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Editor's Note

Singularities Journal is into its 23 issue. The journal which bright out its first issue in 2014 has been regularly bringing it out biannually for the last 10 years with one theme-based issue and one open issue. Not only have we been consistently connecting to the scholars and academics across domains these 11 years, but also holding an international annual conference focusing on themes of cross-disciplinary significance. Professor Brian's article with which the current issue opens reflects on fantasy against the backdrop of myth and contemporaneity, Professor Brian was one of the keynotes in the Singularities International Conference on Fantasy which the journal organised in 2023 in association with Dept of English, University of Calicut.

The current Open issue of Singularities is crisscross of perspectives cutting across texts, movies and themes and theoretical domains. Works like Han Kang's The Vegetarian, Hakuri's One Room of Happiness, Ahdaf Soueif's The Map of Love, Jhanvi Barua's Next Door, Taslima Nasrin's Exile, Hamid Suleiman's Freedom Hospital: A Syrian Story, Sartre's No Exit, Rabai al-Madhoun's The Lady from Tel Aviv, P. Sivakami's The Grip of Change, and Temsula Ao's These Hills are analysed in the articles. Movies and documentaries like Accsex, directed by Shwetha Ghosh, Kathal the Core, Everything Everywhere All at Once and The Library of Babel, and Korean Drama My Happy Home come in for commentary and analysis from interesting perspectives. There are other articles too which work on dalit identity, fat trauma, gastrofeminism, flipped classroom, heterotopia, khasi legends, dystopian feminism, survival trauma and fantasy literature, adding to the richness of the literary and critical texture of the content.

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

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Brian Attebery

Fantasy, Myth, and the Other : The Epic and the Everyday

Fantasy was once a niche genre: scorned by the literary establishment, treated by the publishing industry as a minor offshoot of science fiction, beloved by marginal groups like Medievalists and scholars of children's literature. Then it exploded, transformed into mainstream entertainment in the form of best-selling book series, movie and TV franchises, comics, and role-playing games. It went international. The template for fantasy created by a handful of British hobbyists and academics began to be employed by writers from many regions, cultures, and identities, representing many streams of supernatural lore beyond the early fantasists' Celtic and Nordic sources of inspiration.

As it has grown in popularity, fantasy has also drawn criticism of a more worrisome sort than early dismissals as juvenile or escapist fare. The foundational work of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, for instance, turns out to entail a certain very British xenophobia. Readers testify to their experience of having to read against the grain, as it were: to read about Narnia or Middle-Earth as if they were not women, or people of color, or non-Christians. For many, it was worth the effort, but why should some readers and not others be burdened with the extra work? A reader from Asia or Africa might well give up on *The Lord of the Rings* upon reading depictions of dark-skinned Southrons and slant-eyed Easterners. As Gothic scholar Stephen Shapiro comments, “Tolkien's good guys are white and the bad guys are black, slant-eyed, unattractive, inarticulate and a psychologically undeveloped horde" (“Lord or the Rings labelled racist”). The cartoonish version of this argument in the popular media is that *The Lord of the Rings* is a racist work. I recommend looking instead at the careful way this question has been framed by scholars such as Dimitra Fimi, Helen Young, and Ebony Elizabeth Thomas. They blame not the authors but their unconsidered adoption of older narrative tropes and world views, and they recommend supplementing and contextualizing, rather than replacing, the problematic tales. In this talk, I hope both to provide additional context and to steer listeners toward more varied fantasy fare. As a first step, I want to stop talking about fantasy as if it were all one thing.

The category of fantasy is too big and too varied to be treated as an ordinary genre, the way we treat detective fiction or Hollywood rom-coms. Kathryn Hume invites us to see it instead as a mode, a way of constructing stories, equivalent to and complementing mimesis. In *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, critic John Clute comments that

> Much world literature has been described, at one time or another, as fantasy. "Fantasy"—certainly when conceived as being in contrast to Realism—is a most extraordinarily porous term, and has been used to

Brian Attebery is a Visiting Associate Professor, Hollins University, USA.

> mop up vast deposits of story which this culture or that —and this era or that—deems unrealistic. ("Fantasy")

One can find in the *Encyclopedia* dozens of named varieties, from A to Z, or Absurdist Fantasy to Zombie Movies. Fantasy can take the form of children's picture books or intricate metafictions. It can be comic or bleakly ironic, dreamily elusive or sharply topical.

For my purpose, I'm going to borrow a pair of contrasting terms from Charul Palmer-Patel, who distinguishes between epic fantasy and "localised"fantasy. The difference is partly one of scale: epic fantasy, says Palmer-Patel, "includes the entire cosmos, dimensions, depths and heights of heaven and hell [and] a divine order to the world which *impacts* on the plot or narrative arc" (8). In other words, more than the setting is vast: the story is likewise cosmic. We can apply one of Mikhael Bakthin's ideas to this definition and say that epic fantasy constitutes a chronotope: a kind of fictive space that supports certain narrative arcs and sustains a distinctive set of character types.

The contrasting category, localized fantasy (which is not the primary topic of Palmer-Patel's study) is not universal but particular. Its resolution is something less than world-redemption, and its heroes are more problematic than predestined. Epic fantasy is, as the term implies, derived from the wide-ranging, myth-infused traditional narratives of oral tradition: the Iliad and Odyssey, Beowulf, the Icelandic Eddas, Kalevala, Nibelunglied, Ramayana, Gilgamesh. When Tolkien set about, as he said, to create a mythology for England, he borrowed from and imitated as many of these as he believed were needed to stand in for a missing national epic. A philologist by training, he was doing what philologists do to fill in the history of a language: extrapolating backward from later forms and from related cultures to construct a hypothetical original. Just as unattested words from the past are marked by asterisks, Tolkien's Middle-earth is, says Tom Shippey, England's "asterisk reality" (15).It is the past we get to if we work backward from words and stories instead of building up from documents and buried artifacts. And, since stories articulate fears and wishes, including those we aren't necessarily aware of, the epic fantasy landscape is a place of both dread and keen longing.

If you were listening carefully to my last couple of statements, you noticed that I kept using the word "we": *we* fear, *we* desire, *we* travel to the imaginary past. But who are we? Who is self and who is other? The audience listening to an epic singer had no doubt that theirs was the collective selfhood invoked and, to a great extent, defined by the tale. Anyone else could be disparaged, dismissed, dispatched en masse. The chauvinist potential is especially obvious in the south Slavic epics studied by Milman Parry and Albert Lord because those stories remain mostly in the human register, foregoing the gods and magical transformations that can disguise tribal partiality as something more fundamental. If one's enemies are not men but cyclopes or trolls, then one need not worry about distinguishing between them or treating them honorably. Epic says that the

difference between heroes and villains, which is to say, between self and other, is divinely ordained. We can see this difference enacted on movie screens in Peter Jackson's adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*. Characters who are not fully human can be created by computer simulation and duplicated endlessly to form armies of orcs that can be mowed down without compunction. The good guys are fewer and individualized, as are the characters with the capacity for goodness who have chosen evil: Saruman, Denethor, Boromir. Though the massed armies on both sides are generated by the same CGI machinery, the camera looks from the side of the Western armies and interpolates close-ups that individualize and elicit sympathy. The Enemy's forces are thus different not only in degree but in essential nature: identically beastly or demonic. The filmmakers' techniques make visible what is already implicit in the verbal text.

But we can take this process back another step, because Tolkien was adapting rather than inventing. Epic fantasy learned to racialize the other from epic myth. Though race in the real world is an artificial construct without a biological basis, a form of pseudo-speciation, racial divisions in epic fantasy are fundamental facts, part of the world-building, and the core of that world-building is the re-use of inherited narrative structures and motifs.

Epics arise in particular social circumstances. The singer of tales needs an audience and a patron to sustain the remarkable effort of mastering formulas and then using them to compose a story that might last many days. The longer the tale, the more need for specialization. The epic bard is not a village storyteller but a court functionary. The role is depicted in the blind minstrel Demodocus in book 8 of the Odyssey, from which we get our image of Homer himself, which is to say, of the performers who made up the Homeric tradition.

The process of transforming oral narrative into written literature involved a series of transcribers, copyists, compilers, and editors, all from the literate classes, which is to say, men of a certain social standing and from the winning team. We have names and biographies for some of these men: Snorri Sturlusson, Valmiki, Elias Lönnrot; others are anonymous or are named only in legend. What they have in common is the transformation of orally transmitted (and thus variable) texts into fixed written artifacts: into literature. And not just into any kind of literature, but the kind of literature that John Clute speaks of: fantasy. Epics are full of miraculous events, marvelous beings, impossible objects, all of which then become available to writers who wish to compose their own literary epics in imitation of the traditional narratives, from Virgil and Ovid to Tolkien and George R. R. Martin.

This is all well and good; for those of us who relish both the original mythic compilations and their invented offshoots. However, both the circumstances of epic performance and the identity of the performers pushed the stories in the direction of masculine display and violent confrontation with the outsider and the other. Such

violence was justified by redefining the other as inhuman. Thus, for Gilgamesh, the forest denizen became the monster Humbaba. For Beowulf, the marsh-dwelling local was Grendel. For Rama, the other was Rakshasa or demon. For Thor, a frost giant or troll; for Herakles, a centaur. Whatever their name or form, they are orcs all. Their purpose is to glorify the hero by going down in defeat. The inhuman adversary is a key component (step 11 out of 22) in what Lord Raglan described as the hero's journey. Raglan's structural analysis was later popularized (without credit)by Joseph Campbell and mis-characterized by him as the sole model for heroic narrative: the so-called monomyth.

I recommend some of the critiques of Campbell by folklorists such as Alan Dundes and Barre Toelken, who have pointed out the degree to which his distortions go beyond mere oversimplification. Toelken, for instance, explains that Campbell's claims about a universal hero myth "can be maintained only by suppressing thousands of stories like "The Sun's Myth" in which culture is threatened and destroyed, not stabilized and renewed, by the egotistical actions of a powerful male seeker" (*Dynamics* 257). The story Toelken mentions, "The Sun's Myth," is a sacred tale of Chinook origins, from the American Northwest. It was told in 1892 to anthropologist Franz Boas by a Kathlamet storyteller named Charles Cultee. In it, a chief ignores all warnings and demands the "shining thing" he has seen in the house of the sun. Once he has it, he can't get rid of it, and it destroys his people and their villages. Here is how folklorist Dell Hymes analyzes the meaning of the story:

> The traditional world was one of "participant maintenance," in Redfield's term. There was a mutuality between the people and the powers of the world around them, a "covenant," so to speak, of mutual rights and duties. So long as people maintained their part, the other powers of the world would maintain theirs, and the people would prosper. In terms of the Chinookan genre of myth, the story of the Sun is not a tragedy. It is a story of maintenance of cultural order. (358)

"The Sun's Myth" is typical of Native American narrative, which rarely fits the hero pattern. Hymes's groundbreaking book on ethnopoetics takes its title from another Northwest myth, "Seal and Her Younger Brother Dwelt There,." In that story, as in "The Sun's Myth," a female relative repeatedly tries to warn against dangerous, covenant-breaking behavior. "In vain I tried to tell you," she says, again and again. But heroes don't listen.

Campbell's distortions of mythic tradition are, to some degree, an extension of the biases in the processes of recording and publishing traditional literatures mentioned earlier. Men are favored over women; battles over domestic issues; epics over whatever the alternative might be, for which scholarly history gives us no convenient designation. I suggest the term "everyday myth." Once you set aside notions of a single universal map of

the hero's journey, other patterns become visible. These are the elements of myth that didn't make it into the epics or their fantasy offshoots.

