to be “viewed as a social construction that is primarily recognized by physical appearance, or *phenotype*”(Fluehr-Lobban 1). According to Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, this was fundamentally evident in the United States of America up until the 20th century and has changed radically since, “primarily due to the Obama presidency”(Race and racism: An introduction²). An inability or rather a conscious communal decisiveness to retract from discussions of race and racism in relevant platforms has been in existence in such societies for years.

A lack of such open discussions has led to a massive inherited misunderstanding among people about the concepts of race, racialism, and racism. The book *Race and Racism: An Introduction*, attempts to classify and differentiate the different terms and explain their variant meanings. Racialism as per the author “describes, distinguishes, and classifies racial or phenotypic (observable) physical difference[s] among humans,” while “racism takes note of racial difference[s] but evaluates that difference, ranking it into superior or inferior, higher or lower racial types” (Fluehr-Lobban 3). Racism, in the place of racialism, has sunk deeper into the veins of the general populace through different mediums of language, art, and cultural expressions to create a communal racist perspective that has infiltrated the lenses used in our perusal of the world.

This in turn leads to the subjective manifestation of our reality, causing it to be as fragmented as our mental stratifications of the immediate society that we are a part of. The theory of interactionism constitutes how human beings fabricate their reality based on the interactions they make with everything in their immediate environment. In his book *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*, Blumer explains the nature of Symbolic interactionism to be dependent on three premises: the first premise expounds how “human beings act towards things based on the meanings that the things have for them,” the second premise is that “the meaning of such things derives from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows,” and the third premise states how such meanings get modified and molded through “an interactive process” by the person who uses them with those in their immediate surrounding (2). Symbolic Interactionism hence views “meanings as social products” (Blumer 5).

This calls into question how the social realities of individuals are coloured by the different social interactions they have and also brings to light the validity of the different meanings generated in their wake. The reality proves to be a fabricated social construction that forever remains personal and highly subjective. The concepts of race and racism are so compactly intertwined to self-construct a loop that proposes that even if there is no relation to any of their immediate factors of reality, race and racist characterizations become one of the major checkpoints of a person's understanding of his or her identity. Quoting H. Bhabha in his journal titled *Thinking Identities: Ethnicity, Racism, and Culture* the author states how “the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilled prophecy,” but “the production of an "image" of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image” (Brah 2). Hence, the identity of a person in any society is that which is constructed socially and often unconsciously. Blumer goes on to state how “sociologists ascribe behaviour to such factors as a social role, status, cultural prescriptions, norms, values, reference group affiliation, and mechanisms of social equilibrium” (*Symbolic Interactionism*, p.53). Hence, the people engaged in the process of construction of their reality “are not merely giving expression to such determining factors” (Blumer 53), but are constantly correcting and redefining their own lines of action.

The one phenomenal entity that aids this societal construction is social media like Instagram, YouTube, and such. Online social media platforms play a significant role in spreading ideas, stereotypical characterizations, communal understandings, and reconceptualizations of existing ideas -even racism. The twenty-first post-COVID world has become more transparent and accessible due to these multitudes of social media platforms, some of which have proved to be evident reality constructors promoting new levels of symbolic interactionism. This particular role of online social media, especially the newly materialized ones like the Online Reaction Videos, has gained massive momentum during the era of Covid when online media have been relied on as the most significant sources of information and as the major medium of communication. This has further paved the way for a virtual conceptualization of ideas of racialism and the associated racist perspectives within different cultures.

These varied cultures during the times of Covid have discovered similar grounds of identification that were non-existent a few decades ago. The online reaction video channels such as *Our Stupid Reactions* on YouTube hosted by Americans, broadcasting their reactions and reviews of the Indian art content, in particular, serve as perfect examples to study the reconceptualization of the ideas of race and racism. This is in support of the idea that those who belong to the same culture, that is those who are born and brought up in a particular culture adhering to a particular lifestyle, and belief system, and have had constant interactions with the cultural artifacts of the same, would experience racism and racist identities with respect to that of their immediate society.

Racism would thus be foregrounded as an identifiable feature in such a community employing certain characteristics, which would possibly reveal the existing double standards, inequalities, and stereotypes specific to that culture. However, the online reaction videos in vogue bring into the spotlight the differential representations of such racist characteristics across different cultures. This would in turn pave way for a global online interactive discussion on the ideas of race and racism identified through varying systems of segregation already in existence such as castes, skin colour, class, and so on.

This reconceptualized perspective of racism is founded on the Polycultural scenario of the current society. When cultures across the world get exposed to one another owing to new-age media like Online reaction channels, the idea of racist segregation is structured upon the carefully drawn comparisons between the various historical, and cultural systems. For instance, the racism wherein blacks are treated as inferior is more discernable to the white population owing to historical and cultural evidence. When such a society is exposed to say, the Indian social setup, the racist perspective they form, would then be based upon comparisons drawn from similar structures, like casteism evident in the Indian culture. Thus, as Anna LeeSwan explains in the abstract of her essay, “Rather than discussing transnational and online spaces as disembodied and place-less, it is crucial to recognize the material realities connected to these spaces, particularly on platforms that rely primarily on visual creative expression,” as they, in turn, set the idea of racism and racial segregation in the minds of the viewers of the said new age media.

In conclusion, the paper argues how race and racial perspective are no longer limited to the inherited phenotypic classification that is prominently evident in a particular culture. The highly globalized, polycultural, and transnational community that is taking shape in the world is one where race and racism are conceptualized on the basis of comparisons with multicultural aspects. This redefinition, when properly discussed and effectively molded would further our mission to enhance acceptance and tolerance in a world divided by factions, and possibly prevent the fast dissociation of singularities.

References

- Blumer, Herbert. “The Methodological Position of Symbolic Interactionism.” *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986, pp. 2–5, 53.
- Brah, Avtar, et al. “Thinking Identities: Ethnicity, Racism, and Culture.” *SpringerLink*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1 Jan. 1999, link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9780230375963_1.
- Cole, Nicki Lisa Ph.D. “Symbolic Interaction Theory: History, Development, and Examples.” *ThoughtCo*, ThoughtCo, 6 Oct. 2019, [thoughtco.com/symbolic-interaction-theory-p2-3026645](https://www.thoughtco.com/symbolic-interaction-theory-p2-3026645).
- Fluehr-Lobban, Carolyn. *Race and Racism: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., Rowman Et Littlefield, 2019, pp. 1-3.
- Shepherd, C. “Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method. by Herbert Blumer. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969. 208 Pp. \$5.95.” *Social Forces*, vol. 48, no. 3, 1970, pp. 436–437.,doi.org/10.2307/2574696.
- Swan, Anna Lee. “Transnational Identities and Feeling in Fandom: Place and Embodiment in K-Pop Fan Reaction Videos.” OUP Academic, Oxford University Press, 1 Oct. 2018, academic.oup.com/ccc/article-abstract/11/4/548/5112963?redirectedFrom=fulltext.

Melancholy and Race : A Feministic Reading of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

Abstract

*Race is primarily an ethnic group having their own context of linguistic, historical, cultural and geographical definition. In America, the major divisions of race are the whites, blacks, Mongolians, etc. The belief in the existence of race attributing to their own set of behavioral traits resulting in the domination of one race over the other defines the term racism. The extremities of sadness can be delineated in humans, especially in women due to the atrocities of racism. Women often feel melancholic due to racist concerns. This paper attempts to conceptualize the state of melancholy afflicted in women due to the dimensions of racism within the context of Alice Walker's epistolary novel, *The Color Purple* (1982). Racism has a direct intrusion into the lives of the African Americans, especially in women in the novel. This paper would be based mainly on the theory of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic feminism.*

Psychoanalysis is a science concerned with the interaction between conscious and unconscious processes, and with the laws of mental functioning. Psychoanalytic feminism is a theory of oppression, which asserts that men have an inherent psychological need to subjugate women. The root of men's compulsion to dominate women and women's minimal resistance to subjugation lies deep within the human psyche. The method of the study will be discourse analysis based on close reading of the primary text and research based on secondary materials. American writers substantiate that the postcolonial world instilled a trauma, especially in the mind of women, that changed everything in the multicultural or even globalized view in their novels. The study acknowledges melancholy buried deep inside women in American society in the novel.

Key words: Melancholy, Race, Psychoanalytic Feminism, Trauma, Psychoanalysis, etc.

Race is primarily an ethnic group having their own context of linguistic, historical, cultural and geographical definition. Race talks between people are often associated with powerful human emotions, misunderstandings and accusations that lead to negative outcomes. The way the “society perceives race is centuries old and is filled with ambivalence, confusion, misunderstanding, conflict, and intensely powerful feelings.... The attitudes, beliefs, and fears inherent in race talk symbolize our society's resistance to unmasking the embedded inequities and basic unfairness imposed on citizens of color” (Wing). In America, the major divisions of race are the whites, blacks, Mongolians, etc.

The literary dimensions of blackness and whiteness barely define the question of an American. America has one of the most resilient African populations in the world. For a long time, literature chose silence and evasion on the representation of this segment of the society. The belief in the existence of race attributing to their own set of behavioral traits resulting in the domination of one race over the other defines the term racism. Generally, racism is perceived in dimensions of the consequences on the victims or the objects often ignoring the inflections on the subject of discussion.

The extremities of sadness can be delineated in humans, especially in women due to the atrocities of racism. Melancholy is a state of mind when it feels utmost sadness. Women also feel melancholic due to racist concerns, apart from numerous other reasons. This paper attempts to conceptualize the state of melancholy afflicted in women due to the dimensions of racism within the context of Alice Walker's epistolary novel, *The Color Purple* (1982). Racism has a direct intrusion into the lives of the African Americans, especially in women in the novel. This paper would be based mainly on the theory of psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic feminism.

Psychoanalysis is a science concerned with the interaction between conscious and unconscious processes, and with the laws of mental functioning. Psychoanalytic feminism is a theory of oppression, which asserts that men have an inherent psychological need to subjugate women. The root of men's compulsion to dominate women and women's minimal resistance to subjugation lies deep within the human psyche. The method of the study will be discourse analysis based on close reading of the primary text and research based on secondary materials.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is an epistolary novel that talks about the oppression that African American women face in a male dominated society. The novel presents the struggles and the gradual awakening of Celie, a black woman in America, from the shackles of life. She is plunged into the confines of internal battles as she faces oppression on various fronts, first as a woman and second as a 'black' woman. Raised in a rural setting in Georgia, Celie as a child lived with her sick mother, her younger sister, Nettie and her abusive stepfather father, Alphonso who repeatedly raped her. She is forced into an abusive marriage with widowed Mr. Albert and the only relief she finds in life is through her letters to God through which she reveals her life experiences. A collective bonding is built among black women in the novel as all of them share similar stories of oppression. The first strike of the possibility of freedom hits her when she meets Sophia, her daughter-in-law who shows the courage to not succumb to the patriarchal norms. When she meets Shug Avery, one of the mistresses of Albert and an independent singer, she builds her inner spirit to fight back against the enforcements. She leaves her husband's house, empowers herself with her own business and even inherits her house after the death of Alphonso and finally settles down in life.

Shug Avery helps Celie to move forward through the haze of oppression towards mental healing and strength without caring about white supremacy and their logics. A collective female bonding is built between them and the rest of such suffering women and Celie develops a lesbian relationship with Avery as she finds solace in it. Celie drew her sense of self within the structures of the supremacy of the White and male supremacy, while Avery is a self-centered woman who liberated herself from such systems. Celie views Avery as an archetype of bold woman, which she aspires to achieve. Shug even once exclaims to Celie that “I am here to help you get on your feet” (Walker). Shug even ushers Celie to wear pants replacing her attire that limits her freedom. Shug instills fire in Celie to empower her from leaving the household of Albert which represented action for liberation from the mental enforcement more than the physical one. The novel enlightens the women to break off the bars that cage them from living as a human being as seen in one of the letters which states, “there are colored people in the world who want us to know! Want us to grow and see the light! They are not all mean like Pa and Albert, or beaten down like ma was” (Walker). Julia Kristeva, a French feminist, conceptualized this sense of loss as an important facet of life. The prolonged state of melancholy in them led them to find their own liberation as they survived a decaying world that silenced, marginalized and abused them.

A vast transformation from suffering to voicing out against the sufferings, from grief to grievance has raised new connotations on the impact of feeling hurt. Black feminist theorists such as Angela Davis, Bell Hooks and Patricia Hill opined that the black women are marginalized on the grounds of race, class, color, gender and sexuality. They face double oppression, first from the white society and then from the black men. The black women encounter enslavement, atrocities and patriarchy that their lives often pass in the bars of internal struggles apart from the outward hurt they show. They hold a strong standpoint on their life experiences that they share certain commonalities as a group. For them, alternative ways of knowing are built upon lived experience and not upon the woman as an object because they cannot be studied outside of her environment. Alice Walker proposed a new facet of black feminism known as 'womanism' which stressed the collective bonding of all women, irrespective of race, creed and class. While feminism places priority on women, womanism incorporates racial, cultural, sexual, national, economic and political considerations. The melancholy that the black women suffer pinpoints towards unhappy and unproductive women in the society. They are isolated in such a state, more mentally than physically. There is a misogynist representation of melancholy in women which is seen as their personal failure in handling the situations which are regarded as normal happenings. Through *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker gives voice to African American women and attempts to strengthen the connections among the minority categories of women. American writers substantiate that the postcolonial world instilled a trauma, especially in the mind of women, that changed everything in the multicultural or even globalized view in their novels. The study acknowledges the

prolonged melancholy buried deep inside black women in American society in the novel, which liberates them from the historical suppression that marginalized them for ages and finds gradual triumph.

References

- Anlin, Anne Cheng. *The Melancholy of Race*. New York: Oxford University Press (2001): 9780195151626. Print.
- Gordon, Annette Reed. *Racism in America: A Reader*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press (2020): 9780674251663. Print.
- Singleton, Jermaine. *Readings of Race, Impossible Mourning, and African American Ritual*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press (2015): 9780252097713. Print.
- Walker, Alice. *The Color Purple*. New York: Pocket Books (1985): 9780671647452. Print. Wing, Derald Sue. *Race Talk and the Conspiracy of Silence*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons (2015): 9781119241980. Print.
- Xavier, Robin. *The Methodology of Literature*. Chennai: Mainspring Publishers (2015): 978-81-930001-8-2. Print.

Adivasi and Us : Mourning the Death on the Margin

Abstract

This essay is about the collective life of the Dalits and tribals and the mainstream society's attitude to that, with Dalit/Adivasi life writing as a frame of reference. Life writings as a genre could be viewed either to learn about achievers, to be better achievers ourselves, in our remorseless achievement culture or it could be also about a collective subject. The prominent element in Dalit/Adivasi auto/biography, missing often from others is the part that culture, and collective experience, play in our lives. Against this backdrop, as is evident in life writing, of marginalization of Dalit and Adivasi lives, subjectivity, and representation in Kerala, this article discusses the widely reported recent suicide of an Adivasi. Thus the general marginalization of the Dalit/Adivasi as is evident in life writing is conflated with this particular mediated, tragic incident to understand the fault lines of our social life and the democratic deficit in it.

Key words: Life Writing, Dalit Life – Marginalization, Mourning, Racism

Only the intimate can mourn someone, and the distant almost cannot. This is not real mourning, at least, in that sense and what is going to be engaged in further is not a sentimental exercise. But even the distant can empathize with the ones who mourn and the one who is mourned, while one is about to give into (or to get the better of?) the preachers of death, as is the case here. After all, it is definitely human to empathize as well. It is this empathy that Montaigne expresses when he says “Yet when death does come – to them, their wives [husbands as well], their children, their friends – catch them unawares and unprepared, then what storm of passion overwhelm them, what cries, what fury, what despair! Have you ever seen anything brought so low, anything so changed, so confused” (36). Besides, as Derrida says “Death: not, first of all, annihilation, nonbeing, or nothingness, but a certain experience for the survivor of the 'without response'“(203). “The dead can and must be only 'for us,' and everything we receive from and give to them will remain among ourselves” (Derrida 10). This article is about the recent suicide of a tribal (Adivasi) man as soon as he fathered a child and presumably in the process of a responsible fathering -- which we moderns might possibly misunderstand as our exclusive civilizational superiority -- even while in very deprived circumstances, theimpelling to death and what it tells of a society, of its democratic deficit.

This essay is not strictly looking about a single life represented through life writing, but is about the collective life of the marginalized and the mainstream society's attitude to that with Dalit/Adivasi life writing as a frame of reference. Life writing as a genre can be viewed from two vantage points, one is to seek why so-called successful humans act,

through which we want to be “better achievers in the remorseless achievement culture” that we are in (Griffin 37) or it could be also about a collective subject. The prominent element in Dalit/Adivasi autobiography, missing often from others is the part that culture, and collective experience, play in our lives (Griffin 39). Nietzsche's Zarathustra in section “Of Reading and Writing” uses a term called “writing life with blood” and this, possibly, is about one such writing of life. “Of all that is written I love only what a person has written with his blood. Write with blood: and you will come to find that blood is spirit,” says Zarathustra(67). Death and autobiography have a very tenuous relationship. However sincere the effort, the autobiographical work is always predicated on the death or a completion that is yet to come. If autobiography assumes subject's death, that is autothanatography, then autobiography is in the strict sense impossible. For Paul de man it is not the writer's intent that creates the possibility of autobiographical interpretation, but the very act of writing itself. As he says autobiography cannot be viewed as a genre in itself but instead has to be approached as a figure or reading or understanding that occurs to some extent in all texts (Bradford 219). It is also a fact that auto/biography now is used as a research tool in both the social sciences and the humanities through its ability for detection and unmasking of the past. A past not as an inert factor but one which impinges on the present. Auto/biography has shifted radically in its relationship to its subject in the past four or five decades, but all auto/biography demonstrates the way in which individuals are perceived and judged both within a culture and by those outside it (Griffin 38). To rephrase, what is done in this article is deploying Dalit or Adivasi life writings, concisely, to unmask the hidden, and at the same time blatant, discrimination against the Dalits and tribals, and to look at a contemporary tragic event, which is also a mediated life, against the backdrop of that.

That the mainstream historiography and Malayalam literature disregarded or even erased Dalit-Bahujan experience for so many decades is an established fact. Dalits and adivasis (tribals) were not seen as people with a significant and relatable history, a context in which it was very easy to erase individual Dalit and adivasi experiences in the form of autobiographies and other life writings. Dalit experience as Dasan and the others observed was never viewed as worthy of attention. But this situation very gradually started changing around the twenty-first century, though to a lesser degree in the case of Adivasis. The change was clearly evident in narrating life through auto/biography. Some notable works like that of the autobiographies of Kallen Pokkudan, C K Janu, and biographies of Ayyankali, Poikayil Sree Kumara Guru, Pampadi John Joseph, Kallara Sukumaran, Adiyar Teacher and others appeared, though some of them are not very detailed explorations of Dalit lived lives through self-account. Some of them could be classed under the category of memoirs. The traditional distinction between auto/biography and memoirs is that of the relative completeness of the auto/biography in relation to the latter one, which focuses on a particular aspect or moment.

Those works which came out after this long gap are telling about the marginalization

of Dalits. “There is explicit reference of caste in Dalit autobiographies and biographies, in which most often the paramount concern is caste-oriented discrimination” (Dasan 182). In the section ‘Untouchability’ in his work *Ente Jeevitham (My Life)* Kallen Pokkudan has this to say about caste oppression:

“I am a man who has long borne the humiliation and misery of untouchability, particularly that associated with caste, money power, and slavery. It was the priest (adi) from the Ezhothu Cheermakkavu who reminded me that according to the caste system I could not approach Brahmins, Nairs/Nambiars, and Thiyyars. I am not very clear about this, but I do remember vaguely. Thus did I slowly form an idea about pollution and untouchability” (Dasan 185).

This is in one sense how caste hierarchy gets reinforced and perpetuates. To contextually place casteism which is a version of racism, that is to identify it as a contemporary phenomenon and not necessarily a phenomenon of a bygone era, it is important to bear in mind that Kallen Pokkudan died as recently as 2015 and his book *Kandalkkadukalkkidayil Ente Jeevitham (My Life with the Mangrove Forests)* was written only around twenty years back, that is precisely in 2002. Besides this the art of representation itself was and continues to be a problem as far as Dalit/Adivasi subjectivity is concerned:

Every human has a story of their own to tell the world? I have also something of that sort to tell the world. Definitely yes. But one problem really pestered me. How can one who doesn't know how to write [even] Malayalam, an ordinary person, write an autobiography? I don't know how many letters are there in English or Malayalam. Though I have heard about alphabet I have not learned it. Therefore, some small thoughts, some *Kandal* cases that struck me, and some political cases that troubled my mind. After writing on these in simple language I abandoned such an attempt. (Pokkudan 25)

This is how Kallen Pokkudan describes the problem of the subaltern, particularly Dalits in this case, in speaking out. “For the written word is not for the like of us” bewailed, Poikayil Sreekumara Guru (Dasan 215). Similar is the situation that C K Janu presents when she says “we never heard of anyone going to school from our area nor (sic) of anyone who came to enroll us in schools” (Bhaskaran 5). That is, mostly the tribals did not even have a language to speak out because of deprivation. It is not because they do not really have a language, but the dynamics of Malayalam language worked in a way that the Dalits and tribals, particularly, found themselves outside its purview, contributing also to the fact that the tribal languages did not flourish. K K Kochu eruditely discusses the non-success of Malayalam language to unify diverse social groups into a people. Though initially Malayalam language was significantly influenced by tribal languages even when

compared to Tamil and also as part of its resistance against Tamil domination, in its later development what influenced it was Sanskrit, Brahminical ethos and Brahminical values. Malayalam language advanced reinforcing caste/racist hierarchy after being tamed and sanctified by the elite (Dasan 249). The different appellations used to address different people depending upon their perceived relation to one or upon their hierarchical, societal, or upper caste status, like *nee* (നീ), *than* (താൻ), *thangal* (താങ്കൾ), *Angu* (അങ്ങ്) for the single word “you” from English, a language with a far more extensive and richer vocabulary, is indexical of this feudal traces in Malayalam language.

Against this backdrop, as is evident in life writing, of marginalization of Dalit and Adivasi lives, subjectivity, and representation in Kerala, this article, as suggested earlier, discusses the widely reported recent suicide of a forty-six-year-old tribal man (Adivasi), from Kalpetta in Wayanad, in the early hours of 11 February 2023 at Kozhikode. The man had come to Kozhikode Medical College for the delivery of his wife a few days before. The youth allegedly committed suicide by hanging himself from a tree near the hospital compound. According to *The Hindu*, “The police told the Kerala State Human Rights Commission (KSHRC) that Viswanathan, a tribesperson from Wayanad who was found dead near the Government Medical College Hospital (MCH), Kozhikode, on February 11, took the extreme step after he was questioned by some individuals following a theft.”