It is an interesting exercise to compare the gods of Homer with those that show up in the archeological record. In the Iliad, for instance, Demeter was mostly a reference to grain fields, Persephone was only the dread goddess of the Underworld, Hera was a jealous shrew, and Hestia doesn't show up at all, which has left generations of myth-fans puzzled about her placement among the twelve Olympians. Yet each of these deities was the object of a major religious tradition. Likewise, of the Old Norse divinities, most of what we learn from the texts concerns the warlike Aesir, especially Odin, Thor, and the half-god Loki. It is easy to overlook the other tribe of gods, the Vanir, and yet ritual objects and place names that survive from pre-Christian Scandinavia indicate that Vanir such as Njörd, Freyr, and Freyja were equally important as objects of worship. These deities look after crops, supervise marriages, guide the dead, and keep the balance among the forces of wind, water, earth, and fire. They just don't seem to do anything story-worthy. In addition, since many of their cults were related to fertility and sexuality, if there were stories, they didn't survive Christian censorship.

In Greece, though, where writing was widespread before conversion to Christianity, there are many texts besides the epic narratives, including travelers' reports of festivals and cultic invocations such as the so-called Homeric hymns. In her 1903 study of Greek religion, classicist Jane Ellen Harrison warned against using the stories familiar from the epics to generalize about beliefs and practices. “To our surprise, when the actual rites are examined,” she says,

> we shall find that they have little or nothing to do with the particular Olympian to whom they are supposed to be addressed; that they are not in the main rites of burnt-sacrifice, of joy and feasting and agonistic contests, but rites of a gloomy underworld character, connected mainly with purification and the worship of ghosts. The conclusion is almost forced upon us that we have here a theological stratification, that the rites of the Olympians have been superimposed on another order of worship. (*Prolegomena* 10-11)

Harrison divides, or stratifies, myth into two layers. On top is the universe we glean from the epics and hero legends. These concern great battles and dangerous journeys. In them, the gods are petty and capricious, but they are also grand and beautiful and occasionally interested in justice. The other layer—deeper and, Harrison suggests, older than the literary one—could be seen in actual religious practices. This kind of religion was practical, it was local, and it was recurrent. Its rituals were keyed to the cycles of the day and the seasons and the human lifespan.

Epic fantasy has a pretty easy task: to take elements from epic myth and retell them in a

form that will satisfy readers of modern fiction. The source materials are familiar; they already have a satisfactory overall shape and scope; and they provide many characters, scenes, and details that work as elements of short stories or novels. Non-epic fantasy offers a greater challenge, which is to find (or invent) motifs and structures that reflect non-epic traditions and combine those into engaging, symbolically rich fictions. Such stories would emphasize the local over the grandiose and embody the kind of "participant maintenance" that Dell Hymes finds in the Cathlamet sun myth.

To move away from the hypothetical and into the actual, this is the kind of fantasy written by some of my favorite authors: Kenneth Grahame, John Crowley, Patricia A. McKillip, Terry Pratchett, Hope Mirrlees, Ursula K. Le Guin. Grahame is best known for *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), which is as local as can be—never straying far from the bank of the Thames River—and which contrasts the would-be heroic Mr. Toad with Rat, patient maintainer of home and sustainer of friends. Grahame's short story "The Reluctant Dragon" (1898) takes one of the heroes of epic romance, St. George, and shows how he could be converted from fighting dragons to befriending them. Crowley's work represents the cyclic aspect of non-epic fantasy. Although his novel *Little, Big* (1981) is epic in scale and includes another self-styled hero in the figure of the legendary king Frederic Barbarossa, its most important magic concerns maintaining houses and families. One of its central characters, Alice Dale Drinkwater, is nicknamed Daily Alice, which suggests both her resemblance to Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland and her eventual role as the mother goddess who recreates the world every day. Patricia McKillip's fantasies offer many variations on fairy tale and legend, but the closest she came to writing an epic quest was in her trilogy beginning with *The Riddle-Master of Hed* (1976). Though she was consciously imitating Tolkien—she says that her reaction to *The Lord of the Rings* was "*I want to write that*" (Introduction v)—and she acknowledges her debt to "myths and early poetry, epics and eddas" (vi), her heroes were always unconventional and their quests typically led not to conquest but to self-examination and compromise. Pratchett started out by satirizing fantasy clichés, including its heroic "chosen ones" and its tendency to turn opponents into canon-fodder. As he delved further into his imagined universe of Discworld, however, he also began to develop an alternative model of the fantastic based in common sense, domestic virtues, and the power of belief, culminating, I think, in the late stories about the young witch Tiffany Aching and the sustaining magic of place.

I could construct an argument based on any of these, or a number of other innovative fantasy writers, but I will focus on Mirrlees and Le Guin because each drew upon scholarly sources to challenge the heroic model of myth. Mirrlees wrote only a single fantasy novel, *Lud-in-the-Mist* (1926), but her rediscovery during the fantasy boom of the 1970s established her as major figure and a favorite among other fantasy writers, including Michael Swanwick and Neil Gaiman. *Lud-in-the-Mist* opens with an epigraph from Jane Harrison, who was Mirrlees's mentor and companion. The passage, slightly

modified from Harrison's *Prolegomena* (p 206, per Parmer, via Swanwick), is as follows:

> The Sirens stand, as it would seem, for the ancient and the modern, for the impulses in life as yet immoralised, imperious longings, ecstasies, whether of love or art, or philosophy, magical voices calling to a man from his "Land of Heart's Desire," and to which if he hearken it may be that he will return no more—voices, too, which, whether a man sail by or stay to hearken, still sing on.

In Harrison's original context, the passage invites us to look behind the Siren anecdote in the Odyssey to see a long tradition of winged singers woman, who appear in funerary art as heavenly mourners, as images of the soul, and as psychopomps or spirit guides escorting the dead into the afterlife. They are neither good nor evil—hence Harrison's descriptor "unmoralized," which Mirrlees alters to "immoralised"—but simply otherworldly. The Odyssey transforms these enigmatic beings into evil temptresses, harpies with better voices—who are placed in the story to provide another obstacle for the hero to overcome. Harrison suggests that the older meaning may still be the more valid one—as she says, for both ancient and modern, and that the desires roused by the siren's song are as spiritual as they are sensual.

In Mirrlees's recontextualization, the siren's song is the first appearance of what the novel's protagonist calls the Note, after his first traumatic experience of other-worldly longing, triggered by hearing a single sound from a mysterious lute found in his family's attic. The sound is "plangent, blood-freezing and alluring." For the rest of his life, the Note reappears in his dreams in various guises. It terrifies him, not least because of his attraction to it, and from childhood to middle-age he arranges his life so as to avoid all mystery: "after he had heard the Note, a more stay-at-home and steady young man could not have been found in Lud-in-the-Mist" (6). Nathaniel Chanticleer becomes the anti-Odysseus: not a wanderer, not a hero, not one who dares the Sirens by lashing himself to the mast so that he can listen to their song. Just as Chanticleer buries himself in ordinariness to avoid reminders of the note, his home town of Lud-in-the-Mist has made itself into the most comfortable and conventional sort of mercantile community. One reason Mirrlees's fantasy stands out from earlier works is its setting, which is not a fairy-tale forest or knightly castle but a sturdy, mercantile burg that prides itself on its common sense and lack of poetry. Generations before, the land of Dorimare had thrown out its aristocracy in the person of Duke Aubrey, a troubling and paradoxical person who seduced maidens, played cruel jokes, and composed exquisite songs. Now happily Duke-less, Lud-in-the-Mist's middle class has run things for its own benefit and devoted itself to such comforts as its famous cheeses. Conveniently forgotten was not only Duke Aubrey but also the country's proximity to Fairyland. Yet one of the two rivers that converged at Lud-in-the-Mist had its origin in that same Fairyland, and fairy fruit still came floating down the Dapple River to inspire and madden those who consumed it.

As the story progresses, first Nathaniel's comforts, then his family, and finally his very identity are threatened by Fairyland and its siren song. Surprisingly, he rises to the occasion, demonstrating qualities of endurance and imagination that he has always had and always suppressed. He becomes the hero of the everyday and savior of the ordinary, using logic and law to regain his family and position while also inviting back into Dorimaran culture the disruptive and restorative power of fairy fruit.

The mythic underpinnings of the story might not be as obvious as its old-fashioned charm and gentle satire. Yet myth, and specifically Jane Harrison's understanding of myth, shows up in myriad details such as half-forgotten ballads, figures of speech, rural superstitions, funeral customs, and the lurking influence of Duke Aubrey, who is a version of the fairy king Oberon. Even Nathaniel's appeal to the law, by which he wins back his son from Fairyland, is a reference to one of Harrison's monumental studies of Greek religion, her book *Themis*, which is named for a goddess of justice who, like the goddesses of home and hearth, was much more important in cultic practice than in epic narrative.

Like Mirrlees, Ursula K. Le Guin drew upon the work of an early twentieth century classicist and, not coincidentally, another under-recognized woman scholar, Dr. Bertha Tilly. Le Guin made many significant contributions to fantasy literature, including six volumes of novels and stories about the wizards of a world called Earthsea, another three-volume series titled the Annals of the Western Shore, and shorter tales that mingle fairy tale or legend motifs with philosophical speculation, whimsy, and political parable. The work that best demonstrates the kind of anti-epic I'm talking about here, though, is her last novel, *Lavinia* (2008). In it she interweaves events and characters from Virgil's Aeneid with scenes of historically reconstructed daily life in pre-Roman Italy and visits to a dream world of ghosts and nature spirits. Much of that historical reconstruction, and especially the geography around Lavinia's home, is taken from Tilly's book *Vergil's Latium* (1949), which, as Le Guin says in an afterword, was the product of Tilly's walks "all over the region in the 1930s with a keen mind, a sharp eye, and a Brownie camera" (275). Incidentally, I think that Le Guin's choice to spell the poet's name with an "e"—Vergil rather than the more common Virgil—was a nod to Tilly.

Even without help from Tilly, Le Guin was extraordinarily aware of the complicated relationships among myth, history, and psychology. She once described herself as "a Myth who married a History" ("The Woman" 129), meaning that she was a tale-teller and her husband Charles a European historian, but also reminding us that her background included early and thorough grounding in traditional cultures and storytelling patterns, especially indigenous North American ones. Myth was, in a sense, her native tongue, something she acquired in early childhood. "My father," she tells us, "had told us stories from Homer before I could read, and all my life I'd read and loved the hero-tales" ("Earthsea Revisioned"). Her father, Alfred L. Kroeber, was not just a lover of Homeric

epics but was one of the founders of anthropological studies in the United States, and in his work among the native peoples of the West Coast in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, he had met many storytellers and tradition-bearers. Some of those became family friends—honorary "uncles"—who regularly visited the Kroeber family when Ursula was a child. The Chinook myths I mentioned earlier were collected by Kroeber's teacher Franz Boas, and I like to think Boas might have introduced his former student to Charles Cultee, the performer of "The Sun's Myth."

Because Kroeber was devastated by the destruction of cultures even as he was trying to record them, he took time off from teaching to undergo analysis and was himself trained as a Freudian analyst. Thus the psychoanalytic valuation of, and approach to, myth was also part of the Kroeber children's heritage. Le Guin's brother Karl Kroeber, another scholar in a family of scholars, produced several books on indigenous storytelling, including *Artistry in Native American Myths* (1998). In *Ishi in Three Centuries* (2003) Karl and another brother, historian Clifton Kroeber, gathered materials relevant to the life of the Yahi man whom A. L Kroeber befriended when he emerged from the California hills after the rest of his band had died.

Le Guin herself bowed out of academic life in the midst of doctoral studies in French renaissance literature, but she was trained in scholarly methods and Romance languages, so that when she became interested in the Aeneid, she was able to (re)teach herself Latin and translate Vergil's text. She brought to *Lavinia* an understanding of storytelling as a way of life as well as an artistic practice, and she used the title character to investigate the nature of epics and their heroes and to offer an alternative kind of mythic narrative directed not toward conquest but toward the kind of cultural maintenance that Dell Hymes finds in "The Sun's Myth." Rather than challenging Vergil directly, Le Guin focuses on a character who plays a vital role in the founding of Rome and yet who is given little to do and even less to say in the poem.. Lavinia is Aeneas's second wife and third romantic partner (after the Carthaginian queen Dido). By marrying her, a princess of Latium, Aeneas gains the power and prestige needed to found the new city of Rome—and Vergil gains the leverage to create a foundational myth for his homeland. Le Guin finds the gaps in Vergil's account of Aeneas and his fellow Trojan refugees and fills those gaps with Lavinia's own interests, experiences, and perspectives. She says she didn't want to do as Margaret Atwood did in the *Penelopiad*: namely to write a revisionist account injecting contemporary feminist ideas into the old tale (Grossman). Rather, she did as she did with her own prior work in the later Earthsea stories: interrogate and interpolate in such as way as to deepen and complicate without contradicting or invalidating the existing texts. Her encounter with the original left her with the conviction that Vergil was "different than most of the classic writers, in whom women's voices are suppressed. He simply doesn't seem to have much of that prejudice against women" (Grossman). For this reason, she viewed her work as complementary to the Aeneid rather than oppositional, and she

included encounters between her protagonist and the shade or time-ghost of the man Lavinia thinks of simply as "the poet." As she explains what she is doing in the sacred wood at their first encounter, Vergil acknowledges that he hadn't clearly seen her as he was writing:

> "She came to Albunea by herself," he said, speaking into the darkness, "and knew the sacred names of the river, and had no wish to be married. And I knew nothing of all that! I never looked at her. I had to tell what the men were doing . . ." (40).

What she was doing, which the men were not, is maintaining familial ties and sacred obligations. Albunea is a sulfur spring, an oracle that has lost prestige and yet remains, as she says, "sacred to my family" (27). There Lavinia exercises her piety—which the story reminds us does not mean religious devotion but rather, variously, "obedience to the will of the powers of earth and sky" or "the effort to fulfill one's destiny" or simply "doing right" (216-17). And there she first realizes her visionary gift in a place where "the sense of the numen, the presence and power of the sacred, was strong and strange" (27). Having visited the spring with her father as a young girl and assisted him with the sacrifice of a lamb, Lavinia is now able—and feels herself obliged—to carry on the rituals, though her tribute is of salted grain, salsamola, instead of a slain animal. The sacrificial lamb, she observes, "had its own piety" (28), shown by its fearlessness. Perhaps the salted meal is also pious; certainly the one who offers it is.

Vergil is surprised by this vision of Lavinia the king's daughter and finds her worthier than his invented woman warrior, Camilla. Rather than taking up arms, Lavinia takes up duties: maintaining a household and helping to manage a kingdom. Le Guin asks us to look at housekeeping as something both essential and sacred. One of Lavinia's jobs is to make the salt for salsamola: "I'll have to go down to the salt beds at the mouth of the father river soon, and bring dirty salt back, and clean it and leach it and bake it and soak it and dry it and pound it and all the rest you have to do to make it right" (52). It's both domestic labor and a religious ritual. Similarly, she thinks of the tools for clothmaking as household gods: "I had my spindle and a bag of wool; a woman carries some of her Penates with her" (60).

In another visionary encounter with the poet, she is surprised at his depiction of the gods—influenced by Homer and Greek literary tradition—as bickering persons. Her version is different, more localized and more bound up in the seasons and the necessities of life:

> The world is sacred, of course, it is full of gods, numina, great powers and presences. We give some of them names—Mars of the fields and the war, Vesta the fire, Ceres the grain, Mother Tellus the earth, the Penates of the storehouse. The rivers, the springs. And in the storm cloud and the light is the great power called the father god. But they aren't people. They don't

> love and hate, they aren't for or against. They accept the worship due them, which augments their power, through which we live. (65)

Part of what Le Guin is doing here, in meetings between the imagined Lavinia and the poet who failed to imagine her as fully as he did other characters in his epic, is to propose another kind of mythic storytelling in which domestic chores and daily rituals count for more than battles, because they are what maintains the world rather than disrupting it.

Lavinia has been keeping house—which is to say, worshipping the gods of home, field, and forest—since she was a young girl, and she will continue to uphold order and continuity even after she is courted, wed, and widowed by Aeneas. The heroic epic comes into her life for a time but she is never wholly committed to its dynamic of quest and conquest, and she lends some of her wisdom to the hero himself, who already possesses the complex virtue of piety. In an afterword, Le Guin explains that "Free of the borrowed literary machinery of the pantheon [...] I found my characters following the sacred domestic practices of that profoundly religious people the Romans" (276). And in following after her characters, Le Guin constructs an alternative kind of mythic narrative that unites the everyday with the mysterious. In doing so, she does not so much go against epic tradition as to revisit it with different aims and a different vision. Following in the destructive wake of the epic hero, she gleans the treasures he has left behind.

As I mentioned before, Le Guin is not the only writer to use fantasy to find and fill gaps in tradition. Another such is the Somali American writer Sofia Samatar, who reminds us that epics are more than their dominant narrative lines. An epic, says Samatar is "an everything book" (92) that gives the illusion of containing an entire world, and it does so partly by allowing for diversions and distractions from the main story. Samatar's own *A Stranger in Olondria* (2013) is a good example: it is epic in scope but also packed with embedded narratives and full of intriguing hints about other stories untold. If many epics validate cultural domination, Samatar reminds us, others celebrate rebels and outsiders. The fantasies that are modern literary offshoots of such epics can go even further. Samatar draw on her own academic training and upon the work of her father, who, like Le Guin's father, was a scholar specializing in oral narratives, to infuse her fantasy with a sophisticated understanding of oral cultures and of the dynamics of myth. Samatar also cites Le Guin as a direct influence. She and a new generation of fantasy writers learned from Le Guin how to write about others without reducing them to monsters or faceless multitudes. There are no orcs in these fantasies.

I began by talking about the variations in fantasy as a genre, and I want to end by talking about genres themselves not as fixed categories but as ways of reading. A single book can be both realistic and magical, or both science fiction and fantasy. One reader might notice all the features that favor one of those patterns while a different reader picks up other details and construes a different pattern. If epic is about adventure and domination, everyday myth is about remembering, recognizing, maintaining.

But if genres are, I claimed many years ago, fuzzy sets, then not only our sense of what they include but also our ideas of how to read them are determined by which texts we take as the prototypical examples. If *The Lord of the Rings* is the prototype (as it has been for many), then fantasy is anything that resembles Tolkien's epic, and we read in such a way as to make all other fantasy stories fit the model even if it means ignoring the parts that don't fit. But what if we choose a different prototype?

As readers, we have the option of choosing which generic path to follow. Critical tradition favors an epic lens for fantasy. The film techniques I mentioned earlier, such as CGI replication of enemy warriors on a battlefield, also invite us to focus on heroic quests and epic battles. But we can choose to read a story such as *The Lord of the Rings* as an anti-quest—an attempt to give up, rather than obtaining, power—with protagonists who are decidedly unheroic. We can savor parts of the story that have to do with the everyday, with maintaining civility and offering hospitality, even though those are the parts that get slighted by or omitted from adaptations.

I would suggest deriving a template for fantasy from *Lud-in-the-Mist* or *Lavinia*, rather than from *The Lord of the Rings* or the more battle-heavy, xenophobic epics that stand behind it. "There is more than one history of the world," as John Crowley reminds us (*Aegypt*), and that means more than one asterisk reality as well. Genres are not just kinds of literature but also scripts that guide our behavior. In Hymes's discussion of "The Sun's Myth," he invites us to see long forms such as myth as composites of smaller verbal interactions, or "conversational genres" (351), each of which requires interpretation through knowledge of a culture and its forms. "Much of what it means to be a person, properly offering, maintaining, and receiving respect, much of the identity and values of a group, may be at stake in the management, or mangling of small genres," says Hymes (351).

We learn how to live in the world from stories we have heard and read. Mirrlees and Le Guin and others give us stories that tell us we don't have to be disrupters and combatants; we don't have to aggrandize heroes. We can choose from among mythic pasts the ones that show us how to maintain connection, to respect the stranger, to listen for Nathaniel Chanticleer's mysterious, numinous Note. This is what they have tried to tell us. If we really listen, they have not done so in vain.

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Anila Mariya

Fantasizing Metamorphosis : Becoming Plant and Undoing Humanity in *The Vegetarian* by Han Kang

Abstract

'The Vegetarian' by Han Kang is a novel that will leave the reader with more questions than answers. Han Kang is a Korean writer, born in Gwangju. Having witnessed the Gwangju massacre of 1998, most of her writings question the innate goodness of humanity. The Vegetarian (2007) is a follow-up to her short story titled "The Fruit of My Woman". It is a novel about a woman who decides to turn vegan after having a series of disturbing dreams about human cruelty. She sees vegetarianism as a way not to harm others and yearns for a 'plant-like' existence. The existential angst, which plagues humanity affects her also. She questions birth and death by breathing alone, just like a plant. Her inability to provide an efficient reason devastates her family, which is rooted in Korean etiquette and manners. Her decision to become a vegetarian affects her personal as well as social life. Her "normal" Korean family compels her to eat meat and at last resort to physical violence and torture. Nothing stops her, and, at last, she gives up meat. Later, she stops eating at all, in her journey of metamorphosing into a plant.

This paper intends to analyze how The Vegetarian, which won Han Kang the Man Booker International Prize in 2016, succeeded in showcasing the existential anxieties of modern man and how that anxieties give way to the formation of fantasies. These fantasies, in a way, help modern human beings to cope with the world. An ecofeminist reading of the work aids in understanding the protagonist's dilemma as the theory supports the argument that women and nature have a shared experience. As a class that is subjugated by the norms of patriarchy, women can easily relate to nature, the 'mother earth', which is exploited by man. Yeong-hye tries to isolate herself from the 'human acts' by attaining the tranquillity of nature. She no longer believes that she is an animal. In fact, she becomes nature. Here, both Yeong-hye and nature, do not kneel but out lashes against society in their own ways. She sacrifices or gives up her human body

This paper attempts to find out how the metamorphosis into a plant becomes a powerful statement which challenges cultural conformity and how it, in turn, challenges the existence of humanity itself. Here, vegetarianism kisses death and the protagonist challenges life and death, taking her life into her own hands by fantasizing about her metamorphosis.

Keywords : Metamorphosis, Fantasy, Ecofeminism, Body, Humanity, Post-human, Will.

Anila Mariya is a Student, School of Letters, MG University, Kottayam.

Introduction

The Vegetarian tells the story of a woman who loathes humanity and takes any possible chance to stop being an animal. She relates with nature and identifies herself as a plant. A brief overview of the writer and the background and setting of the novel is given in the Introduction. Chapter One analyzes how the meat paradox compels the protagonist to find an alternate way to exist. The second chapter is a culmination of arguments by major ecofeminists and analyzes how the patriarchal subjugation of women led to the breaking off of the fixed belief systems of society by the protagonist. As this paper attempts to find out how the metamorphosis into a plant becomes a powerful statement which challenges cultural conformity and how it, in turn, challenges the existence of humanity itself, the conclusion offers insights into how modern man copes with their lives through fantasies, flights, and metamorphosis.

Han Kang is a South Korean writer, born in Gwangju. Her father was a teacher as well as a noted novelist. Hence, Kang and her family had to constantly change their residence. As a result, she attended five different elementary schools. Her only constant companion was books ("Han Kang Interview" 0:04-40). Having witnessed the Gwangju massacre of 1998, most of her writings question the innate goodness of humanity. Her works also draw attention to the Gwangju Uprising, a largely peaceful civilian protest that emerged in May 1980 against the military dictatorships that had ruled the country for decades, which failed to treat humans with, even, the least dignity, and one that brutally suppressed by South Korean military forces. Han and her family had just left Gwanju, and the massacre happened. The brutality of the incident and survivor's guilt caused her distrust in humanity. Kang said in an interview, "All the things human beings have committed throughout history and throughout the world… When we are confronted by the horror of humanity, we have to question ourselves" ("Han Kang Interview" 0:06-7:45).

Han Kang studied Korean literature at Yonsei University. Her official literary debut was in 1993 and her short story *The Scarlet Anchor* was published in 1994. She won many awards including, Yi Sang Literary Prize (2005), and the Korean Literature Novel Award. In Kang's college years, she became obsessed with a line of poetry from Yi Sang: 'I believe that humans should be plants'. This line of poetry inspired her to pen her most notable works, especially her successful novel, *The Vegetarian*. Her other publications include *Convalescence* (2013), the poetry collection *I Put the Evening in the Drawer* (2013), a novel based on the Gwanju massacre: *Human Acts* (2014), and the autobiographical story *The White Book* (2016).