The paper continued,

“The report said that after analyzing CCTV footage, it was learnt that a few persons had waylaid Viswanathan near the main gate of the Institute of Maternal and Child Health attached to the Medical College hospital, accusing him of theft, around 12.40 am on February 10. They were aware that he belonged to a Scheduled Tribe community and examined his bag. Viswanathan felt insulted and was mentally disturbed before he fled from the premises. He later ended his life, the report said.” (Viswanathan)

While an online news portal adds something more as detail to the act of vigilantism culminating in loss of life:

On Thursday, while Vishwanathan was at the waiting room for bystanders, somebody accused him of stealing a mobile phone and money. A few of them dragged him to the security personnel, though he explained he was his wife's bystander. Though his mother-in-law Leela also tried to explain, the mob apparently didn't believe them. Apparently, though the security officials asked to file a police complaint, it wasn't done and a few people harassed Vishwanathan again. He fled from the premises, leaving his shirt, mobile phone, chappal and tiffin box in a cover. Leela complained to Medical

College Police as Vishwanathan was not to be seen until late at night on Thursday. It is also alleged that the police officer misbehaved towards Vishwanathan's relatives who had reached the station (Tribal).

This is a world where information “about a subject is made meaningless by the self-disclosure of the subject. This raises the question of whether or not auto/biography can actually survive in the twenty-first century, given that aspects of . . . [modern human] culture apparently compel individuals towards increasingly radical self-revelation” (Griffin 32). This has now led to the situation

Where once the search was for greater information about the person, now it has shifted to a search for an interpretation of how the individual could be located within a particular *Zeitgeist*. The paradox of contemporary auto/biography, and research about it, is thus that in large part the individual life becomes less important. That is the individual characteristics of a person become precisely that, whereas the important question becomes one which is outside the person namely the puzzle of how a particular individual emerged in particular times. (Griffin 33)

This is how the death of the tribal, though unwritten, but mediated, becomes an avenue to enquire about the particular zeitgeist of contemporary Kerala. The fact that is exposed as Fanon would say is that we have a collective unconscious of racism.

The immediate reason for the pathetic act of the tribal would have to be placed at the doors of vigilantism, which is more a praxis of spontaneous violence of bigotry rather than an ideology. Vigilantes generally share the ideology of regressive political unconscious of casteism, patriarchy, religious orthodoxy, racism, sexism, ageism or any other sectarianism depending up on the situation. Vigilantes are custodians of conservative monological values who enforce it through violence. They are the agents of status quo, violence and cruelty. They are the challengers of the rule of law acting simultaneously as police, prosecutor, jury, judge and finally the horrible executor. Their conception of life and freedom is just confined to themselves. They are the apologists of totalitarianism. They are the purveyors of readymade truths and tailor made justice. They can be a group of peeping toms and/or idlers up in arms at the drop of a hat. They are the ugliest users of the words “questioning” and “skepticism.” They throw to the winds the noble idea of jurisprudence, the benefit of doubt, and instill the minds of others/prey with fear. In short they are criminals masquerading as social workers.

Why does the death of Vishwanathan --- “the one who, as we say, is no longer, is no longer living, no longer there, who will no longer respond” (Derrida 200) --- need to bother us? Philosophically speaking, “The Other individuates me in my responsibility for him. The death of the Other affects me in my very identity as a responsible I . . . made up of

unspeakable responsibility. This is how I am affected by the death of the Other, this is my relation to his death. It is, in my relation, my deference towards someone who no longer responds, already a guilt of the survivor” (Derrida 205).

This guilt of the survivor is something that is applicable to the whole of Kerala society which is not yet broadminded and at least tolerant enough to recognize the Other, the Other as a human, the Other as a decent human, equal to us irrespective of his/her shabby appearance. This xenophobia and disregard of the other is also a disregard for the otherness, all kinds of which, the society thinks is against its perverse normativity. Statistically speaking, the Minister for Welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes informed the Kerala Legislative Assembly in February 2023 that the atrocities against tribals increased by 6.2 percent and those against Dalits increased by 1.2 per cent in Kerala in the year 2022. He also informed the Assembly that the conviction rate in cases against Dalits was very low and that the government was taking measures to address the shortcoming. It was in February 2018 that a mentally unstable twenty-seven-year-old tribal youth of Attappady tribal belt in Kerala was chased and set upon by a mob, accusing him of theft. Newspapers reported that local people, almost exclusively youth, caught the person from nearby forest, beat him with sticks, paraded and video graphed him and shared the images on social media before handing him over to the police. The victim collapsed and died while being taken to the hospital.

For Charles Taylor with his idea of politics of recognition, misrecognition is not just a lack of due respect but can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Dipesh Chakrabarty using Charles Taylor's concept of “historical wound” says “for a person or group so 'wounded', to speak of the wound or to speak in its name is already to be on the path to recovery” (Chakrabarty 77). “To be able to speak thus, however – that is to speak self-consciously from within a history of having been wounded – is itself a historical phenomenon” (Chakrabarty 77). He considers Dalits and adivasis (tribals) along with other groups like indigenous peoples in Australia, New Zealand and Canada as examples of such groups. Following Charles Taylor, he says the rhetoric and spirit of decolonization contributed to its formation. He then spells out the salient features of historical wounds. Historical wounds, dissimilar to historical truths – “broad, synthetic generalisations based on researched collection of individual historical facts” (Chakrabarty 77) -- “are a mix of history and memory and hence their truth is not verifiable by historians” (Chakrabarty 78). Second historical wounds are dialogically formed. Another feature is that historical wounds are unevenly formed in across different democracies. “The Dalits in India are usually recognized as people who have been disadvantaged by their histories” (Chakrabarty 78). But unlike elsewhere “upper-caste Indians did not so much respect the historical injuries of the caste system” (Chakrabarty 79). Fanon talks about an inferiority complex of the Black man which he says is “primarily, economic” and the “internalization” of this inferiority, and this inferiorisation

being generated amidst the widely shared casteist unconscious is not very hard to understand (4).

However, the historical wounds got highlighted because the political power of Dalits and lower castes in public life cannot be simply ignored (79). Lastly for him historical wounds pose a challenge to the discipline of history by seemingly privileging experiential access to the past (79). He recognizes the clash between the discipline of history with its idea of historical objectivity and the cultural politics of recognition with its appeal to one's present as a guide to one's past. But for him two civilizational developments particularly would and should continue to challenge the idea of historical objectivity. First in a scenario of globalization "experience" in a commodity-form will continue to mediate people's relationships to their pasts. Second historical objectivity may not be always on the side of subaltern groups fighting for justice and that traditional archives of the historians themselves belong to certain relations of privilege. For him democracy now involves the deployment of both historical objectivity and mediatized memory and experience (86). It is in this context, that the mediatized memory of the suicide of a poor adivasi who slouched into the Bethlehem of the so-called cultured Keralites, having been accused unreasonably and inhumanly of theft because of his underprivileged subjectivity and for being down at heel, and thus driven to end his life, assumes importance. It shows that the historical wound of discrimination is still gaping, lies deep, and needs to be healed.

References

- Baker, Timothy C. "The Art of Loosing: The Place of Death in Writer's Memoirs." *Life. Writing: Essays on Autobiography, Biography and Literature*. Edited by Richard Bradford, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, 219-33
- Bhaskaran. *Mother Forest: The Unfinished Story of C K Janu*. Translated by N Ravi Shankar, Kali for Women and Women Unlimited, 2004.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "History and the Politics of Recognition." *Manifestos for History*. Edited and Introduced by Keith Jenkins, Sue Morgan and Alan Munslow, Routledge, 2007, pp. 77 to 87.
- Dasan, M, et al. *The Oxford India Anthology of Malayalam Dalit Writing*. Oxford UP, 2012.
- Evans, Mary. "Autobiography as a Research Method". *Research Methods for English Studies*. Edited by Gabrielle Griffin, Rawat Publications, 2016, Pp.32 to 47.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin White Masks*. Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. Forwards by Ziauddin Sardar and Homi K. Bhabha, Pluto Press, 1986.
- Jacques, Derrida. *The Work of Mourning*. Edited by Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas. U of Chicago P, 2001.
- Montaigne, Michele. *How can We Weep and Laugh at the Same Thing*. Translated by M A Screech, Penguin, 2015.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spake Zarathustra: A Book for Everyone and No one*. Translated with an introduction by R J Holingdale, Penguin, 2003.
- Pokkudan. *Kandalkadukalkidayil Ente Jeevitham [My Life with the Mangrove Forests]*. DC Books, 2006.
- "Tribal Man's Death in Kozhikode MCH: Human Rights Panel Steps in." *Onmanorama* 11 Feb 2023 <https://www.onmanorama.com/news/kerala/2023/02/11/adivasi-youth-tribal-suicide-kozhikode-vishwanathan.html>
- "'Viswanathan Questioned by Some Individuals for Theft' Says Police Report." *The Hindu*, 22 Feb 2023, p. 3

Diffusing the Boundary through Body Control : An Analysis of Uyghur Ethnic Genocide

Abstract

*Uyghurs, a Turkic ethnic group living in Xinjiang province in China, has been undergoing persecution by China for years owing to ethnic tensions in the region. Despite condemnation from international communities and constant protests from the Uyghur diaspora, China exerts its power through modes of “protecting” the population through surveillance, “reeducation camps” and demographic control. Earlier studies mainly focused on ethnic tensions in Xinjiang through the angles of ethnicity, genocide and other similar concepts. However, the idea of analysing Uyghur genocide through cartographic/demographic cleansing is to be further probed. The paper attempts a reading of the ongoing Uyghur ethnic genocide through the notion of bio-power linked with the ideas of the State, cartography and eugenics. It focuses on the binaries of “nationals” and “non-nationals” and how China, as a State, tries to diffuse the Uyghur identity through indoctrination and cartographic cleansing. The paper analyses how China aims to consolidate its power over Xinjiang in order to merge it with other regions where the dominant Han Chinese ethnicity exists thereby erasing minority Uyghur Muslim identity in the province. To validate this argument, two narratives on Uyghur ethnic genocide, Jewher Ilham's *Because I Have To* and Nury Turkel's *No Escape*, are analysed.*

Keywords: Uyghur, Ethnicity, Cartography, Bio-power, China, Race, Eugenics, Surveillance.

The power of the State through its legal and educational institutions has been an area of profound interest to scholars for ages. Various ancient and modern forms of power institutions had been under constant scrutiny regarding their implicit or explicit policies. The idea of ethnicity or race is a much-contested angle through which the State is studied concerning its legal or educational systems. Racist prejudices especially in the West are still the impetus for various scholarly studies on race and ethnicity. Shifting this focus to the East, and specifically to China, one finds the case of Uyghurs, a Turkic ethnic group in Xinjiang who are at risk of being ethnically cleansed by the ruling policies. Similar to the concept of race in many countries, ethnicity is a major issue when it comes to the Uyghur region. Aiming at a total annexation of this demography, China had started the implementation of various government policies many years ago but a full-fledged operation gained acceleration in 2014. The harrowing experiences of being an Uyghur under authoritarian rule and the urge to help one's community despite being a diaspora are exemplified by Jewher Ilham's *Because I Have To: The Path to Survival, the Uyghur*

Struggle and Nury Turkel's No Escape: The True Story of China's Genocide of the Uyghurs.

Uyghur community, residing in the Western province of China, is one of the minority groups who are culturally and religiously distinct from the predominant Han Chinese in the People's Republic of China (PCR). This Turkic ethnic group is more aligned with the Russian region and tradition and has been in the Uyghur region (now known as Xinjiang) for many years. The official Chinese name for this region is Xinjiang, a term coined by the Manchu Qing dynasty during the early 1900s meaning “new dominion” even though Uyghur and other ethnic communities have been residing here many decades prior to this coinage, practicing their culture, language, religion, and ethnicity. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, control over this region was handed to Mao Zedong's Chinese Communist Party (CCP) by Stalin in 1949. Despite Chinese political control, Uyghurs had their government policies and administration until recently when the government saw claims for autonomy by Uyghurs as a threat to its borders. The government seized this opportunity to infiltrate the administration and use police to control even the daily routines of the Uyghur community. Uyghurs had started to see signs of repression during Mao's reign which heightened after Xi Jinping came to power. Tensions also arose as a result of the deliberate influx of Han Chinese in this region and the increased government positions allocated to them. In 2014, measures like mass surveillance, population forms, incarceration camps, and reeducation camps were on the rise in this region. In 2017, many Uyghurs including famed intellectuals were detained for several months and later released, only to be arrested again and sentenced to life imprisonment on “charges” of terrorism and separatism. What the world came to know a bit late was that those imprisoned were transferred to the horrors of incarceration camps. They were being “reeducated” to denounce their “extremist” religion, ethnicity, and language and to “reform” themselves through learning Mandarin and singing glories to Mao and the Chinese Communist Party. The Karakax list by the Chinese government, which provided the reasons for the internment of 311 inmates of Karakax region in Xinjiang at the internment camps, was leaked thus providing the first revelations of the extent of China's repression of Uyghurs. The government considers applying for a passport or relatives living abroad as separatist acts thereby making Uyghurs susceptible to imprisonment.

The French political philosopher Etienne Balibar's ideas regarding race and the State can be applied to the concept of ethnicity and State formation. He maintains that the State perpetuates the idea of nation as a demographic boundary formed by people who adhere to the laws of the State thereby becoming the “nationals”. Dividing people into the binaries of “nationals” vs “non-nationals” based on these measures is the final outcome desired by the State. For this, the State uses legal, educational and economic systems. Michael Billig, a social psychologist, analyses various measures that form this idea of

belonging. These include daily propaganda “through maps, oaths, school curricula, language, official procedures, the use of 'we' to talk about the nation, etc” (Garner 90). Billig calls this “banal nationalism”. Such examples by the Chinese government can be seen in both Jewher Ilham's and Nury Turkel's accounts.

Ilham's *Because I Have To* details her experiences as the daughter of a prominent Uyghur intellectual who is detained and currently serving life in prison. Her father, Ilham Tohti, an Uyghur economist had brought international attention by voicing his concerns about the Chinese policies that increased ethnic tensions between Uyghurs and Han Chinese and the need for peaceful coexistence between these groups. He was detained at Beijing airport while departing for the USA to be a visiting scholar at Indiana University with Jewher Ilham, and Jewher had not met him since that incident. She had to fly alone to the USA and thus start her life as an advocate for her father and other Uyghurs. Nury Turkel's description of the Uyghur plight opens up discussions on China's genocidal measures and demographic tactics. Taking readers on a brief yet comprehensive tour of Uyghur culture and history, he details the current scenario and stresses the need for sanctions and pressure from the international community on China. He is currently the vice chair of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom and was in Time magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World list (2020).

The idea of eugenics is of high importance in analysing the Uyghur context. It perpetuates “the idea that the State can and should intervene in demographic development by encouraging some groups to breed and/or preventing other groups from doing so” (Garner 133). Hence, desirable progenies are encouraged to be produced while others are almost terminated. Here, the idea of women as the reproductive apparatus of the State comes to the forefront. Nira Yuval Davis talks about “the intersections between women's reproductive roles and the constructions of nations” (Yuval-Davis 26). She talks about the “eugenicist discourse” which focuses on quality population of the State's choice. Groups that are valued and desired are encouraged to have more children while the least desirable ones are encouraged as well as forced to undergo certain measures. These measures include forced sterilization, forced intermarriages and high rewards for consenting to such actions.

The Uyghur genocide is also marked by such policies and actions. Uyghur women at the camps are forced to take medication that affects their menstruation, making them non-reproductive. Measures like sterilization, abortion and IUD implantations are still being enforced among Uyghur women. Moreover, the rule that there should be a gap of three years between the first and second children also affirms the decreased birth rate among Uyghurs. Also, they are promised large amounts of money and rewards if they concede to marry Han Chinese men. It promotes marriage between Han Chinese men and Uyghur women to “maintain national harmony and peace”. These measures aim at an influx of Han Chinese ethnicity in the Uyghur region. In *No Escape*, Turkel puts forth China's

statistics regarding the birth rate of Uyghurs: “According to China's own statistics, birth rates in the predominantly Uyghur regions of Hotan and Kashgar plummeted by more than 60 percent from 2015 to 2018. Across the whole Xinjiang region, birth rates are plummeting, falling nearly 24 percent in 2019 alone” (170). This decline was celebrated even in China Daily, a website by the Chinese government, which states that “Uyghur women were no longer baby-making machines and said the decline in the birth rate had led to a drop in terrorism” (169). Also, to be noted in this context is the genocidal rape committed during the incarceration. Both male and female detainees are tortured and even raped to traumatize them. Despite the International Criminal Court's 1997 ruling that rape is “a crime constituent of genocide” (Garner 98), it is one of the weapons used by modern States to eliminate unwanted groups and the Uyghur genocide is an example of it. The babies born out of rape in internment were taken by the state and indoctrinated with the dominant Chinese ideologies. Thus, the authorities also incorporated intentional pregnancy of comparatively stronger and healthier Uyghur women.

Michel Foucault's notions of bio-power are of high importance in this regard. Biopower is employed to facilitate the cartographic cleansing of Uyghurs. China's idea of a “unified” State is being in the process of formation through this cartographic ethnic cleansing. Biopower is a technology of power or a means of managing an entire population. Highly significant in this context is Michel Foucault's idea of the operation of power over different times. In *Discipline and Punish* he maintains that power has changed from “the public spectacle of the tortured body of the individual deemed to have committed a crime to the disciplining, incarceration, and surveillance of those convicted of crimes in the present day” (Mills 42). In earlier days, biopower was associated with the idea of instilling the fear of death. However, in modern times “where there has to be a rationale for the exercise of power beyond divine right, biopower is utilised by emphasising the protection of life instead of the threat of death” (Garner 93). Thus, the State can use the idea of “protecting the lives of its people” to justify any of its actions (93). The concept of biopower has become an important aspect of modern States. New modes of power are developed and maintained by the State. The parallel process of indoctrination of dominant Chinese ideologies, culture, and language (Mandarin) and the erasure of Uyghur language, culture and religion make young Uyghur children forget their identity. Even elderly people are forced to denounce their religion and are indoctrinated with Maoist ideologies. The Chinese government maintains that “a yearly average of 1.29 million people went through “vocational training” between 2014-2019 (Ilham 108). The State, thus, uses education as a tool for bio-power and ethnic cleansing. For China, these measures are anti-terrorist and anti-separatist and aimed at curtailing terrorism and bringing peace to the region.

All these measures are of demographic or cartographic significance to the Chinese government which is on its path to the consolidation of power and expansion of foreign

relations. These measures aim at ethnic cleansing and demographic genocide of Uyghurs who are a “threat” to China's policies. In his analysis of the relation between the Holocaust and the idea of modernity, Zygmunt Bauman considers State as a garden where the gardener eliminates “every self-invited plant which interferes with his plan and vision of order and harmony” (57). Like this idea of plucking weeds out from the garden, Uyghurs are considered by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to be either eliminated from the state or molded by the dominant Maoist ideologies. Thus, forced appropriation is implemented through the so-called reeducation camps and vocational training centres. As Jewher Ilham notes, Uyghur genocide is the “persecution of an entire culture and population--the largest mass detention of an ethno-religious group since World War II” (80). Like other countries, China too has signed deals with international relations in various sectors; but the Uyghur diasporais fearful of their fate in host countries. Many fear that China's expanding international relations pose a threat to their life and ease their deportation back to China- a torturous life once this diaspora gets back to China. Most of the Uyghurs had to leave their families in China and relocate to other countries. They have become asylum seekers to escape torture. Examples include Jewher Ilham, Nury Turkel, Mihrigul Tursun, Abduweli Ayup, and countless others.

By using relatives of Uyghur activists in the diaspora, the Chinese government tries to stop international voices against this genocide. The government threatens that their voices will eventually lead to the relatives' incarceration and torture thereby instilling a guilty feeling among the diaspora if they ever raise their voices against the government's atrocities. This fear coupled with the diasporic life of Uyghurs make them susceptible to mental alienation. Mihrigul Tursun's account of such an experience provides the extent to which Uyghur diaspora and their families have to suffer. She received a WeChat call from her family after her escape to the USA in which her family is forced to denounce her if she does not refrain from exposing China. Her stepmother says, “You are no longer my daughter if you say anything bad about the country, our country is great. We raised you, we are your parents, please think about us at least, even if you don't care about anything else” (Turkel 124). Mihrigul could even hear her stepmother conversing with a policeman who came threateningly to their house.

Even the privacy of Uyghurs is intruded on by Chinese surveillance. When they lived in China before the detainment, Ilham's family was always accompanied by three police officers. In *Because I Have To*, Jewher says that she thought of them as her father's acquaintances, when in fact they were sent to monitor her family. Later on, this tactic of surveillance went on to become the horrific “Becoming Family” programme from 2014 onwards in the Uyghur region. The Chinese spies live with the Uyghur families and report to authorities any suspicious activity. The Uyghurs are entreated to share their accommodation, meals and even their rooms with these “relatives” who can do whatever as per their pleasure in the house. As Turkel notes, “You are to welcome them unquestioningly into your home as they quiz your children about whether you secretly

pray, use the words “Allah” or “Mohammed,” or ever say anything derogatory about the government” (94). Such data along with plenty of reports by these government-recruited spies “can then form the basis for your arrest and detention in a concentration camp while your children are packed off to a state orphanage to be raised as good Chinese kids and indoctrinated against you and your religion” (94) thereby resulting in cultural amnesia and erasure. Many Uyghur women like Mihrigul had to live in fear when these “relatives” share their accommodation as they are subjected to sexual abuses while their family cannot defend themselves against these “relatives”.

The Uyghur or Xinjiang area is of high demographic importance to the Chinese state in several ways. Its foremost importance lies in the land used for the cotton industry to supply for multinationals like Nike, Dell, Coca-Cola etc. It is also rich in oil and other related products. It is alleged that the prisoners are recruited for forced labour from incarceration camps to various locations in China. Reports especially during the Covid times show that these prisoners were transported across different locations in China and worked for major international brands. As much as 80,000 Uyghurs and other minority Muslim people were transferred from Uyghur “to factories across China where they cannot leave, are under constant surveillance, and must undergo “ideological training” to abandon their religion and culture” (“Call to Action”). Moreover, Xinjiang is the land that connects China to Central Asia and thereby European countries. Hence, claims for autonomy and independence by Uyghurs is considered a threat to China's sovereign power and thereby its economic profits. Another demographic significance of this region is its economic profit to China as it lies amidst China's international relations. Thus, suppressing these voices whilst nurturing the dominant or desirable communities is the “solution” found by the Chinese government for this act of “terrorism”.