First published in Korean as 채식주의자 in 2007, *The Vegetarian* was later translated to English in 2015 by Deborah Smith. As Deborah Smith has told *The Guardian*, the novel is in three parts because, in Korea, writers debut in short stories and then publish a series of them. *The Vegetarian* was first published as short stories and later combined and translated by Smith and published as a novel with Portobello Books (*The Guardian*). It was Kang's first book to be translated to English and she won the Man Booker

International Prize in 2016 for the same. Many critics have praised Smith's stunning literary translation of the novel, which was her debut as a translator, as the author and translator shared the Man Booker International Prize. In victory, the novel triumphed over both *A Strangeness in My Mind* (2014), written by the Nobel Prize-winning Turkish author Orhan Pamuk, and *The Story of the Lost Child* (2014) by Elena Ferrante. (O'Key 2).

The Vegetarian is a fearsome tale of a young and ordinary woman in contemporary South Korea – Yeong-hye. The novel unfolds the ruinous consequences of her decision to strictly avoid non-vegetarian food and later to not eat at all. It is told in three parts by three different narrators. Unfortunately, the protagonist has no voice but sometimes finds it through her dream-like narratives. The first chapter titled 'The Vegetarian' is narrated by Mr. Cheong, the husband of Yeong-hye. He explains how his wife's decision affected his life. The recurring nightmares of blood and killings disturb Yeong-hye and she loathes being human. The trauma of killing and eating animals fills her with guilt. She stops making non-veg food, stops wearing a bra, avoids sexual intercourse, restricts talking, and altogether withdraws from all earthly ties. As her actions do not make any sense to her family, they try to force-feed her pork meat, which ends with her stabbing herself. She ends up in a hospital by the end of the chapter, with a lump of guilt in her chest.

The second part of the novel titled, 'Mongolian Mark', is the third-person narrative of Yeong-hye's brother-in-law, an unsuccessful artist. This chapter focuses on his obsession with the blue birthmark, the Mongolian Mark, and his looming and quenching desire for Yeong-hye who is now divorced. He betrays his wife, In-hye, and uses his sister-in-law as an erotic object. Flowers bloom out of their body as he paints flowers on Yeong-hye's body. The chapter ends with In-hye finding out about his betrayal.

The third chapter is titled 'Flaming Trees'. It is the story of In-hye. Through this third-person narrative, the author reveals the sister bond of both characters. After her family's fallout, In-hye takes care of her sister who is now admitted to a psychiatric hospital. Her husband immediately goes hiding and her parents abandon her sister. Yeong-hye stops eating and her desire to become a plant finds its pinnacle in her doing hand-stand, and asking for water and sunlight for nourishment. She reaches the point of death by starvation. The novel ends with In-hye transferring her sister to another hospital for a dangerous surgery. This post-modernist novel presents fragmented realities and leaves the reader with more questions than answers.

Nature, Culture, and the Meat Paradox in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

"Those who are against Fascism without being against capitalism, who lament over the barbarism that comes out of barbarism, are like people who wish to eat their veal without slaughtering the calf," says Bertolt Brecht in "Writing the Truth: Five Difficulties" (3). One could easily agree that this is the realization that persuades Yeong-hye to become a vegetarian. She realized that she was a hypocrite who altered the truth: who likes to eat the calf without seeing the blood.

South Korea is a carnivore's paradise. The cuisine is based mainly on meat, seafood and rice. Meat dishes such as *aspulgogi* and *kalbi* are common among South Koreans, and there are no food taboos. Non-vegetarian diet is a vital part of South Korean culture and many Koreans have come to believe that vegetarian food does not set up a healthy diet. According to a study conducted by Yoo and Yoon, eating differently is considered an abnormal behavior that disrupts group harmony (113). Another reason, they point out, for this hostility towards veganism is: "the mere presence of a vegetarian appears to have an immediate impact on underlying principles at the Korean dinner table, which is closely associated with eating and sharing the same meals together" (131). Hence it is very difficult for an omnivore to survive. There are only two situations where the South Koreans accept vegans. Either they should have religious reasons or health issues. That is why the wife of Cheong's boss interrogates Yeong-hye as to whether she has any "special reason" for becoming a vegetarian (24).

The reason why Yeong-hye decided to become a vegetarian is revealed in the post-modernist novel through the fragmented dreams of the protagonist, which sometimes intermingle with her thoughts. Sometimes these narratives are just descriptions of her dreams. Sometimes it becomes her thoughts, and sometimes a kind of 'stream of consciousness' narrative. There are six instances where the protagonist's perspective is revealed, in the first chapter of the novel. The first mention of the dreams is on a chilly night or rather morning. Cheong finds Yeong-hye standing, motionless, in front of the fridge at 4 am. When he asks her why she is standing there, she replies that she had a dream (8). Late that morning, she drags out every packet of meat and even eggs from the fridge. Her husband calls her crazy. Whenever he enquires the reason behind her actions she replies with a mere "I had a dream" (9-10). With no surprise, he loses control and lashes out at her. It is through the italicized dreams that Yeong-hye finds a voice in the novel. The first dream presented is ambiguously vague. She talks about a dark wood, blood dripping down from meat, her bloodied clothes, her running through the valley, the happy voices of people eating meat, and her bloody mouth. "*In that barn, what had I done? Pushed that red raw mass into my mouth, felt it squish against my gums, the roof of my mouth, slick with crimson blood",* she remembers, or more accurately, sees herself chewing something that felt so real (19). Maybe the barn is the symbol for the world which is the large slaughterhouse. Or it is the guilt rising from Whitey's death, as mentioned in her fifth dream. It is the second dream or thought, only through which Kang allows the reader to read the mind of the protagonist. Yeong-hye remembers the day before she had the dream. She says that she remembers the face reflected in the "*pool of blood in the barn*" (19). Her thoughts are irregular, disorganized, and unstable just like her. She has no idea what is happening to her and believes that she cannot be saved as she says in her last thought: "*Nobody can help me. Nobody can save me. Nobody can make me breathe"* (49). Maybe it is this realization that compels her to find an alternate way to redeem herself. As this is a postmodernist novel, the reader may inevitably find traces of modernist disillusionment but, as Peter Barry says in the *Beginning Theory,* the

experience of fragmentation is not nostalgic and angst-ridden. For the postmodernist, fragmentation is an exhilarating, liberating phenomenon, symptomatic of our escape from the claustrophobic embrace of fixed systems of belief.

In her third dream, she describes "*dreams of murder*". She is not certain of her identity: "*murderer or murdered…*", who is she? She sees the "*violent acts perpetrated by night".* Eventually, the mask comes off and she sees who the victim is (28). Her next dream is a continuation of this revelation. She is having the dreams of her killing animals. She is the murderer. Her face was reflected in the pool of blood. Her mouth is filled with saliva in the butcher's shop. "*Animal eyes gleaming wild, presence of blood, unearthed skull, again those eyes. Rising up from the pit of my stomach",* the 'murdered' haunts the butcher. The reason for her 'no-bra look' also unfolds here. She realizes that "*hand, foot, tongue, gaze*", are all weapons from which nothing is safe but not her breasts. It is harmless (32-33). Later, in her sixth and last monologue, after she tries to kill herself and is hospitalized, Yeong-hye says that a lump is lodged upon her chest. It is because of meat: "*I ate too much meat. The lives of the animals I ate have all lodged there*" (49). Even though she stopped wearing a bra, it still hurts. The lump remains.

The hypocrisy of humans is the main reason that motivated Han Kang to write *The Vegetarian*. As Kang puts it in an interview published on Lit Hub, "Yeong-hye refuses meat to reject human brutality from herself" (qtd. in Singer 3). As the world itself is a large slaughterhouse, nobody can wash the stains off their hands. Yeong-hye too knows this, and she is well aware of the tales that we tell ourselves in order to exist. That is why she tries so much to wash it off. Hayley Singer calls this, 'the art of carnism'. She believes that the political act of vegan is refusal, whereas it is denial for the carnist (5). They deny the truth and make themselves comfortable. The meat culture and hierarchical invisible belief system condition them to eat certain animals and make it look completely ethical. An attempt to unveil the horror of humanity is portrayed in the novel, by discussing the dilemma or 'animal melancholia' of the protagonist. And this dilemma questions the existence of humanity. The protagonist urges for a guilt-ridden existence, and she is caught up in a web of conformities. The novel does not, really, talk about being a vegetarian but confronts the social conformities which want people to behave in certain ways.

"One could not stand and watch [the slaughtering] very long without becoming philosophical, without beginning to deal in symbols and similes, and to hear the hog-squeal of the universe."

—Upton Sinclair, *The Jungle.*

Fantasy as a Liberating Phenomenon

The Vegetarian by Han Kang is a novel that will leave the reader with more questions than answers. It is a follow-up to her short story, titled "The Fruit of My Woman". It is the

story of a woman who, actually, physically becomes a plant, and her husband puts her in a flower pot, waters her and takes care of her. However, Kang alters the story a little bit and makes it a novel (*The Vegetarian)* in which the protagonist tries to escape humanity by metamorphosing into a plant. Yeong-hye is the subject of *The Vegetarian*, but not its protagonist or even quite its main character. She deliberately does not have a voice in the novel. Her voice is so rarely heard, her speech so rarely present, it would be more accurate to call her the object of the book if it were not for the fact that her actions speak louder than words. The novel is divided into three parts, which have different narrators but not the protagonist. The readers are compelled to understand Yeong-hye from the perception of her husband, brother-in-law, and her sister. To our dismay, neither the characters nor the readers are able to understand her. At this point, Yeong-hye is just another woman, who is criticized by society for not meeting their expectations – which they call madness. Thus, this transgressive literature gives voice to a character who feels confined by the norms and expectations of society and breaks free of these confines in unusual ways. These 'unusual ways' lead to her imprisonment in the mental hospital, in the end.

In *The Vegetarian*, Han Kang succeeds in exposing the stereotypical portrayal of women as weak, passive, obedient, caring, good, and lacking. in the twenty-first century. A simple and regular woman, who is “unremarkable in every way” according to her husband, faces the opposition of her family when she decides to turn vegan (Kang 3). Disturbed by a dream about human cruelty, and the butchering of animals, she sees vegetarianism as a way not to harm others. Thus, she yearns for a 'plant-like' existence. Her inability to provide an efficient reason devastates her family which is rooted in Korean etiquette and manners. She gives up meat and, later, stops eating at all, in her journey of metamorphosing into a plant and thereby achieving 'human innocence'.

While many have concentrated on a reading of the novel as a postmodern outcry against societal conformities, few have argued that the *anorexia nervosa* of Yeong-hye is a protest against the patriarchal expectations of the female body and its physical consequences. Sometimes this text mingles with existential crisis at an ontological level. Yeong-hye is portrayed as a stereotypical, “run-off-the-mill” woman in the novel. For her husband also she is nothing but a piece that puts together his “carefully ordered existence”. She makes his life comfortable and easy by cooking for him and quenching his sexual appetite. And that is all he wants. But everything changes after her dream: that dream marks the end of her domestic tasks routine. “Not once did my wife bother to peer out from the kitchen in the time it took me to get ready, slinging my tie around my neck like a scarf, pulling on my socks, and getting my notebook and wallet together. In the five years we'd been married, this was the first time I'd had to go to work without her handing me my things and seeing me off” (11). For five years, Yeong-hye was not only in charge of the household but also in charge of assisting Mr. Cheong. Not only she puts a halt to her domestic chores, she also stopped having sex with her husband, which also resulted in marital rape. Her decision not to wear a bra also makes him think that she is 'abnormal'. The sudden change in his wife attacked Cheong like a blow out of nowhere. His senses

could not accept the reality that the woman who had been his shadow for five years was now finding her stand, doing as she pleased and gaining her autonomy. In fact, it was a confrontation to his senses, which was constructed to define women not in herself but to 'him'. Simone de Beauvoir writes:

> Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being…she is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other. (8)

The second part of the novel titled 'Mongolian Mark' is told from the point of view of the brother-in-law of Yeong-hye. His obsession with the Mongolian mark unfolds his veiled mentality of viewing women merely as erotic objects. The sketch of his sister-in-law gives him an erection. He calls it an "intense sexual desire" which was focused on a clear "object" (60). Just like Yeong-hye becomes the 'object' of the novel, the unnamed brother-in-law also views her as an object: an object for pleasure. According to *The Sexual Politics of Meat* women and animals share similar experiences in the process of commodification of their bodies. Such as pornography and prostitution objectify and commodify a woman's body, so too does meat eating objectify and commodify the body of an animal (Adams, 2019). Here, we can see how women and animals become interchangeable. As the novel progresses, readers can find a strange fascination Yeong-hye has towards flowers. This leads to her brother-in-law painting flowers around her body. He too uses her; as In-hye realizes, her poor sister may not have been 'in her mind' (137). Anyway, he quenches his thirst by having sex with her. Unlike her husband, Yeong-hye did not show resistance here.