Like the protagonist of Perhat Tursun's novel *The Backstreets*, Uyghurs are subjected to mental alienation and physical torture in Xinjiang. Even the “free” citizens are in constant fear of being dragged into incarceration camps the next day and they try to discipline themselves by the government rules- a tactic explained by Foucault in his analysis of bio-power. They have to strip themselves of almost all religious symbols from their life. Head covering, long beard, and frequent attendance in religious rituals are considered “extremist” and liable for incarceration. Even piles of prayer mats and the holy book Qur'an are dumped by people into the drains to escape from the authorities' wrath. Artificial Intelligence systems like surveillance camera and call recordings scan people for potential “extremist” thoughts, appearance or habits. These are employed by the State in the name of “protecting” the lives of its citizens and maintaining peace- a feature of bio-power. However, the irony is that while the government attempts to erase Uyghur Muslim culture, many Uyghurs including non-practicing are preserving their culture and religion. As Ilham notes, “the more someone wants to take the thing that belongs to you, the more you cherish it” (114). She makes unique Uyghur dishes, practices her faith, affirms her Uyghur identity, and is an ardent advocate for Uyghurs.

While being incarcerated for the last time, Mihrigul Tursun turns to God for solace and even prepares herself for death. Nury Turkel talks about Uyghur history marked by rich episodes of tolerance, prosperity and inter-faith as well as inter-ethnic communication. He urges human rights advocates to pressurize China to stop Uyghur ethnic genocide.

The CCP aims to mold “self-regulating and law-abiding citizens” who work unanimously for a united Chinese culture. In other words, it aims at the Sinicization of the country so as to erase ethnic differences and opinions. The government aims at a common political, cultural and language system that defines people by their allegiance to the Communist Party as well as the Mandarin language. The main intention behind this is to eliminate voices of dissent and difference thereby catering to the State's control over the demography. China's dystopian measures in Xinjiang are reminiscent of its Tibetan crackdown where demographic control is maintained by surveillance, local security forces and other government repressions. Turkel notes that an important Communist cadre forms the “vital link” between the crackdown in Tibet and Xinjiang. Chen Quanguo, the mastermind behind Tibetan repression, came to Xinjiang in 2016, accelerating the Uyghur detention. By diffusing the differences between various communities, the State aims to propagate its ideologies and maintain its control over different regions of the republic.

China, thus, aims at total demographic or cartographic control over regions susceptible to claims for autonomy, and Uyghur or Xinjiang region is one among these. As in Hong Kong and Tibet, China tries to diffuse ethnic differences and opinions by infiltrating Uyghur Muslim heritage through body control. Measures like the deliberate influx of Han Chinese into Xinjiang, infiltration of Uyghur culture, education and language system as well as systems like surveillance, incarceration and reproductive control facilitate the interests of China in silencing the dissent and forming a “unified” State.

Reference

- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. CUP, 1989.
- Concepcion, Natasha Parassram. “Human Rights Violations Against Muslims in the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of Western China”. *Human Rights Brief*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2000, pp. 19-21.
- Garner, Steve. *Racisms: An Introduction*. 2nd ed., Sage, 2017.
- Ilham, Jewher. *Because I Have To: The Path to Survival, the Uyghur Struggle*. eBook, edited by Adam Braver, New Orleans UP, 2021.
- Mills, Sara. *Michel Foucault*. Routledge, 2004. Routledge Critical Thinkers.
- Turkel, Nury. *No Escape: The True Story of China's Genocide of the Uyghurs*. Hanover Square Press, 2022.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. *Gender and Nation*. Routledge, 1997.
- “Call to Action on Human Rights Abuses in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region”. *End Uyghur Forced Labour*. <https://enduyghurforcedlabour.org/call-to-action/>. Accessed on 15 Dec. 2022.
- Tursun, Perhat. *The Backstreets: A Novel from Xinjiang*. Translated by Darren Byler and Anonymous, Columbia UP, 2022.

Memory and Narration : The Nation and its Representation in the Post-Truth Era

Abstract

Benedict Anderson in his Imagined Communities propose an alternate definition for the term. He defines nation as an imagined political community that is imagined to be inherently limited and sovereign. This stance makes it evident that the sense of a community, whether it is a tribe, village, or even the larger community called nation, has to be first imagined for it to be real. Apparently, the existence and continuance of a nation rest on the major powers of memory and narration. It becomes a narrative and offers us representations of people, things and events that occurred, whether real or imaginary. However, it is problematized when you think about the aspect of representation that has been represented. There is a certain asymmetry between what is represented and what is intended to be represented. This is a perfect nursery for the post-truth mechanism.

The article aims to examine how nation turns out to be the birth-child of narration. It scrutinizes the role played by memory- both individual and collective-in documenting history. It brings under its scope the dictates of post-truth in the history and representation of a nation. Relying on Anderson's conceptualization of nation as an imagined community, the proposed paper strives to probe into the agency of post-truth in materializing the concept of a nation.

Keywords: Post-truth, Memory, Nation, Narration, History

Ranging from the age-old tales of magic and fantasy to the fables of morality, it seems that man has the innate tendency to create stories and spread them wide. Throughout human existence, human beings have been social animals and since time immemorial, their efforts have been directed towards spreading self-reinforcing myths that serve as a cooperative mechanism to restore connections between people who are complete strangers. Inventing fictional stories and spreading it by word helped them to make acquaintances in the strange world that surrounds them, converging them into groups of people who believed in the same story. There emerged some sort of affiliation among people in the same group or community per se as they share, follow, and believe in the same set of stories, legends, or myths which struck an emotional chord. The logic and veracity of the tales were of the least importance because they had to offer a sense of belonging to a community or brotherhood which was much more relevant at the time. This tendency to fabricate stories and formulate myths with no obligations to their truth element has always been there among human beings since the Stone Age. Religious myths gave way to their literary counterparts and the lines between fact and fiction always remain blurred to the extent that people are no more concerned about this distinction

Cerin Babu is Research Scholar in English, St. Thomas College Autonomous, Thrissur, Kerala

specifically in the post-truth era. As Yuval Noah Harari puts it, Homo sapiens have been a post-truth species (Harari 190), since their genesis, whose power depends on creating and believing fiction.

Lingering upon this idea of human beings as post-truth species, the article weighs upon the concept of nation as made explicit by Benedict Anderson in his book *Imagined Communities* and strives to examine the extent to which Anderson's proposition makes room for the post-truth phenomenon in its conception and praxis. It aims to identify the manner in which post-truth mechanism dictates the process of narration that formulates one's conceptualization of a nation. In fact, it attempts to rephrase and redefine Anderson's postulation of the nation as an imagined community.

The article examines how history is dominated by memory and narration. It brings under its scope the dictates of post-truth in the history and representation of a nation and The following sections of the article will detail upon the significant features of the post-truth phenomenon that are relevant to the study; its manifestations and the profound influence that it exerts upon the social and political discourse in the contemporary scenario. Further, it encapsulates the arguments raised by Benedict Anderson in his attempt to interpret the concept of a 'nation' his book *Imagined Communities*. Drawing upon the aforesaid theoretical sources, in the subsequent sessions, efforts will be directed at identifying the significant role played by memory and narration in tracing the history of a nation and in turn, formulating the very essence of nation as an imagined entity. The study will substantiate how memory- both individual and collective- is instrumental in documenting history; how narration addresses the gaps felt in the history and representation of a nation; and how the narration of a nation eventually is resultant of a post-truth mechanism.

In 2016, in the wake of U S Presidential election and the Brexit Referendum, Oxford English Dictionaries picked 'post-truth' as its Word of the Year. The term refers to circumstances in which facts are of lesser importance than emotions and personal beliefs in shaping political debate and public opinion (Mc Intyre 14). The 'post' of post-truth is misleading, however, not only because it implies some former time of truth, but also because, in and of itself, this is not a new phenomenon. Post-truth surfaces in the form of alternative facts, fake news, mis- and disinformation and populism in fields like politics, social media, business and journalism.

The Oxford definition focuses on “what” post-truth is: the idea that feelings sometimes matter more than facts. But just as important is the next question, which is why this ever occurs. Someone does not dispute an obvious or easily confirmable fact for no reason; he or she does so, when it is to his or her advantage. When a person's beliefs are threatened by an “inconvenient fact,” sometimes it is preferable to challenge or change the fact. This can happen either at conscious or unconscious level. The selective use of

facts that prop up one's position, and the complete rejection of facts that do not, seems part and parcel of creating the new post-truth reality. Moreover, one of the many inadequacies of human nature that has been identified, by many scholars and critics, is the inability of humans to fully engage in a rational enterprise when it comes to thought and action. Human beings are indeed labelled as emotional individuals rather than rational considering their emotionally charged perception of things and events and subsequent decision-making process. For instance, the US Presidential elections of 2016 and the resultant victory of Donald Trump proves how political decision-making was largely influenced by the manner of presentation of facts before the public- the performance and rhetoric involved- and their emotional appeal regarding the information rather than its truth content. In short, the post-truth phenomenon is discussed as a social trend where the public is manipulated for safeguarding the political or personal interests of people in the power structure. Emotions play an upper hand in deciding what truth is. Individuals thus display this innate tendency to be sheltered against all forms of emotional discomfort which puts them in a position to be maneuvered into seemingly gullible representations of their identity.

Speaking of identity, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* provides his insightful critique on the concept of nation, national consciousness and nationalism. Among the diverse notions that he elucidates in his book, he depicts nation as a socially constructed community, imagined by people who perceive themselves to be part of a group. According to him, nation is an imagined political community- imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.

It is imagined because members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow members, meet them or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives their communion.... the nation is limited because even the largest of them encompassing, perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic boundaries, beyond which lie other nations.... finally, it is imagined as a community, because... the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship. (Anderson 21)

Anderson explains the formulation of identity and national consciousness with an analogy. He says that it is impossible for human beings to remember the consciousness of childhood when they attain puberty. Most of the period between our infancy and early adulthood had vanished beyond direct recall. However, photographs and images taken during the time records an apparent continuity and emphasizes its loss from memory. Out of this estrangement comes a conception of personhood, identity. It cannot be remembered, recollected or recorded but it must be narrated. Anderson, through instances like this strives to prove that all profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them, characteristic amnesias and out of such oblivions, in specific historic

circumstances, spring narratives. Nations is not so different from people in this respect. Awareness of being embedded in secular serial time with all its implications of continuity, yet forgetting the experience of this continuity, engenders the need for a narrative of identity.

Nations, however, have no clearly identifiable births, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are ever natural. Because there is no Originator, the nation's biography cannot be written evangelically, 'down time,' through a long procreative chain of begetting. The only alternative is to fashion it 'up time' (Anderson 220)

Anderson cites newspaper as one of the two forms of imagining the community that constitutes nation. Newspapers provided the technical means re-presenting the kind of imagined community called the nation. According to him, newspapers are self-contained objects reproduced on a large scale that are one-day best-sellers consumed in mass numbers. They are considered as substitutes for morning prayers, for newspaper reading is a mass ceremony that is replicated by thousands of people who are not aware of each other's identity but confident of each other's existence. At the same time, each reader observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barber shop or residential neighbours is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life. Thus, according to Anderson's findings, newspapers are embedded in fiction that it is profound in its fictiveness. It is almost a conglomeration of narratives that inform people what each day's 'story' is. It adds to the identity of a nation and the individual in seemingly discreet ways.

As mentioned earlier in Anderson's analogy, photographs and images, fine child of the age of mechanical reproduction, serves as documentary evidence to the existence of an individual, event or entity. It declares the fact that this particular person, event or entity existed in history. However, it does not tick all boxes. Despite the significant role it plays in documenting history, these images and photographs (in the current scenario, the documentation is executed by varied forms of representations not just limited to photographs) have serious shortcomings. For instance, consider the portrait of an individual of great historical significance, say Mahatma Gandhi. Everyone will agree that a portrait of Gandhi is a representation of him. However, the problem arises when we think about what is being represented. Mahatma Gandhi as represented by Oswald Birley will be very much distinct from a representation of Gandhi made by Upendra Maharathi. Each representation will carry a different aspect of the 'represented.' Furthermore, each spectator (in case of a painting) will perceive and take away something distinct from the representation each time he/she sees it. Each representation makes a statement about the 'represented (a person, event, or entity) and it varies each time. These variations are influenced and determined by numerous factors. It depends on the way it is presented, the persona of the represented, and the style and of the artist and more importantly the mental

faculties of each spectator coloured by his beliefs, emotions and experiences. In short, what a representation represents (Gandhi) must be strictly distinguished from a representation's represented (some aspect of Gandhi). Thus, we have an object in reality, secondly, its representation and thirdly, the representation drags along with itself, the representation's represented. Same is the case with narratives. They are representations of things that have happened whether real or imaginary. Moreover, if history and historical writings documents the existence of a nation, it follows that such representations of the nation will also be perceived by each reader/ spectator differently. Each of these different and distinct perceptions, if ever re-presented by the reader/ spectator will present a new narrative that is far removed from the original narration. Thus nation, an imagined community as understood by Anderson rests its continuity and existence in varied forms of narration that re-presents the narrative (each time when experienced and perceived by an individual whether he is the part of that community or not) in a different yet distinct manner far removed from any of its previous versions.

Thus, it is evident that nation is imagined and forms part of a narration that replicates at loose intervals to facilitate maximum recollection of its history and existence. It derives its existence as much from memory as from historical documentation. Or in other words, it derives its existence from the countless bits and pieces of information recorded in history interspersed with those squeezed out of memory. It is imagined as much as it is real and its narration will be characterized by additional moments of amnesia. There will be intermittent gaps in narration which we attribute to as resultant of this amnesia. This makes it obligatory on the narrator's/ historian's part to fill the gap and complete the narration. The finished product/ narrative will be very much different from any of the previous renderings. As Agnes Gyorke rightly pointed out,

The nation exists as an imaginary thought, 'which has no shape' and it becomes graspable as a result of different acts of naming.... the constant acts of naming permanently create and recreate the nation... Nevertheless, amnesia can never be total; the new meanings not only destroy one another, but are also built upon each other...the meanings built upon each other had erased the unwanted traits, but preserve the preferred ones. (183)

The gaps in the story will be filled by each individual according to his/ her emotional make-up, personal beliefs and ideologies. There is process of pick and choose evident here, characteristic of the post-truth phenomenon whereby the gaps are filled in with details that are soothing to the national consciousness, never discomfoting or demeaning, and perhaps something that glorifies the national entity of which they are a part. The end narrative will tailored as per the whims and fancies of the individual/s which results in the creation of a shared reality. Each individual memory will be biased towards audience congruent messages; consequently, an individual memory, if widely shared,

becomes a collective memory if it bears a collective identity. For instance, the memory of terrorist attack on Indian Parliament in the year 2001 can be considered as an Indian collective memory because it has a great impact on the way Indians think about themselves. However, the Pythagoras theorem and its particulars does not contribute much to their own sense of national consciousness. Nonetheless, emphasis on an individual memory calls for the listing of factors that contribute to its formation. Post-truth mechanism deserves mention in this context. To put it in simple terms, post-truth is a mechanism where logic and reasoning take a back seat in the decision-making process of an individual when compared to the role played by one's personal beliefs, emotions and ideologies. Feelings sometimes matter more than words. Lee Mc Intyre in his book *Post-Truth* says

Someone does not dispute an obvious and easily confirmable fact for no reason; he or she does so when it is to his or her advantage. When a person's beliefs are threatened by an “inconvenient fact”, some times it is preferable to challenge the fact.” this can happen either at a conscious or unconscious level (since sometimes the person we are seeking to convince is ourselves. (18)

Keeping this very basic explanation of the post-truth discourse in mind, we can surely say that human beings have this innate tendency to stand for those notions that are in congruence with their emotional, mental and ideological framework. Anything that challenges this structure will not be welcome to an individual in particular and a community or a nation in general. Post-truth is relevant in this context because it dictates how history is framed according to the wishes of the people high up in the political power structure. For instances, the Revolt of 1857 that the Indians glorify as the first War of Independence, has been stripped of all its glory and the national spirit associated with it by the British historians who consider it as a mere 'sepoy mutiny'. The national consciousness inherent in the British, along with many other factors are responsible for this fabrication. One can find numerous such instances where history is dictated by the national and political interest of a nation and thus transpiring to be the breeding ground of the post-truth sensibility where truth doesn't matter; what matters is one's emotional appeal and comfort. In the Oxford Union Speech delivered by ShashiTharoor, author, politician and former international civil servant from India, he argued that the economic progress of Britain from the eighteenth century onwards was financed by the economic exploitation and deindustrialization of British-India, including the destruction of Indian weaving industry. Referring to the famines in India (which he claimed were "British-induced"), Tharoor focused on the Bengal famine of 1943, arguing that the responsibility for the famine rests solely on then-British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. Tharoor in fact broke the myth of Britain being the generous benefactor bestowing the Indian subcontinent with privileges like the English education system, the railway network in India and so on that opened the doors of India to the civilized West.

As mentioned above, nation, as Anderson points out, is an imagined community that is imagined, shaped, narrated and represented according to the individual and collective interests of people. New meanings and interpretations are generated to fill in the gaps of narration that is coloured by the emotional appeal and personal beliefs of people who are part of the imagined community. The process of narration is biased and hence subject to post-truth sensibility.

References

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. E-book ed., Verso. 2006. PDF download
- Györke, Ágnes. "Allegories of Nation in *Midnight's Children*." *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, Fall 2001, pp. 169-190, *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41274152>. PDF download.
- Harari, Yuval Noah. *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*. E-book ed., Vintage Press. 2018. PDF download.
- Hirst, William and Gerald Echterhoff. "Creating Shared Memories in Conversation: Toward a Psychology of Collective Memory." *Social Research*, vol. 75, no. 1, Spring 2008, pp. 183-216, *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40972057>. PDF download.
- Mc Intyre, Lee. *Post- Truth*. E-book ed., MIT Press, 2018.
- Mukherjee, Meenakshi. "Narrating a Nation." *Indian Literature*, vol. 35, no. 4, July-August, 1992, pp. 138-149, *JSTOR*, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23337240>. PDF download.

Ontological Boundary Fissures through Biomorphing of the Bodily Images in Posthuman Art

Abstract

*Fissures of discrete boundaries have been the prime focus of the posthumanist line of thought. The bifurcation of various identities and subjectivities are important to maintain a co-evolution of the heterogeneous assemblages. Anti anthropocentric view of posthumanism is better understood through the ethical implications of the artworks that focus on the coexistence of multiple subjectivities underpinning the humanist characteristics. The paper peruses on how post gendered subjectivities are achieved through posthuman art and the conceptualisation of body through it. upon the artworks named *The Bond* (2016), *The Long Awaited* (2008), *Teenage Metamorphosis* (2017), *The Dreamer* (2020), *The Young Family* (2002) by Patricia Piccinini.*

The paper looks into how nuances of creative and deconstructing artform voices against the homocentric thought to coproduce in cognitive environment where the biggest challenge faced is that art has always prevailed to be a human centric thought that arises from the human cognition and to an extent hindered to underpinning the copious conglomerations.

Keywords: Posthuman art, Subjectivity, Anti-anthropocentrism, hierarchy, Biomorphing.

The shift from humanist stance to a posthumanist stance happened over the fissures of various boundaries and binaries. A complete deconstruction of the anthropocentric stand point with the critique of the humanist thought is the base upon which posthumanism dwells. The historical construction of identity and subjectivities being rescribed are the main framework of these ideas. The race-hierarchical and other forms of stratification has so far led to the reinforcement of placing the human beings at the centre of the discourse which posthumanism tries to deconstruct. The discussions over posthumanism developed well over many years when human beings started to even think of the ideas of the world that could question the established hierarchies of the world. The appropriation of Man and the facilitation of it to be at the top rung of hierarchy has unleashed uncontrollable powers of man over other species. Branches of posthumanism like philosophical posthumanism, ecological posthumanism discusses how the extortions and reparations done over other unstable identities have to be countered at any cost.

The subject of human is historically constructed and a deconstruction of it with the implications of human over cross disciplines opens the wide array of possibilities and shows how posthumanism is not after human nor without human but how human is just one among all the others. Obfuscating boundaries delimit the identities and the self other paradigm. The postulate of coexistence gets questioned due to the differential treatment and hierarchical segregation.

Allowing the emergence of various identities and assemblages help not just in bifurcation but to situate the relation and connection between each entities. Entanglement of interdependent relations and coexistence is a way to topple the Eurocentric understanding of the world.

Humanism has always set the stipulated standards for artworks on the premise of moral implications. Posthuman artists do not limit any kind of their embodiment within any biological body and encourage all kinds of enhancements and transgressions. Posthuman art proves itself to be a movement of renaissance that tries to break free from the restrictive human conceptualisation. This paper pursues the idea of how biomorphing in art over the recent years in the works of posthuman artists transgress the idea of bio-boundaries and how such bodily fissures lead to the reinvention of post gendered subjectivities through the select artworks of posthuman artist Patricia Piccinini; *The Bond* (2016), *The Long Awaited* (2008), *Teenage Metamorphosis* (2017), *The Dreamer* (2020), *The Young Family* (2002). It tries to understand the alternative subjectivities through radical reconfigurations in visual narratives through theoretical conceptualisation of posthumanism.

The theoretical position of posthumanism with its anti-anthropocentric point is better understood through the ethical implications of the artworks produced which focus on the coexistence and inclusivity of the multiple subjectivities. The quintessential humanist characteristics and the cultural and philosophical inheritances placed upon man are erased off through the works of many artists who aim at obscuring the boundaries on different levels. Many artists like Stelarc, Patricia Piccinini and Neil Harbisson through their works try to establish a non hierarchical, non linear relationship between human and other non human species to envision a new kind of social reality. These artists create a platform that facilitates to rethink the world where they harness and collaborate with creative forces that stand outside the framework of humanism. Most of the works base on the feminist genealogy which discloses the interconnectedness of human and non-human bodies to understand the more than human entanglements.

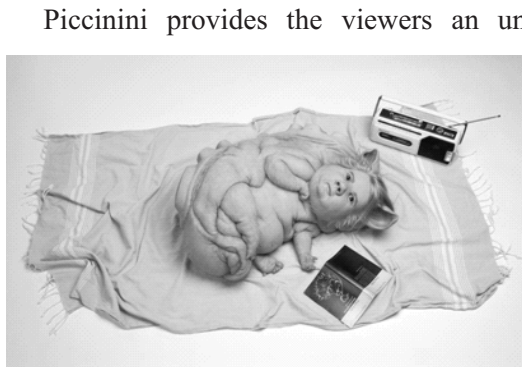
Posthuman artists consider the body not as any social or cultural construct within the binaries; instead, think of it as a mere tool that can easily be replaced or exchanged.

Transcending the boundaries of the body vanquishes homogeneity and enhances rhizomatic connectivity among various assemblages for an ever evolving dialogue among heterogeneous voices. Platforms like Posthuman Art Laboratory brings together

the artists to explore the nuances of creative and deconstructing artform against the homocentric thought to coproduce in cognitive environment. Biggest challenge faced is that art has always prevailed to be a human centric thought that arises from the human cognition and to an extent hindered to underpinning the copious conglomerations. Justin Shoulder's *The River Eats* (2012), Hayden Fowler's *Dark Ecology* (2015) showcases exemplary performances on new understandings of human and the distinction between natural and artificial. (Museum of Contemporary Art).

This study focuses mainly on the hyperreal sculptures made by Patricia Piccinini where she focuses on the relation between human bodies and culture, environment, natural and artificial. With more ambiguous approaches she forces to ponder upon the ethical relations and responsibilities. Artists like Piccinini have been trying to counteract the Western Humanist ideals that refuse to place anything other than humans at the centre of the discourse thereby, ripping off the existence of non-human.

Fig 01: Teenage Metamorphosis. Source : Ocula.com

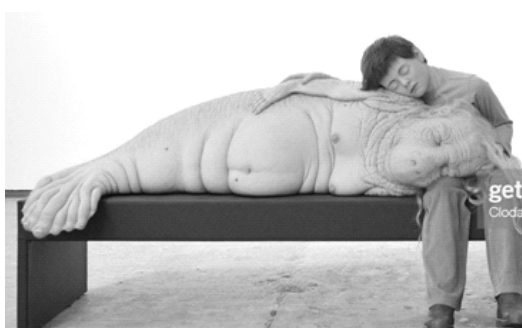


Piccinini provides the viewers an unsettling yet elusive experience through biomorphing and bioart. Deterritorialization and a semiotic shift is achieved through the human non-human hybrid that keeps staring at the audience as a need for the reclamation of their space in the world.

Concept of body has so far been limited to the Eurocentric male where the forceful essentialism upon the concept of body limits the facets of identities. The unsettling parallel universe created by Piccinini is replete with points of breaking the stratification schemata. Teenage Metamorphosis breaks what Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel referred to as the Great Divide. This model breaks the argument to have a distinction between the humans and the animals as it cannot be classified into any one of the categories yet the model is imparted autonomy. This work of art seeks proximity to the rhizomatic assemblages to align closely to intersectionality. Patricia focuses on the concept of ethics and interrelatedness through her artwork named *The Long Awaited*. She raises the question of bioethics becoming complicated and difficult.

Fig 02: The Long Awaited. Source: Getty Images.

Her transgenic model clearly depicts how “the human itself is no longer part of the family of man but a zoo of posthumanities” (Halbertam and Livingston; 1995:03). Identity in theoretical posthumanism is a malleable concept as ‘body’ need not be in constraint under any discreet identity.



The sculpture here shows how peaceful coexistence and positive multiple identities can exist once we begin to understand and embrace the differences. Piccinini evidently proves how bio customisation helps to circumvent the dualities. The conceptualisation of humanness in such queer manner in a way is aligned to posthuman feminism through these

unexplained transformations. The Long Awaited represents the future of human bodies suggesting a bio transformation that exemplifies further through posthuman aesthetics and ethics (Pimentel Biscaia 2019; 28). The bond and affinities shared among the characters of the image shows Donna Haraway's resistance against the construction of discreet identities based on taxonomies. Cyborgian fluidity negates a "unitary conceptualisation of humanness referred to as fractured identity" (Haraway 1991; 155-161). The young boy in the image clearly depicts the radical reshaping of the inter-species propinquity that Haraway describes as, "We can be responsible for machines. They do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they" (Haraway 1991; 180). Piccinini tries to unearth how to maintain the natureculture continuum through interspecies technocultural development.

Fig 03: The Young Family. Source: Ocula.com

The concept of body and thoughts of affinities have to be redefined through a more holistic approach.



The artwork named The Young Family is a cross species representation where the emotion of the family is retained but through its biological features it remains deterritorialized. Deterritorialization is vital to aim at a techno-oriented social and political articulations that can bring about alternative genealogies. As Deleuze and Felix Guattari have mentioned;

only something deterritorialized is capable of reproducing itself(1987; 59-60). The eyes of the mother figure seem too fatigued due to over exploitation and consumption. Nursing her babies, she feels hopeless and cynical about the world. Piccinini tries to bring out a posthuman paradigm not merely by introducing non-human figures into the scenario. She also tries to decentre the linear narration of power and various power disparities that exist

within. The image is a blend of the human figure and the pigs. She points to the over exploitation of the animals like pigs in the meat industry where they are being slaughtered in multitude. She also considers this as a clarion call for the reparations against the non-human figures and establish a web of life which does not entertain one single cynosure. Intersectionality among the species have been achieved through blurring the borderline between various conglomerations. Ferrando in her work “The Body” states that posthumanism is a theoretical invitation to think inclusively to genealogically place humans in a universal field and aims at an alteration within the self (Ferrando 2014). The Young Family forces the viewers to consider the human body beyond the dualistic ontologies to realise the semiotic shift as to how the biological body is just another ephemeral concept. Refabrication of assemblages and manifestation of life at different levels reverberates to biological humanism and Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of the grotesque. “Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits” (Bakhtin 1984; 26).

The Dreamer (2020) by Patricia Piccinini is an elaborate example of the reconfiguration of the unstable bodily interactions.

Fig 04: The Dreamer. Source: Ocula.com

Many often doubt whether such reconfigured entities might tend to take the positions of humans as the centre of discourse lingers but Piccinini through her works has tried to clearly depict not the rearrangement of the established hierarchies; instead, the



coexistence and evolution for a more inclusive and ethically responsible world. Andrew Pickering coined “dance of agency” between human and non-human entities in a posthumanist technocultural space (1995). All the works of Piccinini backs the idea of Katerine Hayles that, “a dynamic partnership between humans and intelligent machines replaces the liberal humanist subject's manifest

destiny to dominate and control nature” (288). Posthumanism provides space for all incongruous relations that exist among various identities. The alteration should happen in a multi directional manner. Human beings should not merely be removed as the centre of the discussion. It should aim at a complete transformation of the humans so that there is a bio customisation happening that can fit into the premise of philosophical posthumanism.

“A posthuman ethics for a non-unitary subject proposes an enlarged sense of inter-connection between self and others, including the non-human or 'earth' others by removing the obstacle of self-centred individualism. [...] The posthuman recomposition

of human interaction that I propose is not the same as the reactive bond of vulnerability, but it is an affirmative bond that locates the subject in the flow of relations with multiple others' “ (Braidotti 2013; 49). Piccinini clearly brings out how posthumanism is not merely discussions that revolve around technological developments but is a holistic approach on a socio-cultural level. Any deviation from the normalised humanist concept was considered to be posthuman. Discussions over Posthumanist feminist genealogies developed much earlier; feminist discourse aimed at toppling the male dominance that prevailed and likewise posthumanist discourse aimed at toppling the anthropocentric world. Both the narratives run parallel and aim at a multi faceted development on an ethical and relational basis. Body needs to be reclaimed from the patriarchal ontological construction and question the boundaries on a bodily and socio-political level. By challenging anthropocentrism, posthumanism overcomes the dualist ontologies and identifies human as a mere ephemeral entity in the web of life (Ferrando; 2016). Perfunctory removal of boundaries might lead to the relentless exploitation of Man over the others. Human arrogance has always been a theoretical strategy for uncontrollable dominance. Mere removal of the boundaries can remove all restraints on humans on an ecological and philosophical level. “Removing boundaries' has been an important metaphor for removing restraints on human actions, and allowing limitless exploitation of natural resources” (Moser 1995; 281). Achieving a post gendered subjectivity through reconfiguration of the bodily experiences and decentralising the normativities can help to achieve an all inclusive turn of life.

The manifestation of posthuman turn through a variety of assemblages must be fostered by projecting the embodiments of various kinds. One must be totally aware of the anthropocentric position one is placed within. Even posthuman art arises from human thought. The whole decentering process and destabilisation of the hierarchy happens from the conceptualization of human beings. The whole thought process of decentering the Man arises and revolves around them. Patricia Piccinini through her artworks tries to bring about the dynamic relation between the human beings and other entities by breaking the socio-cultural foundation of human beings. She does not aim for transformation of human beings through her artwork; instead, looks for a hybridisation of a seamless form. By deterritorializing the body, reformulation of the bodily boundaries are made possible. Multi species co-optation is mandatory for ontological rejection of anthropocentrism. The characters that were so far being attributed to man are being dissipated to seamless boundary less figures. The redefinition should happen through a holistic approach. The artworks of Piccinini invoke a sense of ethical responsibility that should arise from the humanist perspective. The counter hegemonic readings of the artworks and such exercises will give rise to alternative subjectivities. Humanist perspective of the world embodies any subject as the Eurocentric male. Radical reshaping such as a posthumanist reading forces to bring about a post gendered subjective reading that does not limit any kind of identity to certain bodily embodiments. The semiotic shift of boundaries between

bodies and self should impart rhetorical practices of various multiplicities of identities and subjective positions that are all imparted with equal status and co-existence with no established hierarchies ruling over them. Corporealization should be bio disintegrated to develop each into separate and individual entities.

References

- Bakhtin, Mikhail, et al. *Rabelais and his world*. Translated by Hélène Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 2013. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Ferrando, Francesca. “A feminist genealogy of posthuman aesthetics in the visual arts.” *Palgrave Communications*, vol. 2, no. 16011, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2016.11>
- Ferrando, Francesca. “The Body.” *Post- and Transhumanism: An Introduction*, edited by Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner, Peter Lang, 2014, pp. 213-227.
- Halberstam, Judith M., et al., editors. *Posthuman Bodies*. Indiana University Press, 1995. Haraway, Donna. 1991. “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, edited by Donna Haraway. New York: Routledge, 149–181.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *How we became posthuman*. University of Chicago Press, 1999. Latour, Bruno, et al., editors. *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*. ZKM/Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, 2005.
- Moser, Ingunn, and Vandana Shiva, editors. *Biopolitics: A Feminist and Ecological Reader on Biotechnology*. Bloomsbury Academic, 1995.
- “New Romance: art and the posthuman | MCA Australia.” *Museum of Contemporary Art*, <https://www.mca.com.au/artists-works/exhibitions/new-romance-art-and-the-posthuman/>. Accessed 19 March 2023.
- Piccinini, Patricia. “The Dreamer.” *Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery*, 2020. *Ocula*, <https://ocula.com/art-galleries/roslyn-oxley9/artworks/patricia-piccinini/the-dreamer/> Accessed 18 March 2023.
- Piccinini, Patricia. “The Long Awaited”. 2008. *GettyImages*, <https://www.gettyimages.in/detail/news-photo/person-looks-at-an-installation-entitled-the-long-awaited%C3%B5-news-photo/480595484?adppopup=true>. Accessed 18 March 2023.
- Piccinini, Patricia. “Teenage Metamorphosis”. 2016. *Ocula*, <https://ocula.com/art-galleries/tolarno-galleries/artworks/patricia-piccinini/teenage-metamorphosis/> Accessed 18 March 2023. Piccinini, Patricia. “The Young Family”. 2002. *Ocula*, <https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/patricia-piccinini/> Accessed 18 March 2023.
- Pickering, Andrew. *The mangle of practice : time, agency, and science*. University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Pimentel Biscaia, Maria Sofia. “Loving Monsters—The Curious Case of Patricia Piccinini’s Posthuman Offspring.” *Nordlit*, 2019, pp. 27-46, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337168928_Loving_Monsters-The_Curious_Case_of_Patricia_Piccinini's_Posthuman_Offspring
- Tavin, Mira Kallio. “Art Education Beyond Anthropocentrism: The Question of Nonhuman Animals in Contemporary Art and Its Education.” *Studies in Art Education*, vol. 61, no. 4, 2020, pp. 298-311. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2020.1820832>.

Voices of Coorg : An Analysis of Sarita Mandanna's *Tiger Hills*

Abstract

This paper attempts to study Sarita Mandanna's novel Tiger Hills in the light of Race and Space. The text tells the story of Coorg from 1878 to 1936. The novel tracks the life of central characters against the backdrop of Coorg, a rural district in Karnataka. Coorg, being a place surrounded by hills and forest, was isolated from the mainstream area for a long time. This geographical position of Coorg led to the isolation of its people and they evolved as a distinct race with unique beliefs and culture. The Coorgs (inhabitants of Coorg), detached from the other nearby places, lead a self-reliant life solely dependent on their space. After the British invasion of Coorg, the place and its people undergo tremendous socio-political and ecological changes. After the invasion of the British, they carved routes to Coorg and therefore it was left exposed to the mainstream society. The violence and exploitation Coorg and its race of humans had to undergo due to its encounter with the mainstream society is deeply explored by the writer. The encounter results in ecological imperialism and affects the connection between Coorg and its people. The loss of unique identity of Coorg's people results in a rootless generation of Coorg. The present study aims to look at the following aspects:

- 1) *How space plays a role in creation of a race?*
- 2) *The violence faced by people of Coorg and its people when they were exposed to the mainstream society.*
- 3) *How marginality of Coorg is portrayed in the text?*

The research methodology employed is textual analysis in the light of Spatial Studies.

Key Words :Coorg, ecology, exploitation, imperialism, marginality, race, violence.

Introduction

In humanities today, “race” is examined as a socially- constructed and historically reproduced phenomenon that is not related to any biological imperative (Harris 3). Racial interactions and process (eg identities, inequalities, conflicts and so on) are also about how we collectively make and remake, overtime and through ongoing contestation, the spaces we inhabit (1934). Since race is a social construction, society tends to classify people belonging to a certain geographical space as a particular race. As Caroline Knowles puts it “an adequate study of race and racism must attend to the spatial dimensions of race making”. She also writes, “Space is an active archive of the social

Mirfa K S is an independent scholar.

process and social relationships, composing racial order (1940). The text *Tiger Hills* selected for the present study analyses how Coorg, a marginal space give rise to a community, how they are identified as a distinct race by outsiders and how Coorg is affected by western encounters and how moving out to an urban space affects and transforms them. Space and race are interactional and relational. Said opines that “the imperial centre maps a body of racialized discourses onto the periphery in ways that maintain geographic and social hierarchies (Neele and Samura 1944).

Through the novel *Tiger Hills*, Sarita Mandanna tells the story of Coorg and its people. The story spans three generations. It is set during the colonial time period. Though the story revolves around the protagonist Devi and her life from childhood to middle age, Coorg sets the background to the story. Mandanna has not used Coorg as a background but as a character itself without whose omnipresence the story would not have happened or ended the way it had.

Coorg and its People

Coorg's geographical location made it difficult to access before the British carved a route through the forest. Mandanna describes Coorg as follows:

It was a tiny principality, shaped not unlike the knitted bootie of an infant, and tucked into the highest reaches of the Sahyadri mountains that girded the country's coastline to the south. The far side of the mountains was bounded by the ocean, dropping abruptly into the glittering blue of the Arabian Sea. (4)

So, we understand that Coorg suffers both societal marginalization where in as noted by Larsen “marginalized people are usually discriminated against, stigmatized, ignored and often suppressed on the basis of race, gender, age, culture, religion, ethnicity, occupation, education and economy by the mainstream” (12) and spatial marginalization which is usually linked to the geographical remoteness of an area from major economic centres (location), and refers to areas that are difficult to reach (access) in the absence of appropriate infrastructure and therefore isolated from mainstream development” (13).

Mandanna describes in detail how Coorgs' connection with the land, “Only the Coorgs knew the jungle trails well, them and the charcoal skinned Poleyatribals who served them” (5). One can see through Mandanna's description that Coorg has also developed a unique system of beliefs and culture. One can see through Mandanna's description that the Coorgs used to lead a nature centered life and they carry out their living without harming the nature. Rev. G. Ritcher's description of Coorg in his manual of Coorg exemplifies this aspect of Coorgs and views it through an outsider's point of view.

“In vain, however the eyes searches for towns and villages, churches, castles or other indications of civilized life. Only here and there in nooks and corners, ensconced amongst groves and clusters of cultivated trees betrayed by a wreath of smoke, can one discover

the thatched houses of Coorg, who love a solitary abode (5).

From this we understand their lifestyle includes cultivation of crops suitable to the Coorg soil. And also, from an outsider's point of view Coorg is devoid of any sight which signifies civilization. Mandanna's description gives a better understanding of how they make use of their land and it matches with Rev. Ritcher's description. Mandanna writes, "A velvet patchwork of jungle soil, moist, fertile and dark as the night sky where the forest had been hacked away. Peridot swathes of paddy flats lining the wetlands by the streams (5). Coorg's sustainable lifestyle also becomes evident in Rev. Ritcher's description. He writes, "... whatever of the cattle manure and dry leaves has been collected during the year is in dry season carried by women to the fields in large baskets and deposited in little heaps which are there burnt and the ashes are subsequently strewn over the ground" (88).

The land also plays an important role in bringing up a Coorg. One can see that children are trained right from their childhood or they are brought up in such a way that they can learn and know their land from childhood itself. One such example is the games Devi and Devanna would play as children. Mandanna describes how they use to catch crabs as a source of entertainment:

They would wait, grinning in anticipation, as the stream shone around them, the gleam of its surface broken now and again by a movement from some underlying fish. The crabs would scuttle towards the intestine, digging their pincers into its length. Then Devi and Devanna would lift it from the water, together, in one fluid movement, the crabs clinging unawares, like gems along some strange, pendulous necklace" (19).

Violence on Coorg and its People

The concept of race made its first appearance in India under British. By fashioning 'race' conceptually along the lines of Aryanism, they linked physical traits to basic features of social stratification and categorised subcontinental population to several races (qtd in Rakshit 1965: Rai 68). The concept of 'race' under colonialism functioned as a discourse through which caste, tribal, ethnic and religious differences were maintained and made comprehensible (qtd in Thapar 1996 ; Rai 68). In the case of Coorg too, one can see in records that Coorg population was also categorised into a distinct race by colonial missionaries who were assigned to study about Coorg and civilize them. Mandanna, taking references from original records and fictionalizes the situation here.

A fictional missionary who has set about to civilize Coorgs by converting them to Christianity recorded about Coorgs that they are a race of unknown origins. They constitute a highland clan and are free from caste system (25) . Mandanna writes, "One is born first a Coorg, and only then an Indian or even a Hindu" (26). In the first half of the novel, Mandanna describes how Coorg as a race establish themselves in their space rooted to their land by developing their own belief system and culture. But even in the beginning itself, Mandanna gives glimpses of how Europeans settle in Coorg and

attempts to civilize them and convert them to Christianity through western education. Mandanna writes about this, “The reverend decided to change track, realizing that the younger generation was key to the success of his mission. He gave up all overt preaching, restating his primary objective as the establishment of a school in Mercara” (27). The change the education brought was portrayed through Devanna(first generation) and Appu (second generation), two of the major characters in the text. His school in Mercara set up by the Rev.Gundert puts Devanna at the threshold of both the cultures, one being Coorg's and the other being the western. Devanna excels in his studies and learn to unlearn the myths and legends which were part of his Coorg culture. Reverend himself paid keen attention to Devanna and took upon himself the task of civilizing Devanna in the traditions of western world. So, as the British clustered their estates and Ceylonese coffee beans which they brought with them took their root in the “virgin soil” (as the writer calls it) of Coorg, Coorg's people were changing. After being educated in the missionary school, Devanna identifies two parts to himself, mission Devanna and CoorgDevanna. He distinguishes the two like this :

The mission school half could paint, recite Wordsworth, make a perfect sign of the Cross and knew all about reflection and refraction. He wore shoes all times, even inside the Mission, the bows of his laces perfectly equal lengths. CoorgDevanna on the other hand, knew the other, not-so-obvious things. He knew of the Veera, the spirits of ancient valiants who, shocked by their own violent deaths, now shadowed the living. He knew the sweetness of the nectar that pooled inside the lantana blossoms, had felt the heat of germinating paddy slush against his bare feet, the mud oozing from between his toes. He knew full well that, when displeased, Indra Swami threw thunderbolts from his palace in the heavens (55-57).

One can see that the western education and interaction with Rev. Richard made him in conflict with his culture and race. Though he manages to keep these two separates, sometimes one would overlap the other. When Devanna steps outside Coorg, to join his medical school, he has to undergo severe ragging and bullying just because he is from Coorg since he has crossed geographical and social boundaries set up the society who owns the centre. Though he is from a reputed family in his place and academically brilliant, Devanna, in mainstream and comparatively developed place like Bangalore is identified with Coorg, an isolated and marginalized place. Devanna, now in an urban space, he is subjected to racialization. The urban space Devanna moved into is a space with mixed identities and where interaction between different races take place. “Space is often a more tangible manifestation of systemic racial inequalities (Neely and Samura 1940). One of his seniors, Martin especially targeted Devanna. He would call Devanna 'Chokra', meaning servant boy, a derogatory word then. The moment Martin had laid his eyes on the first years, he had spotted Devanna, most “vulnerable of the herd”(113). Even Martin could not explain his loathing for Devanna. While all the others in Devanna's

batch, according to Martin, had been “brown-arsed runts”, Devanna's skin was lighter, a pale olive tinted which resembled nearly Martin's who was an Anglo -Indian and Martin felt the olive undertones of his complexion betrayed his native blood. Here, Martin, an anglo Indian becomes a representation of the dominant white race. He could not stand the lack of brownness of Devanna's skin colour. He enquires about Devanna's background and comes to know about his rich accomplished family background.

It irks Martin even more. Martin who is financially underprivileged, saw Devanna as a privileged version of himself even though he would never admit it (115-116). He was subjected to sodomy and the pain he undergoes afterwards is described by Mandanna mentioning him as Coorg- Devanna , a tag which makes him marginalized and vulnerable, that part of Devanna himself keeps aside when he is in a so called civilized space. Here, Devanna is being identified by his race and one can understand from Mandanna's description the fact that Devanna exceeded Martin's typical expectations of how a Coorg should look like is one of the reasons he loathed Devanna. It can also be interpreted as Martin's attempt to establish his superior race over Devanna's race. During a vacation, Devanna is gifted a Malabar squirrel by Devi and he keeps it in his hostel and becomes very fond of it. The squirrel was also Devanna's way of carrying Coorg with him. But Martin finds out and dissects it brutally. Afterwards, Devanna indulges in a physical fight with Martin and already emotionally shattered Devanna, suffers a concession followed by a heavy blow from Martin. In that state he leaves to Coorg, meets Devi and rapes her, a act which he is not fully aware of. Throughout the incidents that happened in Devanna's life after he left the Coorg, shows how vulnerable he became once he was out of his space. He was identified with his marginalized and undeveloped land as compared to Bangalore, a mainstream space. The fact that Gundert never prepared Devanna for ragging shows that Gundert being a white man could not think of the violence a Coorg would face in a place like Bangalore from the so-called civilized people. Bell Hooks' observation can provide an answer for that. According to her, the experience of space and location is not the same for everyone. It is not same for one who enjoys any kind of discrimination in case of class or race. It is neither same for people who comes from marginalized or “under class communities”(Hooks 205). The answer to Devanna's aforementioned question lies in this. Gundert's inability to think that Devanna would be a victim of brutal ragging is because he is from a mainstream society and does not have any experience of being marginalized.