In a way, Yeong-hye is escaping from reality, and her fantastic wish offers her a new world, where she can be innocent and guilt-ridden. The solution to her dilemma is becoming a plant, which can harm no one else. By applying eco-feminist theory, this novel could be seen as supporting the argument that women and nature have a shared experience. As a class that is subjugated by the norms of patriarchy, women can easily be related to nature, the 'mother earth', which is exploited by man. Yeong-hye tries to isolate herself from the 'human acts' by attaining the tranquility of nature. She no longer believes that she is an animal. Here, both Yeong-hye and nature, do not kneel, but out lash against society in their own ways. They question taboos, and underlying male domination in the 21st century. Yeong-hye finally found freedom unlike many who interpret it as a tragic story. The victory lies behind her failure. Her failure to meet the expectations of the society made her break free of the shackles. Having finally connected to nature, she is portrayed as a happy creature after a long time. Like Susan Griffin famously said, man sets himself apart from woman and nature. He is not the one who hears the cries of nature. It is the woman. She shares the pain of nature. She is more connected to nature.

Conclusion

Unlike other women who bear it all, Yeong-hye makes her choices and refuses to do what she does not like. She shows two refusals – not to wear a bra and not to eat. Her refusal to eat meat is not viewed as a personal dietary choice but it turns out as a catastrophe. As a country which has no food taboos, the highly asserted meat culture of Korea becomes a pitfall for Yeong-hye. Meat has a prominent position in the food culture of Korean society. Hence it is more than a danger to not eat it. Thus vegetarians can be seen as disturbing the cultural hegemony of the community. This not only leads to exclusion but is also associated with madness. The same is the case with Yeong-hye. Although she knows that she will be labelled as a madwoman unless she chooses veganism because of religion or health issues, Yeong-hye takes the chance and dares to break free of the social constraints. The madwoman rebelling against the patriarchy, referenced in *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, could be no different than Yeong-hye, the Korean wife who rebels against meat culture and patriarchy. She shackles the chains which held her, and thereby, is included in the 'Ophelia troop'. The judges of the society awarded her the 'Ophelia Syndrome' tag. Her melancholy became unbearable for the prejudiced society. She became a 'misfit' and she too could not 'fit in' as Kamala Das famously says in her poem "An Introduction".

In his seminal work "Madness and Civilization," Foucault explored the historical treatment of madness. He traced the evolution of societal attitudes toward madness from the Renaissance to the modern era. He argued that societies construct discourses of normalcy that define and regulate acceptable behavior. These discourses are not neutral but are shaped by power relations. In the context of mental health, what is deemed "normal" or "abnormal" is socially constructed and reflects the values and norms of a particular time and culture. Thus the discourses of normalcy can be seen broken by the protagonist by expressing her 'uncanny' 'marvelous' wish, as Tzvetan Todorov explains in his *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1970). In the end, her fantasy prevails as in the Fantastic (le fantastique), the narrative ends without a clear resolution, leaving the ambiguity intact. The novel is so open-ended that the readers are left in an oblivion as it is also not sure what exactly happens to the protagonist.

"Lignes de fuite," or "Lines of Flight," is a concept introduced by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in their collaborative works, particularly in "A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia." This concept is fundamental to their philosophical framework, emphasizing the dynamic and transformative nature of existence. Lines of Flight represent paths or trajectories that deviate from established structures, norms, and constraints. These lines signify a movement away from the fixed and the known, challenging the rigidity of established systems, whether they be social, cultural, or philosophical. It is this concept of flight that is evident in *The Vegetarian.* Like James Joyce's Ulysses, the theme of flight becomes a recurring phenomenon in the novel. This flight from the prison we call the world ends in death, although the protagonist is unaware

of it. Also, this novel asks the most existential and maddest of all questions, “Why should we live?” Even Though, Yeong-hye concentrates more on “how can we live?” and forges her path. Unlike other 'woman writings', Han Kang raises her voice against the patriarchal system even without putting the voice of the female protagonist in the narrative. Yet, this novel turns entirely out to be a feminist outcry for 'women and nature'. Hence, this novel could be seen as a postmodern allegory for women's fight for power and freedom, not as a death drive to escape humanity but to regenerate as an 'ideal human' (if such a thing is possible).

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AnoodhVengattu Parambil

Psychoanalysis of Space : The Identity Formation of Sachi in Hakuri's *One Room of Happiness*

Abstract

Through the publication of Virginia Woolf's A Room of One's Own (1929) the idea of rooms being individual spaces, prominent and necessary for the development of one's character came into the mainstream media. A space of one's own is a central factor in building up a character, fears, love, spirituality and escape. Throughout literature the appearance of rooms as the central idea was underrated.

One Room for Happiness(2022) revolves around a bullied fourteen-year-old girl who runs away from her abusive parents and finds solace in the house of her stalker who stops her from her attempted suicide. The man, who is masked and unveiled till the end, names her Sachi. Here she is finding happiness and adored by the man whose walls are adorned by her photos that he had secretly taken.

In that Studio room apartment 'Sachi' is developing a new identity. She is becoming 'happy' and 'safe'. When she learns that the police have been searching for her she decides to run away with 'Mister' and marry him. The individualistic experiences with a place, a home or the smaller unit of a room are the frontiers of human experience. Human experiences are associated with the memory of warmth or fear, safety or anxiety, love or hate, and these memories arise from the base structure of a room. This paper plans to evaluate this structuring of human experiences through the depiction of rooms as the central theme.

Keywords: Id, ego, superego, heterotopia, utopia, daydream, denial, desire, manga, ijime.

Japanese schools hold a prestigious reputation worldwide, known for their rigorous academics and disciplined students. However, beneath this veneer of academic excellence lies a persistent shadow- bullying. *Ijime*, as it is called in Japan, is a type of bullying that can be persistent, severe and long-lasting. Adding to this is the cultural stigma associated with speaking up. The emphasis on maintaining social harmony and not causing trouble discourages victims and witnesses from reporting *ijime*—shame and fear of further ostracization silence many, leading to unreported cases.

This paper aims to study the formation of 'ego' in enclosed spaces based on the selected text *One Room for Happiness* (2016-22) by Hakuri. Personality according to Freud is encompassed of the id, ego and superego. While the id is the pleasure principle of

Anoodh Vengattu Parambil is a Postgraduate Student, Vimala College, University of Calicut

one's personality, the ego is the rational base. The id is primitive and is present in one from birth. The superego holds all the 'normals' of a society. These 'normals' include the behaviours that are forbidden and the behaviours that are expected. It is the ego that acts as a mediator between the id and the superego. The three- id, ego and superego- collide to agree with each other. Human experiences are central to the healthy formation of identity and personality. These experiences start in enclosed spaces such as rooms and homes.

Michel Foucault has described the existence of paradoxical spaces through his concept of heterotopia. This concept was published in his article "Des espaces auteurs- Of Other Spaces"(1967). Heterotopias are 'other' spaces which have more meaning to them than what meets the eye. He takes the example of mirrors to describe utopia and heterotopia. A mirror is a utopia because it produces a perfect image of the real in a created unreality, a placeless place. Foucault explains that when an object is placed in front of a mirror, he sees himself in the reflection. This reflection of himself is in the unreal space, on the consideration that the object in front is the real space. The mirror, thus, becomes a heterotopia as it showcases the real and the unreal at the same time. The two main functions of heterotopia are the creation of illusion and compensation, that is it creates a space of illusion that exposes every real space and also creates a real space which is the space of the other.

Gaston Bachelard in his 1958 book *The Poetics of Space* applies phenomenology to describe living spaces on their lived experiences. There is a particular focus on the emotions that are created in the people towardsthe buildings and structures from the past. He takes the common imagery of the house, cellars to the garrets, huts, drawers, nests, shells and even corners to explain his proposition. He insists on the need for a house for the people to dream and imagine, like Woolf. Bachelard places enclosed spaces at the centre for human creativity and experience which is then drenched in human emotions. This emotion forms the longing and nostalgia that humans later connect with.Foucault spoke of the external spaces that contradict each other within the space itself, like the museums, which bring the elements of the past into the present. Each element is brought from different time stamps or epochs to the present, contradicting the spatial theory of time. The theory has been now in discourse amongst the postmodernists who have studied the emergence of identity and culture.

Psychoanalytic theories pioneered the magnanimous connection between the body and mind. It was influential in understanding the workings of the human mind. Though psychoanalysis is often attributed to Freud, several psychoanalysts and neurologists have a formative role and influence on Freud and his theories. In *The Ego and The Id* (1923), Freud distinctively divides the psyche into its tripartite interacting components- the id, ego and superego.

Human experiences are what stand central to the development of all three layers of the human psyche. There is no single correct way of analysing being a human. The human

experience is a multifaceted umbrella term which includes the individual, social and existential dimensions. People tend to induce meaning and purpose out of their survival, searching for a connection with something greater than simply existing. In this search, they tend to themselves, growing and changing to be the ideal self that has been envisioned by the superego. This growth is shaped by emotions, thoughts, perceptions, perspectives and above all interactions with the outer reality. This is why the outer reality is formative in the development of one's identity.

The French philosopher Gaston Bachelard takes a unique approach to understanding human experiences through the lens of space in his book *The Poetics of Space* (1958). He argues that the everlasting impressions of homes, particularly those from childhood have become the building blocks of emotions, memories, and even imagination. Bachelard focuses on archetypal images of space, exploring their emotional and symbolic meanings. He takes the central imagery of the house, which is a place of refuge, intimacy, security and protection from the world.

According to Bachelard the place of day-dreaming will later turn into the day-dreams that one constructs for an escape from reality. Freud in his essay "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" (1908), has broken down daydreams as a mechanism of escape and wish fulfilment. He also explores day-dreams as coping mechanisms, like denial and repression. Through day-dreaming, reality is being distorted to live in the idealized life. Thereby satisfying the desires of the id, and the perfectionism of the superego.

Enclosed spaces can become microcosms of self, reflecting and reinforcing personal values and identities. Bachelard suggests that enclosed spaces like attics, corners, and rooms provide a sense of security and privacy which can be conducive to daydreaming, introspection, and the development of imagination. These spaces, due to their privacy can provide a refuge for self-introspection and discovery. Enclosed spaces create a sense of belonging, this belongingness can be analyzed in the way these spaces are decorated and arranged. This personalization reveals a lot about the individual preferences, values and cultural heritage. In short, these spaces and all their contents contribute to the story of self; both recognized by the self and told to others.