It is noticeable that Gundert also failed in his promise to Devanna that he could reach out to him with anything. When Devanna reaches out to him after inflicting violence on Devi, he responds “'Pagan', Gundert hissed, his face white and twisted. 'Filthy, common native...’” (Mandanna 147). Here Gundert associates Devanna's barbaric act to his nativity while infact the reason behind Devanna's act was the violence he suffered from the hands of a half white man from much more developed place than him. Here, one gets

to question who is really pagan or uncivilized, Martin or Devanna?! Devanna's act of violence as a result of what he has suffered at the hands of Martin can be compared to the violence western race infiltrated on Coorg.

During this time, Coorg was undergoing ecological and social change as a result of Western Imperialism. It is evident when Mandanna writes, “European planters were known to be fanatical about clipping back the tree cover, and in some estates there had been mass felling of timber”(Mandanna 223). Coorg people were also made to work hard in a dehumanising way in the forests and coffee plantation. They were asked to cut trees for coffee plantation and if any tree was left out, these planters had their workers that it would be grounds for instant dismissal(223). Fanon defines racialization as a process of objectification and dehumanization of the colonised by colonisers, which was naturalised through physical signification particularly of skin colours, that legitimised colonial domination (Rai 81). They used Ceylonese beans to cultivate in Coorg. It was the first time when the soils of Coorg were introduced to a foreign species. Throughout the text, one can see that Mandanna uses the term “virgin soil” to describe the soil before coffee was introduced to the Coorg, “virgin” implying “unexploited”, which means that she sees that planting coffee as an exploitation to the marginal space of the Coorg. The soil was virgin when the Coorg was a marginalized space. As coffee plantation flourished in the virgin soils of Coorg and it eroded the fertility of Coorg soil. As a result, Coorg transforms from virgin land to injured land. Coorg's devotion to their own land decreases and starts to view land as mere property from which they can make profit. Mandanna writes about this, “But as the years passed, the initial advantage of virgin soil had been eroded”(Mandanna 227). After getting good yields from coffee plantation, Devi is overcome by greed. As years pass, she becomes obsessed with coffee plantations.

Mandanna also describes the westernization of Coorgs like this “A new elite emerged in Coorg on the wings of this prosperity...These were progeny of some of the most respected local families, boasting ancestral histories as long and deep as the Kaveri in flood”. They built European style houses and “modernized themselves and danced tango. They rechristened themselves with mixed results (301).They are the members who frequented the clubs in Mercara. Clubs became an intersection of culture and a ground for getting acquainted with the European cultures. Though Mandanna distinguishes the two cultures like this “The English had their velvet-curtained club, the Coorgs frequented the palm frond-thatched shack that lay at the entrance to Mercara” (232) in the beginning, in the end the rich, landowners also become the members of clubs and starts mimicking the western lifestyle. Appu, son of Machu, adopted by Devi after his death is western educated, the next generation of the protagonists' family is an embodiment of the completely rootless and detached generation from the land. Through Appu, Mandanna brings out the completely changed generation of the Coorg. Appu becomes the representation of all the English educated, European club member who remains completely detached from the land which was once interlinked with the Coorg identity.

He becomes representation of that generation who feels ashamed of his Coorg identity and feels the need to be westernized. He urges his wife to wear western clothes and avoids her during his club visits since she is not western enough. She, who has no exposure to an environment other than Coorg finds it difficult to adapt to western environment. Even though she knew English, she was not as fluent as women who were trained in convent-accented English. She despised clubs and wanted Appu to stay at home and even when she promised to cook Coorg cuisine for him, he fancies western food or at least pretends to prefer that (427 -428). So, she also suffers marginalization from her westernized husband. “Marginality is defined by Gurung and Kollamair as “the temporary state of having been put aside of living in relative isolation, at the edge of a system (cultural, social, political or economic) ...in mind, when one excludes certain domains or phenomena from one's thinking because they do not correspond to the mainstream philosophy” (10). For instance, Appu is portrayed as someone who gets bored of the old games, forests and people of Coorg. Though hunting is a part of Coorg tradition, for Appu it is a source of entertainment. He is bored of his own place and is constantly in search of other sources and places of amusement. His own place seems unsophisticated for him and his demand to name *NariMalaias* Tiger Hills elucidates it. He says, “*NariMalaiis* so provincial. Let's call it Tiger hills instead. English” (316). Machu is portrayed as completely rootless and detached generation of Coorg who tries to transgress his racial identity and geographical space as a Coorg by becoming western and through constant interactions with people who follow western culture.

Conclusion

From the analysis of the text, one can understand how Coorg, being isolated from the mainstream society developed its own unique culture and how they practiced a sustainable lifestyle and lived in close association with nature. From the analysis of the text one can understand that Coorg's marginality did contribute to the racism experienced by its inhabitants when they got exposed to the mainstream society. One can also see that how western education played an important role in Coorgs' transformation and how the later generation constantly tries to get away from the shackles of their racial identities by adopting western lifestyle.

References

- Gurung, Ghana S and Michael, Kollamair. “Marginality: Concepts and their Limitations.” *Dialogue*, 2005. www.nccr-pakistan.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Marginality.pdf Accessed 10 Nov. 2022.
- Harris, Dianne. “Race, Space, and the Destabilization of Practice.” www.jstor.org/stable/43323750. Accessed 15 Nov 2022.
- Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*.^{8th}., *Modern Language Association of America*.
- Hooks, Bell. “Choosing the margin as a space of a radical openness” *The journal of Cinema and Media*, No. 36, pp. 15-23, www.Jstor.org/ stable/ 44111660. Accessed 10 Nov. 2022.
- Mandanna, Sarita. *Tiger Hills*. Penguin Books.2011.

Neely, Brooke and Michelle Samura. "Social geographies of race: Connecting race and space." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol 34, no.11,2011, pp.1933-1952.

www.researchgate.net/publication/232843422_Social_Geographies_of_Race_Connecting_Race_and_Space. Accessed 10. Nov 2022.

Ritcher, Reverent Gundart. *Manual of Coorg: A Gazetteer*. C.Stolz, Basel Mission Book Depository,1878

books.google.co.in/books?id=aadCAAAAIAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=manual+of+coorg&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewjdnJHXp4DpAhUw8HMBHfgSD1EQ6AEIKjAA#v=one_page&q=manual%20of%20coorg&f=false. Accessed 10 Nov. 2022.

Problematics of Dislocation : A Reading of Select Works

Abstract

*The conflicts around refugee experiences arises due to the phenomenon of migration. Some of the major reasons for migration are globalization, regional integration, religious/political interests, the formation and consolidation of blocs including the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and by the triumphal procession of cyberspace. All these formations have caused significant changes to the world map. The disciplines of History, Sociology, Anthropology, Geography, and Economics have delved deep into the plight of the refugees and their subsequent identity crisis majorly through numbers. However, the discipline of Literature and Literary Studies responds to majorly the humanitarian aspect of migration and refugee suffering. When the world goes haywire due to mass displacements, what do the migrants/immigrants/emigrants/refugees feel? How do they respond to the idea of leaving their lands and going somewhere else? Do they accept their harsh reality in one go? Or do they have their own ways of responding, resisting, reacting, and retaliating to their sudden uprooting? Do they ever re-root themselves? This paper aims to find answers to these questions through the reading of Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. Through the analysis of these texts, the paper aims to examine the troubling problematics of the dislocated/disturbed Self, responses to the prevalence of borders and boundaries, the psychological conditioning of the refugees, and the various metaphors of borders as used by the respective authors.*

Keywords: Contested spaces, displacements, hybridity, migration, post-colonialism.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* and Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West* are two seminal texts that focus on the issue of migration. In the contemporary scenario, migration is the reality of our lives. The phenomenon of migration regulates our lives at various levels such as moving out of fears and attachments and fulfill our realities and requirements such as having a suitable career or adhering to the norms of borders and boundaries. Migration leaves the traces of nostalgia, trauma and fantasy in us and hence is an embodied and affective phenomenon. It is an experience that defines our existence. Migration is a spatial phenomenon. Migrants move from one place to another and carry a sense of past defined by their experiences, memories, and attachments. Their multiple identities can be theoretically understood through the concepts of diaspora, exile, immigration to understand their psyche of loss and longing, displacement and replacement, crisis and negotiation. All these binaries are not concepts limited as water tight compartments.

These are blurred concepts which can be understood not in isolation but in relation to each other. Pramod K Nayar has postulated four main components of migration which are important to understand are as follows: 'analepsis', 'prolepsis', 'de-territorialization', and 're-territorialization'. While the first is about looking back at the past, the second entails thinking about the future. While prolepsis is a retreat into the history producing nostalgia and memory, analepsis is about accepting the past and seek new vistas of life. Together, there is a constant interaction between analepsis and prolepsis leading to the discourses of melancholy, survival and assimilation. These two components pertain to the temporal move. The third and the fourth component comprise the loss of a territory followed by the feeling of disillusionment and the element of relocation followed by the courage to readjust and restart respectively. These two components pertain to the spatial move. All these four components function together and further complicate the identity of a migrant. Azade Seyhan, in the book, *Writing Outside Nation* talks about how migration and diaspora have a lot to do with borders and boundaries. This makes them highly important to be studied within the ambit of post-colonialism. She deliberates upon how migrations are a result of the postcolonialism. She says, “Born of crisis and change, suffering alternately from amnesia and too much remembering, and precariously positioned at the interstices of different spaces, histories, and languages, they seek to name and configure cultural and literary production in their own terms and to enter novel forms of inter/trans-cultural dialogue” (Seyhan 4). The issues of migration and displacement often mirror the fragmented consciousness of a post-colonial hybrid identity wherein the borders are not merely geographical boundaries or politically drawn lines. These tend to divide the places into different nation states. The space between 'to and from' in migratory processes is a highly contested place and moving from one place to another does not make the former place as a forgotten past. Rather, past and present exist together. Migration, thus, goes beyond being a physical phenomenon. It is a process involving psychological and philosophical underpinnings.

The aim of this paper is to analyze and understand the ambivalence which is present in the identity of the people who have encountered migration or are constantly in the state of flux. This paper also attempts to understand both the silence and eloquence of migration both as an experience and as a philosophy. The questions that will be critically analysed in this paper are: When the world goes haywire due to mass displacements, what do the migrants/immigrants/emigrants/refugees feel? How do they respond to the idea of leaving their lands and going somewhere else? Do they accept their harsh reality in one go? Or do they have their own ways of responding, resisting, reacting, and retaliating to their sudden uprooting? Do they ever re-root themselves?

Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* refers to three major historical events- the Bengal freedom movement, the World War 2, and India's Partition and how these events gave rise to conflicted and dislocated identities. Focussing on the movement in Bengal and the

partition of India, these two incidents gave rise to the formation of East and West Bengal, Dhaka being the capital of East Bengal and Calcutta being the capital of West Bengal. The meaning of latter being the inverted image of the former signifies how the occurrence of riots made the lives of the common people topsy-turvy. The inversion symbolizes how geographical boundaries could not create psychological borders. Rather, geographical boundaries and maps uprooted families and divided psyches. The novel takes place largely on the newly created Indo-Pakistan border which divided families. Dhaka and Calcutta are no more secular and cultural places but have become politically charged spaces. The two places which were parts of the same whole have now been disintegrated and have been made two distinct nations. The geographical border acts as the mirror and the function of the mirror is to project an inverted image of the object. Here, the mirror is the physical border and the inversion can be understood as symbolizing the communal frenzy, disharmony, violence, the sense of loss of homeland and constant longing of going back to one's land which have now become contested spaces.

The novel can be viewed as a representation of fixed concepts like nation, otherness, and identity dilemmas. To represent these concepts, the trope of memory has been used to reflect upon the existence of borders and boundaries. The novel showcases the stories both pre and post-partition- in Dhaka before Partition, life in London, and the life the narrator (Tridib) in the Calcutta of the 1960s and London of the 1970s. Through these shift in places and spaces, the novel presents the conflicted states of a migrant family having both intra and international affiliations. In other words, the novel can be read as a comment on the complex nature of geographical and psychological borders vis-a-vis the theories of postmodernism and postcolonialism. In the novel, the issue of fluid national identity is portrayed through the character of Thamma who is born in Dhaka (presently in Bangladesh) but later gets the nationality as Indian. She keeps on questioning the ideas of war and borders:

But if there aren't any trenches or anything, how are people to know? I mean, where's the difference then? And if there's no difference both sides will be the same; it'll be just like it used to be before, when we used to catch a train in Dhaka and get off in Calcutta the next day without anybody stopping us. What was it all for then—partition and all the killing and everything—if there isn't something in between? (Page 153)

Hamid's *Exit West* revolves around the story of Saeed and Nadia who fall in love and in the background a civil war occurs in their city that follows mass migrations. Sadia and Nadia are also forced to flee and discover about the existence of magic doors throughout their city that could enable to shift to a different country. So, the couple decide to start a new life together in an unknown place. They travel through time and space through magic doors. Interestingly, the story takes place in different locations: Mykonos, Greece;

London, England, Marin, and California. Nadia and Saeed travel to all these places. Due to the reference to the magic doors, the novel fuses the real with surreal wherein the individuals come to terms with their dislocated lives and psyches. The metaphor of magical doors function at different levels in the novel. On one level, the doors signify a way for the lovers to stay together amidst chaos, they signify the volatile and fluid nature of borders, they signify the contemporary relevance of life in the globalised worlds, they highlight the transience of human life, and they hint at the sense of belongingness to be a state of constant change and not something that pertains to fixity. The story of two lovers amidst chaos and ongoing mass migration signifies the humanitarian aspect of continuous movement. The constant shifting from one door to another gives rise to two fundamental questions: Is migration only about shifting from place to other? Is it only about the leaving a part of one's identity and easily adapting to the new found identity? Does migration entail emergence of authentic selves or lost selves?

The plot of the novel entails multiple phases. In the initial phase, Saeed and Nadia's love story starts. However, the prevailing orthodox social norms restricted them to meet and the government also cancelled all kinds of cellular and internet services as a step towards curbing global connections. Sadly, such a situation was not conducive to Saeed's and Nadia's love story as they failed to stay connected. As the war intensifies, Saeed and Nadia hear about magical doors that can shift people anywhere in the world. To understand the metaphor of magical doors, it is imperative to understand what Benedict Anderson stated in his seminal work, *Imagined Communities*. In this work, he defines the nation as, “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign...It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Anderson 6). This definition holds great relevance when it comes to understand the reference to multiple places in the novel. Following Anderson's concept of imaginary nation wherein he deliberates upon nation being an imagined entity where in the minds of each lives the image of people living together and situating it in the context of refugee identity that even after getting displaced to the respective nation states, the memory and image of the ancestral land remains intact along with being connected to. The real becomes imagined and the imagined becomes real in the cases of such displaced people like in the case of Saeed and Nadia in the novel.

In Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, Tha'mma is a product of her diasporic/dislocated conditions wherein the feeling of being unhomed distances her from her real home as she has to accept her constructed notion of selfhood. Tha'mma was born in Dhaka in 1902 and lost her home forever after her marriage. She is also in constant of mobility ever since her marriage very much like Saeed and Nadia in Hamid's *Exit West*. After her husband's death, she shifts to pre-partition Calcutta.. Post India's partition, her idea of 'home' begins to get disillusioned. When she comes back to Dhaka in 1964, she asks, 'Where is Dhaka? I can't see Dhaka' (Page 194). Her birth place-Dhaka becomes a contested place initially a

part of Pakistan and then becoming a part of Bangladesh. Tha'mma falls into deep anxiety and angst of migrancy as she had to leave East Bengal as it became Muslim-majority space which throws her in a state of perpetual state of dislocation both at the physical and psychological levels. She feels perplexed as her place of birth to become a problematic and violent space and how she ends up becoming an outsider in her own hometown, Dhaka. Her migration can be understood through the concepts of being homed, unhomed and rehomed wherein the central argument lies in the fact before migration, it is the native land which a migrant considers home then comes the phase of the ongoing process of migrating where it is the phase of feeling unhomed and finally the entire process of rehomed arrives when such individuals start off with their lives in the new found homeland. This journey stands vis-a-viz the journey of a dislocated individual from belonging to the native land (desh) to being a refugee (immigrant and migrant) belongs to the emergent culture, who belongs to what HomiBhabha calls the third space wherein hybridity takes place, wherein a negotiation takes place between the old and the new, between past and the present.

In *Exit West*, Saeed and Nadia also undergo the process of becoming migrants from being natives. Suddenly, their identities become fluid and they also fall in the state of in-betweenness as they move from one country to another with respective shift in cultures as well. They feel a sense of rootlessness and displacement that entails how dislocated people suffer from the problem of social acceptance as well as assimilation. It is evident throughout the novel that Saeed and Nadia undergo frustration and disintegration due to multiple shiftings. As a result of the multiple displacements, they begin to lose out their sense of unified self and start to bear the burden of rootlessness. For Saeed and Nadia, migration is also a conflicted experience that goes beyond being a geographical phenomenon and political movement. For them, migration leads them to a conflicted state of being which can also be understood as a postmodern condition comprising hybridity, deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. It paves the way for them to a consistent escape from their homeland and leads to them rootlessness and mobility.

Both *The Shadow Lines* and *Exit West* focus on the lives of immigrants who are forced to travel to different countries for different reasons. Their being is constantly in a state of becoming that can be understood through Arjun Appadurai's concept of 'ethnoscapes'. In the book titled *Modernity At Large: Cultural Domensions of Globalisation*, Appadurai explains:

By ethnoscape, I mean the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups or individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree. (Page 33)

Both Thamma on one hand as well as Nadia and Saeed on the other hand leave their native land and settle down in new places. However, their respective responses to their leaving are different. While Thamma is caught in the state of melancholy and nostalgia after shifting, Nadia and Saeed are caught in a state of identity crisis. As dislocated people and their experiences of 'ethnoscapes' the characters either cannot comprehend the existence of borders (shadow lines) or rely on magic doors to come to terms with their hybrid and conflicted identities. The paper highlights how the refugees are always on the move. They face mental agony and are constantly trying to understand the concept of nationhood and borders. Both the novels posit different approaches towards the issue of mass migration of people by presenting perspectives on the idea of shifting identity and having a liminal identity or an identity in a state of flux. The reference to 'lines' and 'doors' in the two understudy novels are attempts of the respective authors to respond to the phenomenon of geographical displacement that gradually leads to psychological dislocations. The 'lines' and 'doors' are metaphors for mass migrations that occur due to demarcations such as borders and boundaries. Moreover, the titles of the respective novels, that is, *The Shadow Lines* and *Exit West* justify the theme of postcolonialism and how mass migrations are one of its pivotal repercussions. The 'post' in the 'post-colonialism' is not only pertains to the end and departure of colonial rule but also refers to the emergence of many nations and communities. Along with being the various divisions that took place in India post-partition, the shadow lines also refer to the minds and hearts of the people that stood divided when they had to leave their native lands and shift to alien places. Regarding *Exit West*, the title symbolises mass migrations from troubled spaces towards the global "West" that is considered to be the ideal melting pot that includes various economically powerful countries that offer opportunities for migrants to build new lives. However, the open-endedness of the novel poses various questions such as: Are migrant ever able to build new lives? Do they ever feel at home at their new places? Or are they always stuck in the limbo state? Do they ever feel liberated?

References

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. Verso Books, 2016.
- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Ghosh, Amitav. *The Shadow Lines*. Penguin Books, 1988.
- Hamid, Mohsin. *Exit West*. Riverhead Books, 2017.
- Seyhan, Azade. *Writing Outside Nation*. Princeton University Press, 2000.

Unveiling The Layers of Life : Visual Representation of Paniya Tribe Through Documentary Genre; Analysis of “The Slave Genesis”

Abstract

The visual representation of tribes in documentary filmmaking holds a unique power to illuminate their lives, struggles, and cultural heritage. One such remarkable documentary, "The Slave Genesis," by Anees K. Mappila, offers an intimate and captivating portrayal of the Paniyar community, an indigenous tribe in India. Through the lens of this compelling film, this paper seeks to explore the multifaceted aspects of visually representing tribes, with a specific focus on the Paniyars' lived experiences as depicted in "The Slave Genesis." The documentary's "thick description" approach effectively captures the intricate details of the Paniya lives, delving into their cultural history, political context, and resilience. By presenting a comprehensive and nuanced portrayal, the film provides a deeper understanding of the Paniyars' collective consciousness, weaving together personal recollections, cultural traditions, and the historical injustices they have faced. Through analysis and interpretation, this paper aims to shed light on how visual representation can capture and convey the complex narratives and rich culture of tribal communities, offering insights into their struggles, triumphs, and the enduring spirit of resilience that defines their identity.

Key words: Visual representation, “The Slave Genesis”, Thick description, Collective consciousness, Resilience

Documentaries have a unique power to inform, educate, inspire, and provoke change. They serve as historical records, documenting significant events, cultures, and traditions for future generations. They capture oral histories, testimonies, and archival footage, preserving collective memory and ensuring that important stories are not lost over time. As a genre, documentaries have the power to challenge dominant narratives, confront biases, and offer alternative perspectives.

The concept of a documentary evolved over time and one notable film often cited as the first documentary is "Nanook of the North" (1922), directed by Robert J. Flaherty. It is a silent film that depicts the daily life of an Inuk man named Nanook and his family in the Canadian Arctic. Flaherty lived with the Inuit community for several years, learning about their culture and filming their activities. The film portrays hunting, fishing, building an igloo, and other aspects of Inuit life. Other notable early documentary films include "Grass: A Nation's Battle for Life" (1925) by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack, which documented the migration of Bakhtiari people in Iran, and "Berlin:

Symphony of a Metropolis" (1927) by Walter Ruttmann, a portrayal of life in the city of Berlin. These films laid the foundation for the development of documentary filmmaking as a distinct genre, characterized by its focus on presenting real-world subjects and events with an observational or informative approach.

While coming to India, documentaries are vibrant and diverse medium of storytelling, showcasing a wide range of subjects and perspectives. It has always played a significant role in providing a platform for tribal narratives, shedding light on their rich cultural heritage, challenges, and aspirations. There are notable works like "The Hunters and the Hunted" (2004), "Journey of a Jhumka" (2006), "I Cannot Give You My Forest" (2017), "Our Metropolis" (2018), which portray the lives of tribal communities in various parts of India.