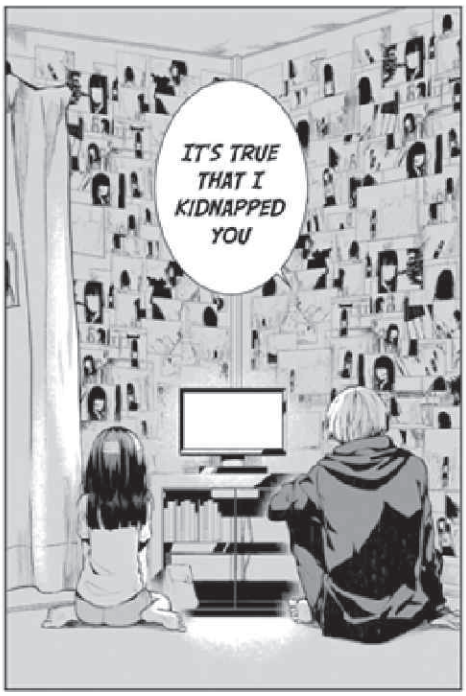
It is not just the self that interacts with the outer world but also the spaces that interact with the self. The space that one comes from holds all the societal and cultural values and their reflections. They become spaces of identification for the outer world. The inner space's influence is from early childhood thereby becoming formative in a child's life. A safe and sound home will help in the proper development of the child, whereas an unsafe one will have negative influences on them. Bachelard focused on the internal archetypes of space, it was Michael Foucault who explored the outer realms that mould identity.

In the work "Of Other Spaces", he rejects the structuralist tendency to do away with history and context in forming and transforming structures of power and social dynamics.

Foucault, on the other hand, focuses on the history of power and the discourse that it creates. He focuses on spatial arrangements, and their contributions to surveillance, discipline, and the marginalization of certain groups.

The underlying power dynamics of space are explored through the idea of heterotopias. Power is never a monolithic entity but operates in diverse, often subtle ways within various contexts. Heterotopias bring in the juxtaposition of two real spaces or two elements that are normally separate in a domain, when two elements are brought together there is always a power struggle. This friction will cause one to rise above the other, therefore othering the other. Heterotopias can be real like prisons, cemeteries, and gardens, or they can be imagined places, like utopias and dystopias. They, thus, are the other spaces in our society which operate under different rules and meanings than the typical spaces that we inhabit.

The manga begins with a television news piece on the kidnapping of a fourteen-year-old. As the panels begin, we are unable to locate the space that the fourteen-year-old and her captor are in. Like the invisible life she had been living up until then, the photo displayed on the television screen has no physical features. Here the girl is unidentifiable, other than a similar haircut. The background in the next panels is empty, only when her captor resonates with the news channel and agrees to her kidnapping does the mangaka provide a background.



The room, which is then revealed, is plastered with her pictures on the wall, all hidden camera photographs. Sachi very soon romanticizes these pictures. She finds comfort in knowing that someone has been looking for her and admiring her to take her photos and paste them on their wall. She does not feel disgusted or anything abnormal in his perverted behaviour. But rather she chooses to create a narrative for herself that he is simply so madly in love with her to go to such an extent. When Haru questions her blind trust, she responds by saying, "You've got pictures of me all over the walls. If you love me that much you wouldn't do anything to hurt me." (*One Room of Happiness*). Her need for belonging runs so deep that she readily creates a narrative in her head and starts believing it to the fullest.

The room runs as a paradox of confinement and freedom. Putting the photos on the wall is a way to assert dominance. The perimeters of the house/room and the narrative of the inside and the outside world are controlled by Haru. As Sachi is forbidden from going out, she cannot know about the situation of the outside world. With her images displayed like a trophy, Sachi becomes a possession reducing her to a two-dimensional figure and dehumanizing her further. Haru's voyeuristic tendencies extend to not just far observation of Sachi's life but the permanent picture frames that reinforce his power to relive the moments and the experiences he had.

The most significant aspect of the room is the door. It represents Haru's control over Sachi's life. She is a prisoner, unable to leave or make her own choices. The door is a constant reminder of her captivity and the power imbalance between her and her captor. The locked door is also a symbol of potential escape. The door unlike all other cases of captivity was never locked in the first place. When Haru picks Sachi from the lake, he tells her, "When you get to my place, you're going to do whatever you like. I'll leave the door unlocked from the outside for you. You can leave whenever you want." (*One Room of Happiness*). Thus, there is a possibility of freedom. But Sachi is so engrossed in the narrative of her captor turned saviour that she does not even try to escape from the room at the times of his absence. However, she does sit patiently waiting for his return, like a newly wedded bride awaiting her husband.

The room as a whole is a metaphor for trauma, it transcends physical limitations and becomes a safe place which is built upon illusion, manipulation and control. The room here, is a heterotopia of illusion, serving both to confine Sachi and expose the limitations of the normal world she has escaped. On the surface, the room offers Sachi an illusion of safety and happiness. Having endured relentless bullying and abuse at school and home, the outside world becomes a source of fear and uncertainty. The room's illusory safety also serves to expose the flaws of the normal world Sachi has escaped. Her confinement is a reflection of the societal pressures that contributed to her vulnerability and the bullying that she has faced exposes the failures of societal structures that are meant to protect children.

According to Freud, the ego acts as the mediator between the id and the superego. When faced with situations that threaten to overwhelm the ego with anxiety, it employs a defense mechanism- unconscious strategies to create a sense of safety. The creation of illusionary safety by Sachi also takes its birth through this denial. Her world before the room is depicted as a source of immense anxiety. She endures relentless bullying at school and abuse at home. These experiences create a constant state of fear and insecurity, threatening to overwhelm her ego's ability to cope.

Sachi's room in her parental home is shown to the readers when Detective Matsubase arrives there for investigation. The room is rather small for the only daughter of a fairly well-off family. It has a simple corner desk, a single bed, a dresser, double windows and a cloth stand. There were scratch marks on the flooring and the furniture which her mother dismisses as scratches from moving the furniture around. However, the detective is quite clever and says, " …the marks are rather complex and irregular, too. Some of them seem like scratches and some are very deep. But it didn't come from any furniture in this room. It was metal and something hard" (*One Room of Happiness*). It was from this that Detective Matsubase picks onto the fact that she was abusing her daughter.

Denial extends to Sachi's memories. The lack of external stimuli in the room allows her to dwell on selective memories, particularly those that paint a less traumatic picture of her past. The only triggering stimuli in that small room are the photographs of her past, which she has already concluded as his undying love for her. This way she creates a happy place out of the photos that reflect her past. She thus stands in awe looking at the photographs. Every time she recalls her traumatic experiences she does so with a smile on her face, just as if she is not able to understand the depth of the experiences. By refusing to acknowledge both her past and the present, Sachi had resorted to living in the bubble that she had created for her and Haru.

Haru, here is standing between the unnamed child of fourteen who is warming up to him and the passive, lost and abused faces plastered on the wall. He thus becomes the creator of her new identity, the one person in the story who has the power to throw away her past and create a new girl. And so, he does, he names her Sachi. He explains his choice for naming her as, "If you write it with the character for "happiness" then…Sachi. Because I want you to be happy" (*One Room of Happiness*). Here her identity is being re-written. She is overwhelmed with happiness and hugs her captor saying, "It's wonderful… from now on, I'll use the name Sachi. You call me that too uni-chan!" (*One Room of Happiness*) She is readily accepting her newly made identity.

Feelings that had been suppressed by her ego through many layers of defense mechanisms break through the experiences she has had with Haru. When they flee the room fearing being caught by Detective Matsubase, Sachi breaks down seeing someone who looks similar to her mother. There she gets hallucinations of her mother scolding her and belittling her, something that has never happened before. The defence mechanism put up by her ego had fallen by then and she was facing her past traumas.

The room they move into from there has a French window that overlooks the sea. Unlike their room back in Tokyo, this one has both of them in their real self. They aren't faking any sweet moments or unreal happiness; they know the situation they are in and also that they will not be safe there for long. The external stimuli which were all masked and covered by her illusionary happiness are torn down here. And thus, she gets hallucinations and breakdowns every time she looks at her old photographs and all the little things that remind her of her past.

When her denial melts into acceptance of everything that has happened, she feels her emotions of the past all at once. It gets too much for her to handle and she is starting to fall apart mentally. To reassure herself of her newly gained identity and the inability to return to her past life, she starts cutting her hair as a gesture of adopting a new physical identity.

Sachi, with her newly found id and developing ego is like that of a child. She does not comprehend her emotions and finds it difficult to understand the normal way of life. So, instead of acknowledging her lack of comprehension, she is looking for reasonings. She reasons her emotions based on her past experiences, and this gives rise to a highly disordered and narcissistic self. The experiences that she has within this new room are very similar to its location. The room is unidentified as to where it is other than the panel showing somewhere close to the sea. Here in this unidentified place, she also has not put an identity label on herself. Just like she is lost and confined within the same place, her developing mind too is wandering within the confines of her experiences but somewhere, she does realize that she is growing more and more attached to Haru than she claims to be.

Sachi's narcissistic tendencies tone down once she realizes that life might not necessarily go her way and that is okay too. She is accepting the today that she has with

Haru and living in the present with little worry about the future. At this point, her superego starts to function. The fear of losing happiness is gone and is replaced with eros- the drive for life. Her confidence comes from knowing that there will always be people around her who will care for her and keep her safe. This safety and security, which she had lacked at her mother's home, she is finding in a rented apartment in the middle of nowhere. The Eros is bringing out the creativity that she had suppressed, the freedom from fear of losing helps her talk with them freely and thus, she appears more cheerful. That is what having a place to belong to does in the development of one's character.

Years later when SachiMatsubase, hold her photography exhibition. It is filled with stills of the places that she has been to. The photographs are mostly scenic pictures, the only difference in this comes when the special exhibit is talked about. It is a space that has been decorated like the apartment in Tokyo which was the first refuge that Sachi and Haru had. This space is recreated exactly how the apartment was – a corner television, centre table and windows with curtains. The other similarity is that the walls are plastered with photographs, but this time of people from her travels, of people with their loved ones – it could be family, a lover, a friend or anyone else. The people were not chosen at random but were people who showed her kindness. She labels this exhibit as one room of happiness.

Here she completes the heterotopia of illusion. The construction of happiness and the formation of identity in Sachi took place in that studio apartment in Tokyo. Gaston Bachelard in his *Poetics of Space* writes, "And after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are. We live in fixations, fixations of happiness. We comfort ourselves by reliving memories of protection" (5). Sachi is returning to her memories, is reliving the happiness and comfort she felt with Haru by recreating the first room that they had shared in Tokyo. As Bachelard writes in her new place of no return to the past, she is creating that space to return to her memory. The power and elasticity that a space has in the memory that can move depths inside one's self is depicted through her artwork.

Space is never empty, a space or place that a person inhabits is always filled to the brim with experiences and emotions. These experiences are the grounding steps for personality development. The development that Sachi did not get at her parents' place, she receives from Haru and later from Matsubase and Yashiro. The reason for her stunned development at her parents' place is because of the relentless verbal and physical abuse. When her mother screams at her and tells her that she is stupid, Sachi believes her mother. She internalizes herself that she is stupid and her ego, to not succumb, puts up denial as a defense mechanism. And like a vessel sealed tight and put under pressure, when the load becomes too much for her to handle, she leaves home to suicide, where Haru finds her and takes her in.

The room that both of them share from then on becomes pivotal in providing her with warmth, care and a free space for development. There she sheds her old identity and adopts the new her- Sachi. Sachi slowly starts recognizing warmth and care, she understands what has been missing in her life. More than everything, she finds safety with Haru, there she does not have to worry if she will be hit for making mistakes, food is served on a plate and she gets to choose if she wants to stay or leave. Haru creates a safe haven for her which she sis not have while staying at her home.

The spaces that we live in, which sketch the background of our life and hold all the ups and downs are thus pivotal in shaping one's personality. In many ways, when Sachi sees the walls which are plastered with her photos she might have found it as fodder to her ego. The obsession that someone else has over her, makes her feel elevated to the ranks of being love-able, which she believed was impossible till then. When she looks at the wall though she is initially creeped out she is not disgusted by Haru's actions rather she terms it as love. In a sense, maybe she wanted to make herself believe that what he did was out of love and not pervertedness.