Narrowing down the genre to Kerala, the documentary genre has witnessed a diverse array of topics and endeavours, providing a platform for various tribal communities to finally illuminate their often-overlooked narratives. One such remarkable documentary, "The Slave Genesis," offers an intimate portrayal of the Paniyar community, an indigenous tribe in India. In the 65th National Film Awards by the Government of India, "The Slave Genesis," directed by Anees K. Mappila, emerged victorious as the recipient of the Best Anthropological/Ethnographic Documentary category, recognizing its exceptional portrayal of a compelling narrative. Visual representation plays a vital role in telling the story of the Paniya community, providing a powerful medium to convey their experiences, struggles, and cultural heritage. He has created a multidisciplinary documentary to portray the life of Paniyars, a marginalized community, which is a powerful and inclusive approach. By incorporating elements of music, art, and storytelling, he has given a rich and engaging representation of their experiences, culture, and challenges. Through immersive storytelling, vivid visuals, and in-depth interviews, this documentary unveils the beauty, complexity, and shared humanity of Paniyar community, steeped in rich cultural traditions. Here the genre of documentary has added value for the ethnographic study of the Paniyar community and the director is politically energizing the medium.

The primary goal of ethnography is to gain an in-depth understanding of a specific culture or social group from an insider's perspective. Ethnographers often spend an extended period of time living among the community they study, observing their daily lives, participating in their activities, and developing relationships with the people they engage with. This immersive approach helps them to uncover the underlying meanings, values, norms, and practices that shape the community's identity and way of life. In this sense the director can be identified as an ethnographer where he has resided with the community for over three years to extract the Paniyar culture to camera. The documentary begins with the description of the Paniyar community and how their identity changed over a period of time.

Paniyar, an ethnic group inhabiting the hilly terrains to the south of western ghats in india. When migrants encroached up on their habitats, their identities underwent quantum shift and they eventually became a labourer tribe. The very word 'Paniya' means 'labourer' (Mappila 0:00:07-0:00:25)

The visuals begin with the image of a scarecrow in an agricultural land and a song in Paniya language follows. The visuals and music portrayed shows their strong identity of being a Paniya or labourer. But these people were once the tribes of Wayanad with rich traditions. But the scenario changed due to the arrival of migrants. The interviews of local people incorporated in the documentary provide a clear picture of the migrants.

It was my grandfather Pakramar and three friends who came to Wayanad in the beginning. If you ask me the precise year, it could be around 1872 or 1873. Those days, only people who had no other way out in their native land would set out for Wayanad. He bought 32 acres of land from Murinikkara Gowda (a jain migrant) for Rupees 5-6 an acre. Why because that gowda was additionally provided some Paniya people too, to labour on it. Their wage had been paddy for the day (Mappila 0:02:05-0:02:52)

Their representation in historical works should be placed under postcolonial framework. In the Malabar series commissioned by the British, Paniyars are mentioned as:

...dark-skinned and curly haired tribe of a Negroid type is found in all the amsams of Wynad. As agricultural coolies they are a necessity in a country where it is difficult to secure labourers for work in the paddy fields...they were savage tribes living in caves and thick forests, coming out only at nights and feeding on paddy and other crops. The Gounden landowners finding their crops always destroyed by these black beasts managed to secure a number of them by means of nets known as *Thandati* and in six months domesticated them the language and to go on errands (Nair 100)

The original inhabitants resided in the forests is described as beasts, or savages who are in need of civilization or domestication. But the modern narratives and documentaries on Paniyars shows another side of the community. Leela Santhosh, Kerala's first tribal woman film director through the documentary *Thanalukal Nashtapedunna Gothrabhoomi* has portrayed the real Paniyar history. They were people with their own constitution and laws having a framework for organization and functioning of government by appointing a *Chemmi* and *Koyma*. The families were organized and each had a chief to control the affairs. This disciplined and systematic community was later vilified as criminals.

...Their habits are migratory and unless the employer is kind, they suddenly give him the slip and are not easily caught. In moral turpitude they stand high. They are professional burglars, waylay and rob travellers and do not hesitate to commit the gravest crimes and yet they are excellent-field labourers. (Nair 104)

Acknowledging the essential role of the Paniya community, both migrants and the self-proclaimed civilized individuals humbly recognize that without the expertise and labor of the Paniya tribe, their cultivation endeavors would falter, underscoring the undeniable necessity of the Paniyas to effectively manage and propel agricultural activities. This realization has branded them as 'Paniyas,' a term derived from their invaluable contribution as laborers, highlighting their indispensable role in the cultivation landscape.

Anees' visuals show the richness of Paniya life. For instance, the act of Paniya women waving the paddy to remove the chaff is accompanied by their traditional work song. There is a cultural significance and a sense of tradition associated with this activity. It suggests that the Paniya community has a specific way of performing this task that has passed down through generations and is intertwined with their cultural practices. Not only through music but also through drawing the director have tried to interpret their situation. Rather than superficially portraying Paniya life, creator has delved deep into their culture providing a 'thick description'.

...ethnography is thick description. What the ethnographer is in fact faced with- except when he is pursuing the more automatized routines of data collection- is a multiplicity of complex conceptual structures, many of them superimposed upon or knotted into one another, which are at once strange, irregular, and inexplicit, and which he must contrive somehow first to grasp and then to render... Doing ethnography is like trying to read a manuscript- foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations and tendentious commentaries, but written not in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour. (Geertz 3)

Being a person born and brought up in Wayanad, Anees intertwines his childhood memories and recollections, adding a unique layer of analysis to the documentary. The amalgamation of his personal stories with visuals provides a profound symbolism to the narrative of the Paniya community. Anees vividly recalls his childhood fear of a recurring beast in his dreams, which can be interpreted symbolically as the disparity between the landowners and the numerous Paniya laborers. This symbolism gains further significance in the subsequent image depicting the Paniya community working under the watchful eye of a single landowner. The drawing shows the years of injustice and suppression faced by them. Anees's personal recollections serve as a poignant reminder that the enduring

history of slavery and struggle faced by the Wayanadan tribes has left an indelible mark on the collective consciousness of the entire community.

A Paniya life is full of mysteries. What they do for living, what all problems they face in the modern world, how they are represented, is a matter unknown for the outer world. 'The Slave Genesis' is trying to read the gaps between the community and outer world. There is no drastic change in their old and new life, only that the age and its name have been changed.

The community's story echoes a tragic past where they were once ensnared in the grips of slavery.

An old Chetti of Wynad narrated a fascinating story. According to which the Paniyans were living in the interior of Wynad hills, and used to come very close to the habitats of the plains people. On festive occasions they used to assemble for collecting the refuse from discarded leaf plates, but on seeing the plains folk would flee to the nearby forest uttering loudly the word 'Ippi-Ippi'. Once the Chettis decided to trap them. They, therefore, fixed string nets around the area and articles of food were kept in plenty at places where refuse used to be thrown. As usual, these Paniyans entered the place unaware of the trap, and tried to collect the food and flee with the same. Suddenly the Chettis closed the net and trapped them. They were later on domesticated and used for agricultural operations... In the middle of the last century when planters first settled in Wynad, they purchased the land with the Paniyan living on it, who were practically slaves of the land-owners. (Census of India 2)

The current situation sees the Paniya tribe being relocated for labor opportunities, unfortunately falling prey to the allure of alcohol and tobacco, creating a disheartening cycle where influential individuals exploit their vulnerability, resembling a modern form of enslavement. In the documentary, director conducts personal interviews, giving voice to a young Paniya man who shares his poignant experience. He recounts being taken to a ginger plantation in Coorg, owned by a Christian man spanning nearly 30 acres, where approximately 30 Paniya individuals toil as workers. Alongside their wages, they receive alcohol, which tragically becomes an addiction that fuels internal conflicts and tragic outcomes. The cycle of addiction leads to suicides and even violence among them, yet their lives are overlooked even in death. Their bodies are returned to their families after postmortem examinations, but no attention is paid to the cause of death or the grieving families. This harrowing reality exemplifies a modern form of slavery, as they find themselves trapped in helplessness, unsure of what is right or wrong.

In addition to unraveling eye-opening mysteries, Anees immerses himself in the deep cultural traditions of the Paniya community. The latter half of the documentary intimately

showcases their customs, taking viewers inside their community. Two songs are presented, namely "Kooliyattu" and "Penapattu." The former is chanted to ward off evil spirits, while the latter calls upon the spirits of the departed. "Penapattu" is sung in its entirety, narrating the genesis of the Paniya tribal community. The song portraying the story of IppimalaUtthappan or Uthi holds significant meaning within the collective consciousness of the Paniya community. It serves as a cultural touchstone, ingrained in their traditions and oral history. It is said that if they are in any sort of danger or frightened the word "Ippi" is uttered. The repetition of the word "Ippi" within the Paniya community can be seen as a form of cultural meme, representing a shared understanding and response to fear or distress. Through the sacred figure known as "Aattaali," the soul of the deceased communicates. The documentary recounts the story of a landlord named IppimalaGowda who captured two siblings, IppimalaUthi and IppimalaUthappan, forcing them to work on his land. When the need for more laborers arose, they were coerced into becoming husband and wife, and their forced procreation resulted in the birth of children believed to be the ancestors of the Paniya community. Embedded within the collective consciousness of the community lies the narrative of this unjust and exploitative history, echoing through the generations. The songs, sung throughout the night when someone passes away, encapsulate the essence of years of toil endured by the Paniya people on the lands owned by others, serving as a poignant testament to their history and struggles.

Where I stood had been green... leaves kept sprouting; when draught stuck everywhere. I laboured twelve months a year. Now I am dead and I continue to toil the other world. My speech has been silenced more than before. But I will tell you one thing for sure that trees have guarded me always (Mappila 0:18:41-0:19:30)

The haunting lyrics symbolically convey that even in death, they continue to toil, emphasizing the pervasive nature of their silenced existence, as if the shackles of slavery persist even in the afterlife.

In the documentary, Anees highlights significant places that hold importance in the communal life of the Paniya community, such as the Valliyoorkavu Temple. This temple bears historical significance as it was where landlords would force them to pledge obeisance before trading them as slaves. Despite this painful history, the temple has become deeply ingrained in the collective memory of the Paniya people. When the festival begins, community members, momentarily forgetting the traumas they endured, wholeheartedly participate in the festivities. For them, Valliyoorkavu represents not just the symbol of past slavery, but also a place where they find solace and hold expectations of divine assistance. However, it remains a potent symbol of the exploitative power dynamics between the upper castes and the marginalized Paniya community, representing the long history of oppression they have endured.

Anees skillfully incorporates political dimensions into the documentary, effectively

energizing the medium and prompting viewers to contemplate the complexities of the Paniya community's circumstances. By bringing the issue of POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses) cases to the forefront, Anees highlights the clash between tradition and modern legal frameworks. While child marriage remains a part of their cultural tradition, it falls outside the provisions of POCSO, resulting in the arrest of around 30 youths. Anees purposefully leaves this situation open-ended, allowing viewers to interpret and analyze whether the preservation of long-standing cultural practices should take precedence or if reforms are necessary to break free from the remnants of injustice. This thought-provoking approach engages the audience in critical reflection on the complexities of safeguarding cultural heritage while addressing contemporary social and legal concerns.

While "The Slave Genesis" is primarily a documentary, Anees skillfully incorporates elements of dramatization, blurring the boundaries between distinct mediums. The non-sequential narration of the story of IppimalaUtthi and Uthappan, who were siblings and later became husband and wife, adds a layer of intrigue and emotional resonance, further enhancing the storytelling within the documentary. In the documentary, a poignant scene unfolds as a girl and boy, likely siblings, traverse through their surroundings, recounting the distressing story of IppimalaGowda's exploitative actions towards IppimalaUtthi and Uthappan. The narrative vividly portrays Gowda's manipulation, wherein he subjected them to the spread of itching powder and forced scratching in their private parts, ultimately leading to a coerced intimate relationship and subsequent pregnancies. Symbolically, the girl's rigorous scratching in front of a kerosene lamp, with her brother providing support, serves as a powerful visual metaphor. This skillful integration of dramatization within the documentary blurs the boundaries between genres, presenting a unified medium that leaves a profound impact, evoking empathy and shedding light on the traumatic experiences endured by the Paniya community.

The cinematography in "The Slave Genesis" is commendable, as it creates a unique perspective that immerses viewers within the Paniya community. Rather than being a detached observer, the camera feels like a participant, intimately embedded within the community itself. The cinematography skillfully captures the beauty of the Wayanad hills and effectively conveys the climate and atmosphere of the region.

The director's presence within the frame adds an authentic touch to the documentary. Often, the director is seen holding the camera, resembling a Paniya friend as they navigate familiar places together. While the interviewee's voice and story are heard in the background, the camera's focus remains on the Paniya work tools, their workspaces, and their daily jobs. This deliberate choice emphasizes the director's intention to present an authentic portrayal of the Paniya community and their lives.

Even during the dramatic portions of the documentary, where the tragic Paniya genesis is depicted, the camera captures poignant images, often focusing on a kerosene

lamp. These visuals serve as symbolic representations, evoking emotions and drawing attention to the hardships faced by the Paniya community. The director's presence within the camera frame further enhances the authenticity and impact of these scenes. The cinematography in "The Slave Genesis" not only captures the visual beauty of the surroundings but also creates an immersive experience, effectively portraying the story and authenticity of the Paniya community.

The epilogue revolving around the birth or genesis signifies a symbolic turning point or new beginning. It represents the potential for growth, resilience, and the hope for a better future for the Paniya community. It emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and understanding their history while also highlighting their continued existence and cultural heritage.

In the documentary amidst the portrayal of the deep injustices and long history of slavery endured by the Paniya community, there are moments of celebration and positivity. One such instance is when a girl experiences her menarche, marking her transition into womanhood. The community comes together to shower her with gifts and treats, recognizing this milestone as a significant moment in her life. They express their joy through singing, dancing, and enjoying the occasion, creating a sense of community and support around the young girl's journey into adulthood. These moments of celebration amidst the challenging circumstances faced by the Paniya community offer glimpses of resilience, cultural richness, and the ability to find joy even in the face of adversity.

"The Slave Genesis" masterfully employs a diverse range of artistic and narrative techniques to provide a powerful visual representation of the Paniya community's history and struggles. Through the use of symbols, the documentary delves into the profound meanings embedded within the Paniya experience, shedding light on their long-standing oppression and resilience. The documentary is a remarkable visual representation that combines various mediums and approaches to present an authentic and poignant depiction of the Paniya community. It serves as a powerful testament to their history, resilience, and the complexities of their collective consciousness.

The documentary's thick description captures the intricate details of the Paniya community's lives, presenting a comprehensive and nuanced portrayal. It reflects the collective consciousness of the community, weaving together personal recollections, cultural traditions, and historical injustices to create a multifaceted narrative. By combining music, art, dramatization, visuals, narration, interviews, and ethnographic study, "The Slave Genesis" creates a rich tapestry that engages the senses and emotions of the audience. The integration of these elements enhances the impact of the storytelling, conveying the depth of the Paniya experience in a compelling and thought-provoking manner.

Furthermore, the documentary explores the genesis of the Paniya community, tracing their origins and the forces that have shaped their existence. It invites reflection on the enduring effects of slavery, the preservation of cultural traditions, and the ongoing struggles faced by marginalized communities.

References

- Contributors to Wikimedia projects. "Documentary film - Wikipedia." Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 21 Oct. 2001, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Documentary_film.
- . "Paniya people - Wikipedia." Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, 6 Nov. 2013, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paniya_people.
- ""Documentary on Paniyan Tribes by Tribe Member Leela"-KettathumKandathum 21,July Part 3." YouTube, uploaded by asianetnews, 23 July 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJN110Q3-Sk.
- Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Slave trade | Definition, History, & Facts." Encyclopedia Britannica, 14 May 2010, www.britannica.com/topic/slave-trade.
- Geertz, Clifford. thick description: toward an interpretive theory of culture. cscs.res.in/dataarchive/textfiles/textfile.2009-08-14.2117562205/file. Accessed 16 June 2023.
- NAIR, C. GOPALAN. MALABAR SERIES. HIGGIN BOTHAM & CO, 1911, archive.org/details/wynaditspeoplest00goparich/page/n17/mode/2up?view=theater.
- PANIYAN OF KERALA. NEW DELHI, OFFICE OF THE REGISTRAR GENERAL, INDIA MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS. Vol. 1 of PANIYAN OF KERALA, lsi.gov.in:8081/jspui/bitstream/123456789/5640/1/52003_1961_PAN.pdf. Accessed 13 June 2023.
- Riyaz, Azmia. "Aneez K Mappila's national award-winning film captures the heartbeat of Wayanad'sPaniyar community." the new indian express, edex live, 26 Apr. 2018, www.edexlive.com/people/2018/apr/26/aneez-k-mappilas-national-award-winning-film-the-slave-genesis-captures-the-heartbeat-of-the-paniy-2589.html.
- "The slave genesis." YouTube, uploaded by Aneez K Mappila, 24 Oct. 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=AXIbpvXjwCM.
- "Tribes of Wayanad - Paniya." YouTube, uploaded by KIRTADS - TRI Kerala, 12 Aug. 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=6ojtiyLoZX4.
- "Thanalukal Nashtappedunna Gothrabhoomi" - A documentary by LeelaSanthosh." YouTube, uploaded by Studio JM, 3 Aug. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayVDL66r0s0.

Fan Negotiations : On 'Desifying' the Western Canon

Abstract

Fan negotiations are an essential aspect of the now politicized concept of fandom. From Stuart Hall's understanding of decoding within negotiated positions to Christine Gledhill's emphasis on the pleasurable aspects of negotiations, fan labour, the creative output of fan communities like fan fiction, has grown to a more autonomous stance. One of the major techniques used by these fans, who are simultaneously consumers and producers, is racebending. Initially a practice rampant in Hollywood, where media creators often used actors of European descent to portray characters from minority communities, the term racebending was coined as part of a protest against this in 2009. But now, it is a popular genre in fan fiction communities, where fan writers often reimagine the canonical character as ethnically different.

This paper attempts to locate the 'Desi', or the Indian identity within the vast array of fan fiction written on typically white male characters that belong to the Western canon. The paper seeks to explore such Indian interpretations as part of politicized re-imagination that comes under the title of racebending and through this will try to understand the hierarchical positioning within popular fandoms regarding such creative acts of protests. To achieve this objective, selected fan fiction works written on famous Western canons that have attained the status of an enterprise, like the Harry Potter series and Marvel Universe will be selected and treated as the primary texts for close reading. Following the textual analysis will be an attempt to contextualize its content within and between the fandom and the media or literary enterprise, connecting it with the larger community of audience, based on related incidents that have happened in recent times.

Fandom is often considered a democratic space. What constitutes this understanding is the freedom to play with the canon, to interpret, imagine and reimagine the content made possible by the non-commercial aspect of fan fiction platforms along with the highly heterogeneous nature of such communities. In a world, where technology and digital cultures are expanding day by day, studying such communities that are contributing to a change of temperament of the society is increasingly essential.

Keywords: Negotiations, Fandom, Racebending, Fan Fiction, Indian Identity, Digital Culture

Introduction

Today, the world, aided by technological advancements is simultaneously expanding

Salini K. is a Research Scholar, Department of English, University of Calicut.

and shrinking. The number of platforms through which media content reaches our everyday life is growing, and along with it, our interests and values are shared with a larger community, one that is no longer defined by geographical and national boundaries. The same can be applied to fan communities as well. An Indian fan following a Korean musical band can now communicate with fellow fans from a country in the Middle East using a social media platform developed in the USA. Language exchange programs through an elaborate network of pen pal systems, transcultural discussion forums, and a number of platforms for fans to engage with each other through activities like quizzes, fan fiction writing competitions, fan art making, etc. are just a few examples of fan lifestyle today.

These communities bring together people from different nations and ethnicities and hence pave the way for an intermingling of politically and culturally heterogeneous voices. A lack of which on the canon's side, be it media or literary, leads to poorly thought-out content with little or no representation in the first place. This distance between the canon content and the fan community, in terms of representation and political correctness, is the most important reason why we see fans trying to rewrite or reimagine the given. Fan fiction is the creative output of fans where they create stories based on the canon's premises, sometimes adhering to the original features of the canon while at other times deviating from it as well. The fan fiction that adheres to the original features is called affirmational fan fiction, and the ones that deviate, are called transformational fan fiction. An online non-profit platform called the Organization for Transformative Works hosts various such sub-platforms for writing, sharing, and discussion of transformative fan fiction. Fan fiction that portrays Sherlock and Watson, the famous detective duo created by Arthur Conan Doyle, as queer and the ones in which Shakespeare's Macbeth is a woman are all examples of transformational works.

Initially, a tactic adopted by the Hollywood movie industry to whitewash the lead and hence increase the commercial value of the content, racebending is now the technique of protest all around the globe. In her article on the politics of race in *The Last Airbender*, Lori Kido Lopez talks about fan activism and how a website created as part of the protest started hosting discussions regarding the issue, urging more fans to create works that 'bend' the typically white male protagonist of the canon (437). In fan fiction, this bending is usually expressed through the changing of the main character's ethnicity, as well as by contextualising the story to suit the new racial identity.

Discussion

The two canons selected for this paper, the Harry Potter series and the Marvel Universe are both mostly about white characters rooted within the imperialistic values of the West. Harry Potter series, created by the British author JK Rowling is a fantasy novel series set in England, where most of the characters, especially the main leads are all white. The Marvel Universe, developed from the Marvel comics created initially by the American comic book writer Stan Lee is also not very different. Although efforts are now

being taken to present the works as inclusive, a large number of fans still find it hard to relate to these stories. Even when the original description of Hermione Granger in the novel by JK Rowling did not specify her race, the movie adaptation of the series cast a white actress; without doubt, the majority of fans including fans of colour accepted it easily because the predominant imagination allowed only a white lead. This issue came to the forefront of discussion about race particularly when the black actress NomaDumazweni was cast as Hermione in the theatrical adaptation of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. A large population of the fans and audience were distressed about the casting but had to make peace with it when the author herself announced that a Black Hermione was possible. The new series and movies from the Marvel Universe portray a variety of characters with different ethnical backgrounds, but the most popular and celebrated characters particularly in the movie version are portrayed through a predominantly white cast. When Miles Morales, an Afro-Latino character was introduced as a new Spiderman in 2011, a backlash similar to the case of Hermione was stimulated.

The frustration that this lack of representation cause among the fans of colour leads to a number of fan fiction works that make use of racebending. Although these race reversals are numerous and diverse, most of the studies done on these protest writings are focused on African American identities. India's relation to these western canons has always been different. If the features of the Indian diaspora can be drawn as a parallel, we can infer that most Indians at the onset of western influence, due to the huge differences in their religion and culture, are interested to carve out a space where they can allow the both to coexist. Their aspirations for a better standard of living do not usually lead to a complete erasure of their root traditions. Reading the aspirations of a large number of Indian fans of the western canon by this logic, we can understand how these fans also desire to carve out a space where their object of desire can coexist with their cultural identities.

It is impossible for Indian fans to establish a relationship with western canon without addressing the colonial past. The early Hollywood and British movies, just like the books, treated Indians as stock characters, reinforcing the stereotypes they perpetuated in the first place, the later works, although better, still lacked honest representations. Yet, just like cricket, a colonial legacy that was later wholeheartedly accepted and owned by Indians, many of these western canons have also become close to the people. Stuart Hall's idea of asymmetry between the broadcasted and the received message can be applied here. According to him a “distortion' or 'misunderstanding' arise precisely from the lack of equivalence between the two sides in the communicative exchange” (4). The consumer is not always the passive recipient of the encoded, the socio-cultural and political background of the individual plays a crucial role in the decoding. Apart from the dominant code, where the recipient decodes the preferred meaning, the negotiated and oppositional positions also exist. For Hall, “decoding within the negotiated position contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements” (102). Applying this to fan negotiations, Henry Jenkins elaborates upon how this agency in contrast to the autonomy

suggested by Barthes in 'Death of the Author' operates within the creative population of fandom by focusing it on fantasy genres. "Fan-made texts are not best understood as interpretations... they also model alternatives fans might like to see but often know they will never receive from the producers" (388).

A fan fiction written in the form of an origin story on Wattpad by a user called Inkbulet called *Indian Wizarding Society* attempts to provide a history of Indian Wizards that can be read in parallel to JK Rowling's account of Britain's history of the Wizarding world. While JK Rowling did a faultless job in the construction of an imaginary magical world that aligns with real history, the global fans of the series were quick to notice how the original content was completely Eurocentric. If a world where magical and non-magical beings coexisted was to be imagined, then providing little detail about the magical history of the non-western world will contribute to a sense of dissatisfaction across the globe. In this re-imagination, the fan author begins with an emphasis on the existence of Wizarding societies in every county of the world before furthering India's history. To her, all Indian wizard families "trace their origin back to great witches and wizards of Indus Valley civilization" (np). She explains how before the struggle for Independence from Britain the Indian Wizarding Society was on sociable terms with the European society and about the colonial history that ruined these relations. This led to the formation of an independent establishment, the Indian School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, one that has its branches spread out to even Nepal and Tibet. In the original story, wizards use an instrument for magic called wands which are often made from wood. The trees mentioned in the canon are almost always unfamiliar to Indian readers. So Inkbulet goes on to introduce wand cores from trees and other materials like Rudraksha which has a strong Indian association.

In another fan fiction called *Lifeblood* published in Fanfiction.net by a user called liron-aria, the protagonist Harry Potter is an Indian. In the canon version of the story the Patil sisters, Parvati and Padma are the only Indian characters. Although they are not used to reinforce any existing stereotypes, they have little significance in the overall development of the plot, more so in the movie adaptation than in the original novels. This fan fiction offers a critical take by imagining the life of the only two Indians in a British school for magic. Here Harry is ethnically Indian but lacks connections to his roots because of his British upbringing. The story is written from the point of view of the Patil sisters and touches upon the major events that happened in all seven parts of the canon. In the beginning, Padma talks about how Harry did not even get a chance to choose his life because he was kept unaware of the true identity of his parents. The sisters talk to each other about all things Harry could share with them including their love for Sachin Tendulkar and Indian food, instead of believing everything the English were trying to establish about the Indians. The story also talks about the bullying brown-skinned people face in a country of white people. Parvati is offered skin-whitening potions multiple times throughout the story and has to face comments that portrayed her colour as ugly. The

'White Saviour Complex' mentioned in the story points towards the superiority the west feels by looking down upon the indigenous medicinal practices of India as barbaric. Hermione's comment on how their mother should divorce their father because all Indian marriages were without exception arranged, and all Indian wives undoubtedly oppressed leads to a conversation on Western feminists and their narrow-minded approach that lacks the interdisciplinary understanding required to analyse a country like India. The subtle references to the English attitude towards Indian symbols like sarees and kumkum, and the history professor's ignorance about Mughal Empire are all examples that indicated the lack of cultural appreciation they received. The author goes on to introduce certain subtle changes in the story in order to Indianize it. The canon's entirely western style of magic is modified to suit the Indian taste by incorporating the Nataraja pose. The story ends on a happy note when Harry wholeheartedly accepts his Indian identity and embraces his fellow Indian friends while also defeating the antagonists like in the real story.

The story *strikedhedonia* published by deathsweetqueen in the Archive of Our Own is based on the Marvel Universe character Tony Stark or Ironman. The original Tony Stark is an American millionaire who runs Stark Industries that engages in the production of weapons exported to war-torn countries of the Middle East. In the canon version, he is the tool used by the American imagination to demonize Muslims as violent others. In the fan fiction work, Tony Stark is a Tamil Iyengar woman of Indian origin. The story exposes the differences in the attitude of society regarding a millionaire, particularly when it is an Indian woman of religious background. The achievements of Indian Tony stark are treated as nothing when compared to her childless life. The idea that a woman cannot be complete unless she becomes a mother celebrated particularly in India is a major theme here. Apart from this Ironwoman's relationship with the teenager Peter Parker is treated as a platonic and divine friendship defined by the example of Krishna and Sudama of Hindu mythology.

Another story by the same author called *gatekeepers of an endless war* takes place in India set during the Second World War. In this story, the original character Captain America and an Indian Tony Stark get caught up in a Nazi mission that aims at unearthing the Syamantaka stone of Hindu mythology from the ruins of Dwaraka. The story starts in a bar in Bangalore with Tony speaking in Kannada. During the Second World War, India was still under British control and this fact is reminded again and again when Tony talks about how the British shoot any Indian who even dares to speak up. "I am pretty sure they shot him because that's what they do, the British, they kill us if we say too much" (np). The Indian interpretation of the Swastika sign that was taken by Nazis is a topic of discussion in the story and is used to validate the apparent richness of Aryan myths and symbols that were according to the fan author misrepresented by the Nazi interpretations. The story of Satrajith from Hindu mythology, who was blessed by the Sun God with the Syamantaka gem of immense power, one that brought prosperity to the land of its owner is the major

focus of this story. The Nazis of Germany learn about this stone that now lies buried in the ruins of Dwaraka, the land believed to be of Krishna, and needs the help of Tony and Steve Rogers to unearth it. Various elements from the myth like the kings involved in the fight for the gem, Krishna's marriage with Satrajith's sister Satyabhama, etc, become part of the fan fiction. In the end, although the Nazis are defeated by the duo, the gem is still unearthed hence according to the author proving the myth true.

In her essay *Pleasurable Negotiations*, Christine Gledhill stresses how mass media texts often speak about people of colour, but rarely speak to them, particularly in the case of women (71). The fans then find it hard to relate to the main characters and end up wanting more. In such cases negotiations are unavoidable. All the fan fiction works discussed above are the results of this dissatisfaction with mainstream literature and media. The lack of understanding of India's colonialized past makes Indian readers shy away from getting dedicated to their fandom of western origins. These negotiations through fan fiction allow them a safe space to coexist. Platforms like Wattpad even arrange competitions for such Indianized stories, an attempt to bring such imaginations to the forefront of fan creations so that they get the attention of the mainstream fandom as well. Once the gap in history is rectified, the next attempt, much like the Indian diaspora is the everyday life of an immigrant. What *Lifeblood* tries to portray is something similar. The subtle discrimination through comments on appearance, insults disguised as advice, and a disregard for specific cultural symbols are all explored. But it remains a fact that most of these stories are trying to reimagine an India that is still celebrating Hindu culture and myths. Indian identities that belong to other communities and religions hardly ever make it to the forefront in spite of the availability of a democratic platform simply because of the statistics within fandom.

Conclusion

The specialty of these stories is that they try to preserve the original character's behavioural features as much as they can so that the initial attraction the fans felt for the canon is not affected, thus proving that a modification in terms of ethnicity need not change the value of the characters as such. Since these fan fiction works are not created for commercial success, the fan authors need not satisfy the requirements of the mainstream audience that is still predominantly white. What racebending provides as a technique of negotiation for fans is an agency to create an alternative world where who they are can be reflected in what they love and endorse it without guilt. Apart from being an important step in the identity formation of a fan, this also helps create a space for shared addressing of issues regarding race thus strengthening the sense of collective identity along with individual identities.

References

- deathsweetqueen. "Gatekeeper of an Endless War." *Archive of Our Own*, 10 Jan. 2021, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/27451045/chapters/67108753>.
- deathsweetqueen. "Strikehedonia." *Archive of Our Own*, 1 Sept. 2019, <https://archiveofourown.org/works/20473721>.
- Gledhill, Christine. "Pleasurable Negotiations." *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*, edited by E. Deidre Pribram, Verso, London, 1990.
- Hall, Stuart. "Encoding and Decoding in The Television Discourse." *Semantic Scholar*, 1 Jan. 1973, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Encoding-and-Decoding-in-the-television-discourse-Hall/9d8d680436345535ae2598f9e6786c68d4143f9b>.
- Hall, Stuart. "Encoding/Decoding." *Culture, Media. Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972-79*, Routledge in Association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, London, 1980.
- Inkbullet. "Indian Wizarding Society ." *Wattpad*, https://www.wattpad.com/story/47107940?utm_source=android&utm_medium=link&utm_content=share_reading&wp_page=reading_part_end&wp_uname=SalK86&wp_originator=vv1QluMAe5fqx3rjVEJLJqw%2FF3fu1rBhk4XnzHh29E03PAXWzrqVwvDwP5e6C158NS4%2BPU081gxIkfdDNx075hD3e1PiRLbhy2a1dpHGmZpxKWkj4OiPGJyZ9ShY4kD.
- Jenkins, Henry. "Negotiating Fandom: The Politics of Racebending." *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*, edited by Melissa A. Click and Suzanne Scott, Routledge, London and New York, 2020.
- liron-aria. "Lifeblood." *Fanfiction.net*, 21 Aug. 2015, <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/11460815/1/Lifeblood>.
- Lopez, Lori. "Fan Activists and the Politics of Race in the Last Airbender." *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Ics.sagepub.com, 1 Jan. 2012, https://www.academia.edu/2123950/Fan_activists_and_the_politics_of_race_in_The_Last_Airbender.

Into A Postcolonial Canvas : Revisioning *King Lear* in Preti Taneja's Novel *We that are Young*

Abstract

Shakespeare opened up millennia of opportunities for writers and creative minds to ponder upon and explore new interpretations and adaptations. The flexibility and adaptability of Shakespearean plots and characters into any form, place, time, setting or aspect play a key role in maintaining strong foothold in almost all linguistic and cultural landscapes. King Lear has hosted numerous retellings, adaptations, and counter-writings transcending the limits of time and setting. British-Indian writer Preti Taneja's first work of fiction We that are Young is a rewriting of King Lear set in postcolonial era where the sequence of events are recontextualised into contemporary Indian milieu with new undertones. The novel focuses on the younger generation characters giving them ample voice through narrative space and thus attempts a revision of these characters by exposing the mental colonisation, othering, exploitation, marginalisation, demonization and power politics that these characters fall prey to. We that are Young opens up new dimensions of readings and problematizes the established notion of demonization or idolization of King Lear characters, and points out the folly of such distinctions based on perception from the perspective of the dominant class — as in Shakespeare's work, from the perspective mainly centred on Lear. When this focus shifts to multiple perspectives through other characters, the reader is exposed to their mental tension, their justification, and their attitude towards the critical situation they are placed in. Taneja makes possible a neutralisation of the virtues of good and bad, and exposes the shallowness of context of this dichotomy. This paper examines the perspective change created through revisionism mainly focusing on viewing characters from a different angle, subversion of villainy, problematization of goodness, identity crisis, fluidity of gender, feminist reading of the women characters, and their survival instincts in the androcentric society.

Keywords: Revisionism, Postcolonial, Re-contextualisation, Feminism, Good/Evil dichotomy, Rewriting.

We that are Young is a revisionist retelling of William Shakespeare's famous tragedy *King Lear* in the form of a novel. Adrienne Rich defines the word "re-vision" as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (166). Revisionist narrative aims at the subversion of the established perspective put forth to the reader or the society, mostly based on the central character,

and develops a different perception to highlight readings of the text that defy the dominant discourse thereby initiating a process of decentering. Paul Prescott asserts that "decentred adaptations often seek to redress a political imbalance by focusing on underwritten characters" (17). In a similar fashion, Preti Taneja takes *King Lear* to a different dimension through the postcolonial era adaptation of the play focusing on a new critical perspective that deconstructs the seventeenth century text and focuses primarily on the underwritten characters. The author's craftsmanship is exposed in her brilliant reworking of the play into a novel by completely adhering to the former plot and sequence of events, and yet making possible a revisionist re-contextualisation catering to postmodern approaches.

Preti Taneja envisions a parallel between the power structures in Elizabethan Feudal society and contemporary capitalist Indian society. This twenty first century postmodern narrative reworks a seventeenth century tale transposing the English Feudal Empire of King Lear into contemporary Indian context. Her novel adheres to the storyline of Shakespeare's *King Lear* wherein the context shifts from the royal palace of King Lear of Britain, who divides his land to his daughters, to the abode—named The Farm—of the royal billionaire business tycoon Devraj Bapuji in twenty first century India dividing his Company—which is an embodiment of India. His three daughters Gargi, Radha and Sita are the spitting images of Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia respectively. Almost every character in *King Lear* has a similar counterpart in the novel. The Earl of Gloucester and his sons are represented by Ranjit Singh, Jivan (Edmund) and Jeet (Edgar). All other major and minor characters find expression, in the novel, recast into a modern canvas. Gargi is a capitalist, Radha is a socialite, and Sita is an environmentalist, Jivan, an expatriate London citizen and Jeet, a homosexual. The game of love, in the novel, is narrated in striking similarity to the script of a play, and the Devraj Hundred replaces King Lear's Hundred Knights, Jivan and his story of illegitimate blood, Ranjit's eye gouging scene, Jeet's upheaval into a tramp sage representing Edgar's disguise as Poor Tom, the turn of events ensuing wealth and power, violence set in the backdrop of Kashmir where Devraj takes up the role of a populist hero of the anti-corruption movement to fight back his daughters, the tragic killings and suicides that follow, all become the crux of the novel with crystal clear reflections of the play *King Lear*.

Preti Taneja, in her novel *We That are Young*, attempts to re-vision the characters by slowly fading the margins between good and evil, that is, to explore goodness in the bad and vice versa. Her way of approach to both aspects is different. She attempts to outline a prologue to the main plot, the *King Lear* story, and successfully relates to the predicaments of the set of characters that have their counterparts in *King Lear* as evil. This is made possible without deviations in the main storyline except the exhibition of new facets of behavioural changes in them. The side-lined characters in *King Lear* are moulded into fully developed characters in all aspects relating to human behaviour, and not as characters limited to virtues that they are expected, by the author, to possess and in

turn manipulated to attain the desired effect. These characters try to comfort themselves in their world of chaos and subsequently, will attempt in various ways to alter or improve their positions.

On the other hand, Taneja attempts to present the so-called good characters of *King Lear* as either cruel, biased, or indirect reasons for the segregation of the other category. But to the 'outside world,' — The Farm becomes an embodiment of an empire cut off from those outside it and forms a world in itself consisting of his empire. The world outside only has a superficial perception of it— they remain the epitome of goodness and generosity parallel to how *King Lear* readers perceived their counterparts. This results in a defamiliarization and lack of empathy towards these characters, due to which the reversal of their fortune and power, and their victimisation is less painful for the reader.

Taneja works on a clear distinction between Bapuji's abode— The Farm— and the outer world around it, including the Company. The main purpose of this distinction is to create a double-sided view of what the novel shows the reader and what is perceived by the 'outside world' in the story due to its limited view and expression of the dominant voices only. Devraj can be conceived as a human embodiment of the whole company. The magazine article about Bapuji, the novel reads “the founder of Devraj Company, India's most loved tycoon, visionary Businessman, Guru to millions, employer of thousands, head of the hundred-hotel Company, father of three lovely daughters, Animal Lover and

Environmental Hero, humble” (Taneja 6). The progression of the story makes it clear that this identity of Devraj is completely deceptive and nothing but a series of misconceptions masked by an unsympathetic, cruel, selfish, exploiter. Taneja digs into the self-contradictory reflection of Bapuji which the 'outside world' comprehends and resonates with Shakespeare's *King Lear*. She questions the general idea of perceiving Lear as a monolithic king with a single flaw that leads to his downfall.

The Farm can be inferred as an embodiment of an empire cut off from the outer world, and a neo-colonial gaze is at work similar to Foucault's proposed panopticon image. With six screens and constant surveillance of the Napurthala family townhouse (Devraj's home) with continuous intrusions into their privacies, they are constantly viewed upon which forces them to “behave” even in their beds.

Taneja attempts a feminist revision of Gargi and Radha, in assonance with earlier retellings of *King Lear* such as *A Thousand Acres* by Jane Smiley in 1991, and *Lear's Daughters* written and performed by Elaine Feinstein and the Women's Theatre Group in 1987. All these novels outline the androcentric suppression of the women characters. Ann Thompson, in her essay titled *Are there any Women in King Lear?* points out the misogynistic approach in *King Lear* by asserting that the characterisation of Goneril and Regan are purely evil in ways that trigger no further justification, while Edmund's behaviour is vindicated to an extent by the social discrimination and stigma associated with being an illegitimate child. "He (Shakespeare) does not allow them to point out

wrongs done to them in the past as eloquently as Shakespeare does, or to question the fairness of the society's distribution of power as articulately as Edmund" (Thompson 122). Taneja takes up the responsibility to voice the unvoiced in the play.

The Shakespearean play channels audience identification with Lear, as it is written with Lear at the focal point, whereas Taneja, following the tradition of other women writers, uses rewriting as a plausible way of focusing attention on the concerns of the three daughters as women. The author presents them as victims of patriarchy rather than evil and unsympathetic, and thus exposes the misogyny of Shakespeare's *King Lear*. She tries to relate these characters with their counterparts in *King Lear*, especially Goneril, in agreement with Peter Brook's reading of Goneril's first speech as possibly not associated with evil intentions. In his work *The Empty Space*, Brook notes, "In fact, if Goneril in her first appearance does not play a "monster," but merely what her given words suggest, then all the balance of the play changes— and in the subsequent scenes her villainy and Lear's martyrdom are neither as crude nor as simplified as they might appear" (14). Devraj, in *We that are Young*, projects Gargi as mysterious, irresponsible, barren, incapable and tractable. This acts as an echo of Shakespeare's misogynistic treatment of the women characters. The defiance to Gargi's individuality and his misogynistic contemplation of Radha's character throw light on the colonialist shadow cast by Devraj. In the end, he becomes a victim of the subverted hegemonic power structure.

The gradual progression from the world dominated and controlled by Devraj to a world where Gargi commands makes her a competent and innovative commander counter acting traditional representations that depict women as unsuitable for highest positions. Devraj's submission to a female governmental system antithetical to his ideology results, in part, to his insanity. Positioned on top of the Devraj Empire, Gargi represents the change from a hierarchical leader to an egalitarian one. It is suggestive of the ideological and generational change. Shakespeare's Goneril is an unemotional woman who ruthlessly treats her father and kills her sister. Taneja reposes the character in a new flickering light where her outward appearance as an unemotional, selfish, practical minded, business-oriented woman is shadowed by a contrasting emotional side of empathy and generosity. But this emotional side is almost always unrecognised. For instance, Jivan's accusation, that Gargi's care for workers is all part of her business, could be regarded as based on his biased impression about her.

The same incidents of *King Lear* when recontextualised in *We that are Young* creates a different impact with the projection of reader's perception of evil characters in a positive light. Gargi's visit to the home of her employee who was brutally beaten nearly to death by Devraj— just a few hours before her rude behaviour to him and the subsequent dismissal of half of Devraj Hundred— makes the reader convinced to an extent that Gargi is justified in her action. This could be read as her retort towards the ruthless and insane behaviour of her father. Devraj's accusation of her showing fake love in words creates an

impression that he has turned into an irresponsible, irritating and adamant old man. She contemned his arrogance and his despotic attitude as she could clearly see that it would slowly erase the borders of sanity from his mind. It would make him an insane old man unable to reason his doings and attitudes, and instead engage in cruel pleasures and enjoyments. Such an intention shows the rational, thoughtful woman working diligently to solve this serious problem.

Jane Smiley's feminist revision of *King Lear* in *A Thousand Acres* includes potent symbols like longing for mother and incest by father. Similarly, Taneja employs symbols like Gargi as a mother figure and Ranjit's incestuous relation with Radha to serve the revisionist purposes. While the former serves a feminist purpose and is a plausible deviation told from Gargi's point of view, the incest theme is more problematic. The purpose of the latter is to probe into the mental and physical exploitation of Radha (Regan) as a woman and to increase the intensity of remorse experienced by Ranjit (Gloucester) in the eye gouging scene. Shakespeare earlier used this scene as an example of stage stigma, to symbolise the effect of the errors and insufficiencies of a character (Wilson). Theodore Spencer, in *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*, notes that in *King Lear*, both Lear and Gloucester are the victims of filial ingratitude: the blinding of Gloucester is the physical equivalent of the madness of Lear. (136) In Taneja's novel version of the play, One can rightly observe Ranjit's hand in the serious decisions that lead to the tragedy of women. Ranjit becomes the reason for the most important turning points that influenced the women characters and their decision making. For example, Ranjit's advice to a reluctant Gargi to take up Bapuji's position, his betrayal of Radha giving her false hopes of support and safety, and his deaf ears to Sita's desperate wish to meet her sisters and sort out things.

Taneja presents Gargi as the second mother to Radha, Sita and Jivan in the sense that she takes up the responsibilities of her deceased mother, and throws light on her influence in their character development. Gargi is viewed with sympathy when she is blamed for her bad upbringing when Sita absconds, while none appreciated her when Sita was hailed as the most loved character. This symbol serves the purpose of altering the perspective of the readers. It imagines the possibility of a prequel similar to what has been affirmed in the play *Lear's Daughters*.

Preti Taneja attempts to revision the character of Jivan without taking him out of the shoes of Edmund. The former is also burdened by the shame and stigma of illegitimate birth just like the latter, for a cause that they are not responsible for. Gloucester's sin of adultery is normalised in *King Lear*. Willam F. Zak observes that "Gloucester's self-indulgent failure to assume the burden of fatherhood reveals that his life has been ordinary until now, an unburdened crawl toward death, in which the shame originally attached to his own sinfulness has been conveniently transferred to Edmund and, with him pushed out of sight" (129).

Taneja spares an entire chapter to highlight the predicaments of Jivan due to his

corrupted blood and fifteen years of separation from his family on Ranjit's insistence. The identity crisis that Jivan faces is due to his fifteen years of alienation from his family and nation. In America, he was discriminated against due to his skin, and in his country, due to his blood.

A non-linear narration of Jivan's withered childhood in the first chapter of the novel effectively communicates the discrimination and neglect he experienced as an illegitimate child. *We that are Young* expounds the infinite possibilities of stigma and shame which Jivan would have experienced in silence, suppressed in his mind as a child and grew into vague broken images. His act of rolling in the mud and running after Jeet could be read as an effort from the subconscious mind of a young boy, who could not wipe off the dirt of his birth, to make himself equal to his brother by mitigating the other one's cleanliness.