In that room, all Sachi sees and hears is about her, the news channels go on for hours talking about the poor missing fourteen-year-old, with her mother's frequent appearances and of course, the photographs on the wall, all of which adds fuel to her ego making her self-esteem grow. She gains self-confidence from the world suddenly turning their attention to her. Attention in a positive manner is something that she had missed all those years during her development as a person. Like child development, when attention falls on Sachi, it helps fuel her id to show up and slowly she recognizes her cravings and needs.

Mastering physical spaces builds confidence, while feeling comfortable in social spaces fosters a sense of belonging and self-worth, both of which happens in Sachi outside her parental home. Navigating different physical and metaphorical spaces teaches to adapt, solve problems and make decisions; Sachi's growth and development certainly take acceleration through the different experiences and rooms that she shared with Haru and later with Matsubase and Yashiro.

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Ashna K. Asok

Author as the Critical Insider : Reading the Self Reflexivity of Dalit Identity in P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*

Abstract

P. Sivakami's novel The Grip of Change is a pioneering work that places itself on the line of contradiction between the particularity of the Dalit experience and the universality of suffering and hope. The Grip of Change is the english translation of Sivakami's Tamil Novel Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum, which was the first Dalit novel written by a woman. Sivakami's engagements with the concerns of contemporary Dalit Movement, Dalit subjectivity and caste oppression, is unmistakably portrayed through the eyes of aninsider while simultaneously placing the plot within the larger context of caste discrimination and Dalit suffering. The novel places on the forefront, the significance of a 'critical consciousness' among Dalits to transform from vulnerable objects of oppression to subjects of their fates.This paper intends to analyse the authors role as acritical insider in closely observing, analyzing and critiquing both the internal fissures of the Dalit movement as well as the external oppression of castehierarchies.The paper also intends to explore how the novel moves beyondthesimplistic dichotomy of the oppressed, suffering Dalit and the oppressing, exploitative upper-caste lords, to problematise the nexus of power and oppression to showthat Dalits too can be oppressors.

Keywords: Dalit Literature, Authorship, Critical insider, Caste

> 'Dalit literature is poised between a regionalism that revels in local dialect and the nontransferable specificity of caste conditioning, on the one hand, and a broad universalism that invokes a certain global paradigm of protest (both politically and culturally), on the other… Dalit literature must thus confront the contradiction between Dalit particularity, specificity, and singularity, and Dalit humanism that opens its ranks to many others'. (Gajarwala, 19)

P Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* and its sequel *Author's Notes* place themselves, as Toral Jatin Gajarwala suggests on the lines of contradiction between the particularity of experience and universality of suffering and hope. *The Grip of Change* is the translation of Sivakami's Tamil Novel *Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum*, which was the first dalit novel written by a woman. This paper intends to analyse the authors role as a critical insider in both these novels.Sivakami's engagements with the concerns of contemporary Dalit Movement, Dalit subjectivity and caste oppression, is unmistakably portrayed through

Ashna K. Asok is Assistant Professor, Christ College (Autonomous), Irinjalakuda

the eyes of an insider in the novels, closely observing, analyzing and critiquing, without falling for the inherent bias of an insider. In *The Grip of Change*, it is the protagonist Gowri who espouses the role of the 'critical insider' exposing the fissures of the Dalit Movement and the hypocrisy of Dalit patriarchy while also exposing Dalit suggering. In *Author's Notes,* the author herself embarks on such a mission, this time bringing the internal complexities of Dalit literature to the forefront. Sivakami's intention is not to portray the simplistic dichotomy of the oppressed, suffering dalit and the oppressing, exploitative upper-caste lords, but to problematise the nexus of power and oppression to show that dalits too can be oppressors.In *Author's Notes,* Sivakami writes

> It wasn't simply that the upper castes exploit the lower castes. A lower caste leader might exploit his own people. It is not only upper caste men who prey upon lower caste women. Men like Kathamuthu are perfectly capable of taking advantage of vulnerable women. The overall picture presented by the novel is that rich or poor, upper caste or lower caste, the seeds of corruption exists at all levels.(149)

Kathamuthu, the ambitious, manipulative and quick-witted local Dalit- leader is the living effigy of the exploitative nature of Dalit leadership and is also inspired by the novelists own father. Fictional Kathamuthu is a tyrannous Dalit patriarch, whose polygamous marriages, parasitic disposition, and exploitative manipulation of his own community are scrutinized and treated with contempt by the author. Though he helps Thangam to secure a monetary compensation for the physical assault she was subjected to, he himself spends that money through well maneuvered tactics. He later rapes Thangam, who was in an intoxicated state, thus blurring the distinctions between himself and Paranjothi Udayar, the upper caste landlord who raped her too. The only difference is that while Paranjothi refused to publicly accept his sexual liaison with Thangam out of caste pride, Kathamuthu openly took her as his third wife.

Kancha Ilaiah in his book *Why I am Not a Hindu:A Sudra Critique of Hindutva Philosophy, Culture and Political Economy,* proposes the concept of 'Dalitization'as a proposal to look inwards in to the dalit-communities as sources worthy of imitation. The concept is an obvious counter-ideology to M.N Srinivas's idea of 'sanskritization'. Dalitization, Ilaiah writes, "requires that the whole of Indian society learn from the dalitwaadas…It requires that we attend to life in these waadas; that we appreciate what is positive, what is humane, and what can be extended from Dalitwaadas to the whole society" (129). This involves an assumption and argument that life is the Dalitwaadas is more egalitarian and democratic, where the "individual is subsumed in to the collective" and where patriarchy is "considerably more democratic" (20). Sivakami's portrayal of the Parayar community in *The Grip of Change* is certainly an open challenge to Ilaiah's egalitarian depiction of the Dalitwaada. The Paraya *cheri* is an exploitative space where men like Kathamuthu takes advantage of less powerful dalits, like his own brother

Kalimuthu.It is a space wherein the 'collectivity' that Ilaiah refers with pride does not come into play as they silently witness the violent assault of Thangam within her own *cheri.* It is also a space where women like Thangam or Kanagavalli ,lack the voice or agency to protest alone against exploiters like Paranjothy Udayar or Kathamuthu himself. Kathamuthu's tyrannous nature against the women in his house and the social ostracization of Thangam after her husband's death are evidently comparable to patriarchal structures in upper-caste communities Such instances construct an argument against the 'democratic' forms of patriarchy that Ilaih argues for. Hence, the act of looking inwards in to the Dalit community works differently for Sivakami and Ilaiah. While Ilaiah vouches for an egalitarian vision worthy of imitation, Sivakami exposes the inconsistencies and skewed power relations within the community itself, thus suggesting that the idea of Dalitization in a universal sense, is not without faults.

The Grip of Change traces the local realities of the Dalit movement's evolutionin Tamil-Nadu through different stages. The movement's progression from centralization of authority and agency in the hands of select fewto its ideological flirtations with Marxism which eventually lead its penchant for democratic ideals , is traced immaculately by the novel. In Kathamuthu, we see a corrupt, manipulative leader, who unflinchingly takes immoral stances at critical junctures. As Meena Kandasami points out, " by speaking of his tyrannical overbearingness, corruption and polygamy, Sivakami has reflected the universal trend that powerful men usually lead pathetic personal lives." (qtd in Sivakami, 194). As a dalit leader, the blemish upon his intents is exposed as he manipulates an abused Thangam's testimony at the police station, which eventually sparks a caste riot in Athur. Even though his shrewd moves won for Thangam, a hefty monetary compensation(which Kathamuthu eventually claims for himself,) it came at the high cost of unnecessary violence and suffering for the Parayar community. Chandran, Kathamuthu's niece, stands as a befitting foil to Kathamuthu's style of leadership. Deceit, guile and despotism characterized Kathamuthu's accession to power. He did help people, not out of humanitarian concern, but with an eye for his own share in the 'spoils of war'. However, Chandran rose to the ranks of popularity with his honest and sincere nature and a genuine concern for the well-being of his people. Sivakami writes"older men continue to bow to Kathamuthu, nodding at his every word. Gratitude defined any interaction with Kathamuthu.Young men questioned Chandran closely. Their relationship with Chandran was democratic. They interacted as equals" (112). Chandran's ascent to popularity, was hence democratic. Apart from the obvious difference in their styles of leadership, the most crucial aspect that sets apart Chandran and his young collegues from Kathamuthu and the ones who bow to him, is the presence of a 'critical consciousness'. The terms 'critical consciousness' and 'conscientization' , was coined by Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire in his 1970 work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* in which he explains critical consciousness to be the awareness and in-depth understanding of the world, and one's own position and oppressed state within it . Conscientization on the other hand is the

process of achieving critical consciousness "by means of which, people through a true praxis leave behind the status of objects to assume the role of historical subjects."(Friere, 160). Chandran and his colleagues from Sowbhagyalakshmi Rice Mill and Ginning Factory Workers Union, possesses the 'critical consciousness' to collectively assess their oppressed position in terms of caste and class. They critically questions and analyse the situation before accepting someone's leadership and caters to aspirations for their future. "They sometimes thought about their children's future and desired the possibility of a decent life for them. But their wages did not match their desires. Their ambitions for their children remain stunted" (Sivakami, 104). It is this awareness that brought them together, blurring the lines of caste differences among them. Even when Kathamuthu tries to create a wedge between them using their different caste identitieson the occasion of Chandran's marriage, they remained unperturbed, owing to the realization that in unity lies their strength to bargain for a decent future. Gowri's character too undergoes the process of conscientization and in her case, it is education that aids in this process. In fact, the first novel ends on a heightened note of Gowri's awareness. "Recognition of the life force in nature coursed through Gowri. She stood there, rooted by the thrill of awareness." (Sivakami, 127). It is this idea of critical consciousness complemented by a democratic unity at the Dalit front that Sivakami seeks as an alternative to the deluging fissures within the Dalit movement. Thus, in her role as a critical insider, Sivakami doesn't stop herself at exposing the atrocities of Dalit leadership and Dalit patriarchy, but steers forward to seek solutions, thus proving that her intent is not only to criticize but also to pave the way for reformation. In this context, Meena Kandasamy rightly observes that "Sivakami criticizes the Dalit movement and exposes the cruel face of dalit patriarchy through feminist eyes and yet, clearly veers away from becoming a 'caste traitor' because of her engagement with the search of solutions." (qtd in Sivakami, 195).

Even as she critiques the underlying inconsistencies of the Dalit Movement, Sivakami neatly places such criticism within the larger context of caste oppression and Dalit suffering. The very opening of *The Grip of Change* unveils the brutal physical violence inflicted upon a Dalit woman, Thangam, by upper-caste men, for the alleged 'crime' of sleeping with Paranjothy Udayar, a wealthy and powerful upper caste man. Thangam's predicament foregrounds the universal plight of Dalit women, who are thrice oppressed by virtue of her class, caste and gender. Not only is she raped and sexually exploited by her employer, she is also extremely vulnerable to violence by upper-caste men and exploitation by men of her own community. Sivakami anchors her novel on this very fulcrum of caste violence. Caste prejudices and inequalities emerge in multiple ways throughout the novel, manifesting the subtleties and deep-rootedness of caste in the every-day lived realities our nation. For instance, when Thangam's complaint resulted in a police inquiry, Paranjothy Udayar's words of frustration reveals the intensity of caste-prejudices embedded in upper-caste minds. He says "Ungrateful whore! Even if she was hurt, she was hurt by the hand that adorned gold! A Parachi would have never dreamt of

being touched by a man like me! My touch was a boon granted for penance performed in her earlier births." (Sivakami, 31)

Similarly, while discussing retaliatory tactics to punish the entire Paraya community for Thangam's audacity to file a police complaint against an upper caste man, Ramalinga Reddiar's infuriated rant, summarizes the upper-caste attitudes towards dalits. He says "…we will burn the *cheri* to the ground. If the Parayars cannot serve the upper castes, they might as well die." (Sivakami, 50). Sivakami employs multifarious methods to frame her narrative within the larger context of caste inequalities and violence. Sometimes, it is explicit and emphatic as in the case of violence against Thangam, while at times she employs the carefully crafted subtleties in the narrative to characterize caste as a system of "graded inequalities" as Ambedkar points out. For instance, when one of Kathamuthu's relatives visits the jewellery shop of Naicker, he kept the man standing and dropped the silver piece the man had purchased in to his palms from a distance in order to avoid touching him. Upon Kathamuthu's angry confrontation regarding this matter, Naicker replies, "You know I never pay any attention to caste. I am not a Brahmin preserving the old order, afraid of the wrath of the Gods. All that I am particular about is cleanliness. That's all." (Sivakami, 19). Naicker's reply contains in it ,the implicit meaning that Dalit bodies are perceived to be unclean and filthy by the virtue of being born in to a particular caste. The author here portrays the modern legitimization of the age old practice of Untouchability.