Jivan's childhood images— playing generals and subalterns, exemption from education, life in the converted stable, lonely confinements in his room, Ranjit's preconception of his inability to lead, and advise to follow or “shadow” his half-brother to behave well in family dinners with the Devrajs— all creates an awareness of the clear cut discrimination and othering, until after a point where he rises to the standard of his half-brother by hook and crook. He regains the position he rightly deserves and knocks his brother down into a role reversal— to writhe in shame and stigma but for a different cause, for being a homosexual. The binary opposition of Jeet as the privileged perfect son and Jivan, the unprivileged incapable “other” carefully exposes the mental colonisation of Jeet's character by forcefully instilling Jeet's model into his identity. Jivan is relegated to the periphery with Jeet at the centre both of Ranjit's affection and of power and inheritance. The reader, who grasps the intensity of this suffocation, to an extent supports Jivan in taking advantage of the situation to establish the power, attention and position he rightly deserves.

Jeet's upheaval into a good son is at the cost of making Jivan the bad one. His deliberate attempts to establish his privilege and superiority over Jivan can be witnessed in the first conversation they have with each other in which he tries throughout to belittle Jivan's excitement over his return after fifteen years. The reader identifies with Jivan's piteous situation where he sounds almost like begging “I don't want to be some kind of tourist here” (Taneja 73). The feeling of loss that Jivan experiences from instances like omission from family photo, Jeet's possession of Nizamuddin house which was the only reminiscence of his deceased mother also contributes to the shift in his behaviour. Though, Jeet cannot altogether be labelled bad from these minor mistakes from his part, Taneja's intention was to show the twin sides of human nature where labels like good and bad are difficult. Jivan's villainous or evil attire results from his father's indifferent and unjust behaviour towards him. His childish rhetoric “why did father favour Jeet when he had Jivan” (54) and the crisis of “how to fit in” (101) leads him to put to practice the

vicious game of survival of the fittest. The practical neglect that Jivan faced, forces him to find strategies to rise from the status of nothingness, and make himself visible to others who made him invisible.

Another character of paramount importance is the counterpart of Cordilia, Sita. The most loved character in *King Lear* is brilliantly depicted as less at fault among others. Yet the privileges that Devraj bestows upon her become the reason for her downfall. In *King Lear*, Cordelia is not present on stage for a lion's share of the play. In the novel, the omnipresence of Sita's name in everything from laddoos to the upcoming project, from barks of trees to welcome banners annoys not only the other young characters, but also the readers due to which they are less attached to the otherwise lovable character. Sita becomes a character who, unlike the Sita of Ramayana, has a stern stand and voice of her own and is not so emotionally and dutifully connected to the patriarchal bond of love created by traditional society. Her rejection of the company shares is not because she doesn't have words, but because she is an "economist and environmentalist" (104). She frees herself from obligations that demand submission to be the expression of love. Sita's refusal in 'the game of love' is a retort against the view of women as dolls screwed in the back by male hand whenever they want them to dance and please.

Yet, in the process of breaking the tradition and asserting her individuality independent of her father's name and legacy, she unintentionally skips her obligations towards her sisters and completely defied them while establishing herself as a philanthropic "ecowarrior". Her temporary withdrawal from the family can be read as an escape from the unrest developing within the 'world' inside the Farm, as a result of the growing political unrest, intergenerational conflicts and corrupt influence of dominant hegemonic aspects, even though she was always exempted from the pressure these imposed upon the younger generation of the novel.

We that are Young is placed in Indian society where patriarchy is thoroughly intertwined with Indian culture and tradition such that its separation, it seems, would probably destroy the essence and soul. Taneja's novel, on one hand, deeply ventures into the unbound freedom and legitimacy men are advantaged to possess, which in due course is revealed to have a ruinous and devastating impact on women they are related with. For instance, Ranjit Singh's freedom to regard women as appealing commodities to please his sensual instincts results in the madness and death of his first wife, rootlessness of the blessed dancer and her illegitimate son Jivan, and Radha's disintegration as intoxicated and made to serve the men around her. All the three women defy patriarchal code of conduct in due course and set out to establish their signatures in the world, but tragically succumb to death unable to defend themselves in the vicious game of patriarchal power politics.

Taneja makes the tragedy of the women more painful to the readers by witnessing the helpless situation they are placed in. They are unable to reconcile with each other

though they gravely wish for it and decides not to believe observations of the men on the happenings. Gargi desperately longs for Sita to come back and make things right. Radha is reluctant to accept that her sister would harm her in spite of Bubu and Jivan's instigations, and Sita refuses to act against her sisters even after witnessing Bapuji's condition. All these point to the fragmented women's craving to get united as they fully realise the insecurity of their existence in a corporate power-driven society. The turn of events and external manipulations bring in a climax similar to the storyline of *King Lear* and results in their tragic deaths. Jeet understands the incompleteness of their individual selves without each other "They should love each other as two parts of a whole. One is ambitious and the other is beautiful. A crucial third of their heart is missing. To make sure of health and wealth and prosperity, they have to get this back" (536). It is their inability to unite that shapes their tragedy.

Taneja moulds the tragedy of young characters into a new shade even while adhering to the plot of *King Lear*. She presents myriads of possibilities in the back-story of *King Lear* by creating plausible deviations in the Lear plot. She shapes the tragedy of Sita as a result of the superiority and privileges unwillingly imposed upon her from which she makes a temporary escape. It makes things worse. Radha's actions are governed by her trust in everyone and the pain of betrayal. Gargi and Jivan's downfall results from their realisation and subversion of the dominant power structure, and attempt to access power in their hands. Jeet escapes the tragedy with his transformation from the dominant to the relegated status.

Preti Taneja works out a clear denaturalisation of the hegemonic aspects like patriarchy, colonial othering, capitalism, generational dominance and heterosexual advantages. It also establishes feminism and identity of the Self along with an identification of passive interpersonal relationships and soared intergenerational conflicts. Taneja approaches the two categories of characters— one type casted as evil and the other, good— with a revisionist outlook. The readers' compassion is deviated towards those whom Taneja represents as crushed under the power structures of the societal and familial ties rather than towards characters recognised and loved in the play. It urges the readers to feel for them even when they put on their attire of villainy only for the cause of regaining what they rightly deserved, but was deprived of. Taneja successfully attempts to envision the characters in a new light and alter the perspective with which they are viewed upon. This results in the realisation of the characters as complete human beings rather than fictional embodiments of virtues created for the purpose of audience identification.

References

- Brook, Peter. "The Deadly Theatre." *The Empty Space*, Scribner, 2019, p. 14.
- Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken." *Adrienne Rich's Poetry and Prose: Poems, Prose, Reviews and Criticism*, edited by Albert Gelpi, W W Norton, 1993. pp. 166-167.

Prescott, Paul. "Shakespeare and the Theatre." *Shakespeare's Creative Legacies: Artists, Writers, Performers, Readers*, edited by Paul Edmondson and Peter Holbrook,

Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016, p. 17.

Spencer, Theodore. *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*. Macmillan Publishers, 1974, p. 136.

Shakespeare, William. *King Lear*. Wordsworth Classics, 2004.

Smiley, Jane. *A Thousand Acres*. Anchor, 2003.

Taneja, Preti. *We That are Young*. Penguin Publishers, 2017.

Thompson, Ann. "Are There Any Women in King Lear?" *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakesperare*, edited by Valerie Wayne, Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 122.

Wilson, Jeffrey R. "The Earl of Gloucester's Blinding." *Stigma in Shakespeare*, wilson.fas.harvard.edu/stigma-in-shakespeare/earl-of-gloucester-s-blinding.

Zak, William F. *Sovereign Shame: A Study of King Lear*. Bucknell University Press, 1984, p. 129.

'Us' and 'Them': Recasting Identities in Prayaag Akbar's Novel *Leila*

Abstract

The discourses of race have in recent times percolated to other seemingly disparate areas of human existence, such as class, caste and community, in unprecedented and insidious forms, even in societies that have long claimed democratic values and structures. Ideological constructs based on hierarchically understood differences which form the building blocks of prejudices of race, class, caste, gender and community are the lifeblood of fascist societal structures, such as that which is depicted in Akbar's dystopic novel Leila. Fundamental human freedoms of the characters in this novel are destroyed with open and unabashedly justified violence, using the all-too-familiar racial rhetoric of 'us' and 'them', with differences of class/ caste/community being harnessed to erect and maintain insurmountable walls of hatred and intolerance. While relating a core story of a mother's attempt to find her lost daughter, the novel addresses frightening fascist developments in a seemingly futuristic society which directly impact upon the lives of the principal characters, rendering them unrecognisable to themselves and those known to them. The institutionalised ideologies of racial prejudice and hatred that come into play in this novel are rendered even more vicious, in that they are situated within an intra-racial context and exercised within the specificities of class/ caste/community differences. My paper attempts to trace the playing-out of these fascist ideologies in the lived experience of the characters, arguing that the over-arching manifestation of these ideologies is to not just obliterate the idea of difference through xenophobic rhetoric, but to violently create a new racial breed and identity, terrifying in its homogeneity, intolerance and insularity.

Keywords: boundaries, intolerance, violence, class, community, intra-racial identity

Prayaag Akbar's novel *Leila* uses the tropes of dystopic fiction but derives its power from the way in which it realises the idea that what is presented as dystopic nightmare is actually a reflection of the social and political realities of contemporary Indian neo-nationalism. The focal point of the socio-political dynamics of the state presented in the novel is concentrated on the questions surrounding community identity and constructions thereof, with intersecting undercurrents of caste/class distinctions. The core story of the novel revolves around a mother's agonised search for her lost daughter; the principal characters are Shalini (married to her childhood friend Riswan, educated elite liberals with a three year old daughter Leila), Naz (younger brother of Riswan and an unabashed advocate of communalism), the hired domestic help Sapna (obviously

Dr. Sindhu J is a Professor, Department of English, Bangalore University, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.

disenfranchised in terms of caste as well as class), Joshi (the right hand man of the self-declared Man-god/fascist dictator) and the Repeaters (extremist vigilantes of communalist persuasion). It is through the experiences of Riswan and Shalini that the erosion of liberal values, effected by the insidious advances made by the ideologues of communalist walls, is to be perceived. The Repeaters form an overt image of the violent establishment of communalism, working out their machinations away from plurality toward the creation of a society that is frightening in its artificially and violently constructed insularity and homogeneity.

When Shalini marries Riswan according to Islamic rites, she takes the name of Yasmeen, not so much in the spirit of religious faith as from the glamour she associates with the Disney princess character; this referent of Western pop culture within her own liberalist views gestures towards the fact that liberalism as projected in this novel is also a class-privileged notion. Her child is named Leila, a name common to more than one minority community. As things become more and more difficult from the politically nurtured rigidity and intolerance, they move to East End, a privileged (but increasingly ghettoised) urban space that is the last locale of liberalism as they knew it. Concomitantly, the class divide between the rich and the poor continues to be maintained, even after the construction of community walls and the creation of zones. The Repeaterstry to harness and appropriate the underprivileged and deprived classes to their own agenda, through the strategy of situating their injustices within their larger rhetoric of a posited social contamination and erosion of traditional values. The crisis of acute water shortage depicted in the novel illustrates how this strategy is worked out, while simultaneously highlighting the ways in which the class divide is deepened due to the sudden lack of an essential resource. The foul air crisis, however, belies the rhetoric of Joshi and the Repeaters, because nothing has really changed for the very poor, who eke out a living from picking over the garbage mounds of the rich, dumped outside the city outskirts. Carol Upadhyia in her study of discourses of community as a conceptual category in the Indian context argues that the opposition between the realm of culture and that of economy is a dichotomy that has not been duly considered (Jodhka, 2958). Joshi, as a self-constituted spokesperson of a society based on violently created and oppositionally placed communitarian identities, conveniently elides the dichotomy between culture and economy when he tries to appropriate the oppressed classes to his own declared agenda: “[...]we are very close now [...] to making our land pure, ourselves pure, pure as the land of the “ancients. Soon we will be mentally, emotionally, culturally restored. Soon we will reclaim our rightful place at the top of the world” (Akbar, 117-8); when asked by the audience (itself composed of the very people his speech claims to be including in the rhetoric of social and economic upliftment) how he would go about helping the poor (those born outside the sectors), he does not seem to hear the question, but shouts: “Soon we will get to the unfortunates, but first we must complete our work!” (Akbar,119). In his argument for an overall reconstitution of a society based on

communitarian identities that are formulated, fixed and policed by the state, Joshi demonstrates a trend that is increasingly visible in neo-nationalist political discourses (a trend observed by A.R. Vasavi), in which there is an “increasing presence or emergence of 'communities' as 'political actors' in the public domain of the nation, and [...] the resulting community-state interfaces” (Jodhka, 2959).

The ideology which is used by the Repeaters to create and maintain community divides is very similar, if not identical, to the rhetoric of race in the context of fascism and ghettoisation. The ideology which is used by the Repeaters to create and maintain community divides is very similar, if not identical, to the rhetoric of race in the context of fascism and ghettoisation. In his article, Ajay Skaria constructs nationalism (as manifested in the form of Hindutva) as being linked to communalism and racism. These in turn, he argues, are manifested as majoritarianism and supremacism. It can be argued that the communalist majoritarianism that forms the core of the Repeaters' ideology can be also construed as a kind of supremacism, a form of racism. Their subscription to a set of values that are common to them as a self-constituted power (and deeply implicated within discourses of neo-nationalist frames of reference) is underscored by the assumption that these values will ultimately be recognised and upheld by everyone within the artificial social order that they have violently created. As Skaria puts it: “Central to racism [...] is the presumption of a certain equality amongst racists—whether this community of racists be whites, Aryans, Jews or Hindus [...] This abstract equality is also what makes racism such an inclusive and capacious form of community” (n.p).

Throughout the novel, there is an obsessive engagement with the notion of 'purity', a concept that lies at the very core of racial identity ideologies past and present, translated here as impermeable walls that bind specific community identities within an insular ghetto that is not just labelled (Patel Sector, Haryanvi Jat Sector, Kamrupi Brahmin Sector, Salsette Catholics, Political Sector, etc) for identification, but also violently policed. Each gated community has high and insurmountable walls securing them from 'contamination' from other communities, with armed security guards manning the gates and checking individual documents (IDs declaring caste/community affiliations denoted by specific markers and with an overarching fidelity to the ideology of 'Purity for All'). As such, these ghettos become illustrations of the processes of cultural production involved in identitarian politics that are applicable to constructions of communitarian as well as racial identity. Such processes, in Upadhyas argument, include “politically motivated objectifications of culture, embodied in emblems of identity which represented the distinctiveness of the community” (Jodhka, 2958).

Apart from their declared agenda against social heterogeneity and specifically Hindu-Muslim coexistence, the movers and shakers of the new societal order in *Leila* also target educated women liberals whom they see as the prime agents of 'corruption'. The example of Sana in Purity Camp illustrates the Purity ideologues' paternalistic prejudices against

educated women, who question regressive practices like female genital mutilation. Purity One is a camp for transgressors like Shalini, sinister in its resemblance to a Nazi concentration camp, complete with Wardens, nurses who could well be Nazi S. S. Matrons, barbed wire, dubious doctor-figures who reinforce indoctrination through punishment and drugs, uninvestigated evidence of the genocide of an entire community, gender segregation and a common slogan/gesture denoting the notion of 'Purity for All'. The Tribunal at Purity Camp uses sexual abuse as a punishing tool to control educated thinking women who pose a threat to its internal order, like Shalini.

The notion of 'purity for all' is extended to an absurd extreme in its self-justificatory claim that such purity will also bring about 'Unity', disguising parochialism and xenophobia as patriotic fervour and nationalism as it 'ought' to be. When the Repeaters identify potential or actual rebels as 'foreigners' and 'traitors', they automatically employ the language of alienation that applies to the orders and rules constructed around this definition of 'purity'. Riswan poses as a Hindu at the gates of Shalini's sector and narrowly escapes being physically checked for evidence of circumcision (reductively understood as a marker of Muslim identity and as a fundamental distinction between Hindus and Muslims) by consciously playing into the language of alienation that Others specific non-mainstream/minority communities, like the Muslims.

Speaking of politically orchestrated communalist mobilisations in the neo-nationalist context, Sujatha Patel draws our attention to the politics of space within such newly-ordered societies: in her argument, "Locality was often valorised in such mobilisations and was used "for violent interventions. The politics of space reinforced the fetishism of locality [...]" (Jodhka, 2963). This trend is very visible in *Leila*, where such fetishism is carried out to a dystopic (but very real) extreme, in the form of walled community ghettos, legitimised as civic spaces that will ensure and preserve a 'purity' composed of societal divisions based on hatred and intolerance. One of the most frightening aspects of these community ghettos, including Purity Camp, is the sense of security that is artificially and violently created around them, which is projected as 'normalcy', the ideal way things should be, and even as a restoration of an 'original', 'pure' social order: "We will end these cycles of violence. Restore equilibrium. Order will be there, and purity" (Akbar, 143). Joshi, as the main ideologue of this new order of segmentation, ironically employs "gangs of toughs, producing [...] surgical vibrations of violence" (Akbar, 114), in his rhetoric of justification for community walls as the only way to 'purity'. East End represents the last urban space of liberalism, heterogeneity, mixed society, urban ecological balance in terms of civic amenities (Yellowstone mixed school, for e.g.), but is at the same time distinctly a class-privileged space, into which the poor (like Sapna) are allowed only to carry out fixed labour for wages. Shalini and Riswan live here after moving away from the increasing uneasiness in Riswan's community ghetto, and their daughter Leila's third birthday is celebrated here within the class-marked frames of conspicuous consumption and ostentatious expenditure. The Repeaters' attack on East End is the inevitable outcome

of their constant Othering of all those who do not conform to their politically constituted ideas of community identity. In their scheme of things, East End liberals are aliens who are carriers of the disease of Western corruption, debauchery (alcohol, drugs, loose sexual codes) and disrespect for tradition and 'elders', and as such, must be attacked and exterminated, a violent 'cleansing' process that has had many dismal antecedents in fascist histories of racial identity reconstitution. Riswan is lynched by the Repeaters in an open show of power; Shalini is herded away with the other women (segregated from the men) and her daughter Leila disappears with her nanny Sapna. This episode of violence is an instance of a state-authorised pogrom against value-systems and social configurations that have been anathematised by the existing powers- that- be.

In his analysis of ethnic conflict and civil society in India, Ashutosh Varshney uses the term ethnic in a broad conflated sense to refer to and include categories of religion, race, language and sect (365). He identifies civic space/society as that “which (1) exists between the family [...] and the state [...] (2) makes interconnections between individuals or families possible, and (3) *is independent of the state* “ (my italics) and is also “organized in “associations that attend to the cultural, social, economic, and political needs of the citizens” (Varshney, 366). What we see in *Leila*, however, is the antithesis of such a definition of civil society; here, the state is directly involved in the reordering, reconceptualising and reconfiguring of a communally ghettoised civic urban space that Others and alienates the Muslim community towards ejecting them from civil society and ultimately depriving them of citizenship, while simultaneously maintaining the oppressive boundaries that preclude the addressal of economic inequities of other societal segments. It is the state which breaks Shalini's family and destroys her life as she had known it as a member of a civil society not yet obsessed with unreal xenophobic notions of 'purity'.

In his exploration of conventional definitions of civil society in relation to modernity, Varshney is of the opinion that “ascriptive associations should be considered part of civil society so long as they connect individuals, build trust, encourage reciprocity, and facilitate “the exchange of views on matters of public concern—economic, political, cultural and social” (370). The Repeaters are an externalised image of such an ascriptive association claiming similar roles, but actually doing the exact opposite of them. The lathi-wielding Repeaters form part of an extremist political system which violently specifies “which group may have access to formal civic spaces and establish organizations and which ones may not” (Varshney, 369). Shalini's friend Dipanita who had once been a part of the East End liberal culture, succumbs through fear to the ascriptive rhetoric of the Repeaters. She allows herself to be fully indoctrinated and brainwashed, in her effort to belong somewhere in the new order. Her prejudices are not her own, but are internalised fear-induced ascriptions which seek to fix caste, class and religious identities into rigid moulds. Both Dipanita and her husband Atul escape

persecution although they too had once inhabited a society that was ultimately targeted by the Repeaters; they manage this by mouthing the Repeaters' rhetoric as if it stemmed from their own convictions (“Community is the most important thing nowadays. Those fancy ideas we had[...] of love and pleasure, adventure, those are bad words now” (Akbar, 203)) and by carefully visibilising all outward signs/markers of conformity to the new order. In this sense, they exemplify a new racial category that has been violently created within an intra-racial context, using the Repeaters' ready rhetoric of 'Us' and 'Them'.

References

- Akbar, Prayaag. *Leila*. New Delhi: Simon & Schuster, 2017.
- Patel, Sujatha. “Shiv Sena, Culture and Community”. Paraphrased in “Community and Identities: Interrogating Contemporary Discourses on India”, by Surinder S. Jodhka. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Oct. 9-15, 1999, Vol.34, No.41, pp. 2957-2963. [https:// www.jstor.org/stable/4408508](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4408508)DOA: 12/12/2022.
- Skaria, Ajay. “Why Hindutva Is a Racist Supremacism – Not Merely Communalism or Majoritarianism”. <https://thewire.in/politics/why-hindutva-is-a-racist-supremacism-not-a-communalism-or-majoritarianism>DOI:10/SEP/2021. DOA: 12/12/2022.
- Upadhyaya, Carol. “Conceptualising the Concept of Community in Indian Social Science: An Anthropological Perspective”. Paraphrased in “Community and Identities: Interrogating Contemporary Discourses on India”, by Surinder S. Jodhka. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Oct. 9-15, 1999, Vol.34, No.41, pp. 2957-2963. [https:// www.jstor.org/stable/4408508](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4408508)DOA: 12/12/2022.
- Varshney, Ashutosh. “Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond”. *World Politics* 53 (April 2001), 362-98. Project Muse, <http://muse.jhu.edu>DOA: 12/12/2022.
- Vasavi, A. R. “Narratives in the Re-Constitution of Communities”. Paraphrased in “Community and Identities: Interrogating Contemporary Discourses on India”, by Surinder S. Jodhka. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Oct. 9-15, 1999, Vol.34, No.41, pp. 2957-2963. [https:// www.jstor.org/stable/4408508](https://www.jstor.org/stable/4408508)DOA: 12/12/2022.

SUBSCRIPTION FORM



Singularities
a peer reviewed international transdisciplinary biannual research journal

ISSN No: 2348 – 3369.

Name : _____

Address : _____

Tel : _____

Mob : _____

E-mail : _____

Choose the type of subscription required :

1 - Year - Rs. 1000

2 - Years - Rs. 1750



Singularities

a peer reviewed international transdisciplinary biannual research journal