One of the unique ways that the author employs to place the narrative within the context of caste inequalities is to address therelationship between caste and spoken language. While operating within the perceived notion of the refined nature of the upper caste language and the coarseness and rawness of the spoken language of the Dalits, the novelist deals with language as an integral part of identity . However, she also engages in self-criticism as she examines her own language in the novel that seemingly betrays a hidden reverence for the upper castes. The question of language is initially brought up in relation to Kathamuthu whose "picturesque language" was interspersed with "coarseness and …crude phrases that only [he] could get away with" (Sivakami, 18). The very 'unrefined' nature of Kathamuthu's language is further stereotyped by the upper caste Naicker who refers to his spoken language as an outward expression of his lower caste identity. "Poor fellow, he belongs to a lower caste. Can't you tell from his speech?"(18). Thus language is treated as an identity marker of the caste. However Sivakami also points out that in the public sphere, especially within the literary world, such a style of language is not approved of, and is looked down upon, as she reveals in *Authors Notes* about the multiple edits her publishers had done in her novel to remove expletives. The 'dalitness' of dalit literature is rooted not only in its subject matter but also in its effervescent modes of expression, including the language. Hence to censure the language in a dalit narrative would mean the censure of the lived realities of Dalits too. Thus Sivakami familiarizes the

readers to modern forms of caste hegemony expressed through contempt and censure of the coarseness of Dalit language.

Sivakami's stance as a critical insider is the strongest when she discusses the many manifestations of Dalit patriarchy. As the first Tamil novel written by a woman, *The Grip of Change* throws light on the plight of dalit woman, the oppressed amongst the oppressed, 'the thrice marginalized.' The narrative of the novel is anchored upon a single incident involving a nexus of caste and gender violence. Meena Kandasamy rightly points out that the text is 'body-centric' and that "a major defining part of the novel was entirely played out on the dalit woman Thangam's body." (qtd in Sivakami, 194). Thangam's body is violated thrice-by Paranjothy Udayar,his brother-in-laws and then by Kathamuthu-thus acting as a site of vulnerability. Sivakami is quick to observe that a dalit women is desirable only as an object of sexual pleasure by upper caste men.As Arundhati Roy points out, "men of priviledged castes has undisputed rights over the bodies of untouchable women. Love is polluting,rape is pure" (18). Paranjothy Udayar becomes disturbed by Thangam's police complaint only because he is embarrassed to admit in public that he had a sexual affair with a woman of lower caste and not because he is scared of its consequences. The different permutations and intersections of caste and gender is explored in the novel through three inter-caste couples- Kathamuthu and Nagamma, Paranjothy Udayar and Thangam and Lalitha and Elango. Nagamma being an upper-caste woman, is not brought, but 'installed' in Kathamuthu's house. She, unlike Kathamuthu's first wife, is not meek and silent, but dares to react and talk back to Kathamuthu's dripping sarcasms. On the other hand, Thangam's relation with Paranjothy Udayar is based on physical and sexual exploitation as she is a poor dalit woman, vulnerable to exploitation. Subsequently, Lalitha's love affair with Elango, a young man of lower caste, initially faces trouble as she insults his caste identity, but they later reunite after Lalitha questions the rationality and logic behind caste. They represent a modern individuals who are ready to look past the divisions of caste to unite in life. Thus each of these inter-caste relationships are marred by the skewed power relations of caste.

When it comes to women of the novel, it is the character of Gowri that stands apart as a symbol of dalit emancipation and critical consciousness. Gowri's transformation from a school girl who is constantly scared of her father , to a young woman exuding confidence, possessing political awareness and critical consciousness ,follows the aspirational models of dalit feminism. The grown-up Gowri talks and writes about caste issues and lectures her mother and step mother on women's liberation movements and inspires them to stay united against Kathamuthu's tyrannous nature. Gopal Guru in his essay *Dalit Women Talk Differently* argues that "the independent and autonomous organization of dalit women has the potential to counter dalit-patriarchy from within and state sponsored globalization from without" (2548). Guru stresses on the necessity of a united front of the Dalit women to counter the patriarchal norms that relegate them to the status of 'opressed

amongst the oppressed'. Sivakami's feminist perspective argues for the same thing, apart from the necessity of education that would pave way for emancipation. It is Gowri's education that helps her to gain autonomy and self-awareness. Thus,even as characters like Thangam and Kanagavalli suffer multiple layers of oppression, the author gives the reader hope of emancipation though the character of Gowri.

Toral Jatin Gajarwala in her work *Untouchable Fictions* argues that

> In Dalit literature, everything is meta narrative. Born from the self consciousnessof any literature of radical protest, Dalit (untouchable caste) literature, engendered by caste oppression and caste consciousness, occasions a self-reflexivity that works at several levels: language and metaphor, political philosophy, and literary production. But its metanarrativity is unusual in that it is firmly cast in aesthetics of modern realism, derivative and new, individualized and collective.(1).

The reader gets a peak of the self reflexivity of Dalit Literature that Gajarwala talks about, in *Authors Notes*, the sequel to *The Grip of Change.* Written as a work of meta fiction,*Authors Notes* offers the reader a sneak peek into the author's personal life and mental processes that occur behind the process of writing. In the true fashion of a critical insider, Sivakami lets the reader know the inconsistencies and falsities and the personal bias that creep in to a novel that is partly autobiographical. The author reveals that her father, the man who inspired the character of Kathamuthu, was very much different from the fictional Kathamuthu. She admits that "she had achieved a revenge of sorts in her novel. At the end of her novel, she had reduced her father to a counterfeit coin." (145) Thus the author reveals the fissures between lived experience and fictional reality. "Nothing in the novel was untrue, but the novel was false" (156), says Sivakami. Similarly, Sivakami as a dalit author critiques the enterprise of Dalit Literature, for not being what it seems to be. She recalls multiple situations when she was asked to change her original piece of writing for the sake of likeability by the readership and the economic gains it brings about. "Do you want to become a literary giant or end up being a small time writer?" (158) was the question she repeatedly faces and she chose the former. Sivakami also explores the theoretical debate of the necessity of the writer to be a 'do-gooder or problem solver.' Sivakami does not spare the opportunity to be honest and critical- not only of her own novel but also of the enterprise of dalit literature itself.

Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* stands out as a work of Dalit Literature , by the virtue of its uniqueness in approach to the question of Dalit empowerment and leadership. Contrary to the majority of other dalit writers, Sivakami dares to be critical of the dalit movement, and yet also manages to show the way forward and instill hope in the minds of the reader. Being a critical insider is a task that requires meticulous work to not tread over the lines but Sivakami achieves this task with precision in her novel.

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Aswathy A

Memories of Shame and Disgust ; Fat Trauma in the Autopathographical Writings of Fat Women

Abstract

In contemporary culture, where an obsession for a thin and sculpted physique has been the normative body standard, fatness becomes a contagious disease capable of escalating into an obesity epidemic. The stigma around body weight is so gendered in such a way that society demands women to consume less space compared to men. The dehumanization of fat bodies and the status of a deviant trait attributed to them forces fat women to discipline their bodies through physical exercises, diet charts, and medications for weight loss.

This study intends to unravel the fat trauma faced by fat women that resulted in developing a troubled relationship with food, body, and the self. It aims to explore the autobiographical accounts written as blogs by select fat activists to analyze the trauma resulting from fat shaming and the constant surveillance of bodies exerted by the culture. The study also explores how the medium of autopathography helps fat women channel fat trauma and painful memories regarding the stigmatization of the body in the past.

Keywords : Fatness, Fat Trauma, Eating disorders, Surveillance, Diet

In contemporary culture, where the thin and sculpted physique has been the normative body standard, fatness becomes a contagious disease capable of escalating into an obesity epidemic. The stigma around body weight is so gendered in such a way that society demands women to consume less space compared to men. The dehumanization of fat bodies and the status of a deviant trait attributed to fat women force them to discipline their bodies through physical exercises, diet charts, and medications for weight loss.This study intends to unravel the fat trauma experienced by fat women that resulted in developing a troubled relationship with food, body, and the self. It aims to explore the autobiographical accounts written as blogs by select fat activists to analyze the trauma resulting from fat shaming and the constant surveillance of bodies exerted by the culture. The study also explores how the medium of autopathography helps fat women channel fat trauma and painful memories regarding the stigmatization of the body in the past.

Fat activism refers to the movement that critiques the thin body as the epitome of beauty and health and the increasing aversion towards fat bodies in the culture. On the one hand, the internet is flooded with free tips on fitness and an endless list of foods that need to be avoided to lose weight and to be healthy. On the other hand, we can see several fat activists turning the online space into a fatosphere (a term referring to the interconnected

Aswathy A, Research Scholar, Department of English, Vellore Institute of Technology, Vellore

network of blogs by the fat community) where people having fat bodies start accepting their voluptuous bodies without regrets and encourage the fat population to love their bodies without hatred and shame. Irrespective of the mind-body dualism as propounded by the religions and philosophies that contempt one's indulgence in the body as a sinful act, fat activists subvert the dominant ideologies regarding the body by foregrounding the corpulent body into the center of their discussion.

Denarii Grace, a Black, bisexual, disabled fat activist who runs the blog titled 'Rooted in Rights', argues that fat trauma, i.e., the trauma resulting from being trapped inside a fat body, starts from the family at an early age of the child itself, and it continues with the increased influence of discourses and depictions in media, the internet, and cinema. She recalls the experiences of the fat activist named Crystal Renee Newsman who shares how she and her sister were constantly traumatized by her father in her childhood. Newsman writes;

> "He (the father) looked at my thigh and he was like, 'Well you're in elementary school and your thigh is bigger than mine…' Every single time we would clothes shop, it just seemed like he would always bring up my weight. And I would be crying in the store…" (Grace).

Grace argues that fat people, depicted as " headless bodies' in the newspapers, are often demonized and stereotyped as "lazy sources of comedy that eat too much, don't exercise, and are full of insecurity" (Grace). She quotes the experiences of other fat activists such as Lindsey Averill and Rebecca Jane Weinstein, who were victims of continuous body scrutiny and the vigilance over their food habits exercised by the diet culture. These fat activists were on a diet from the age of 6 years old. The social pressure to fit into the thin mold as well as the continuing oppression for being constantly judged based on the normative body standards tends women to consciously opt by themselves to strive for a toned body as noted by Averil;

> "I don't remember [any specific] instance of someone bullying me, but I remember going to my mom and saying that I was experiencing bullying, begging to be put on a diet. From this [fat antagonistic] culture, I had been taught that I could solve the 'problem' of my body shape — all I had to do was go on a diet. [And t]he culture told my parents that that was an okay choice for a six-year-old" (Grace).

On the other hand, Rebecca Jane Weinstein was forced by her parents to consume diet pills at a very young age to achieve the desirable body type approved by the culture. Both Averil and Weinstein have developed a troubled relationship with food as eating has evolved into a crime and non-abstinence from it constitutes a sinful act in the fitness culture. Averill says;

> "I lost sight of the idea that food is something we need to be 'healthy'. " "Food was the enemy. Nobody was asking questions like, 'Are you taking care of yourself?' Instead, it was just validation based on, "YAY! THINNER!" There was no reference at all for self-care. Because I live in a larger body, anything I do to get thinner is good, whether it's unhealthy or not. And that's wrong" (Grace).

The act of disciplining the body is motivated by the social pressure to look good by having a thin and well-built body rather than being healthy and fit to stay away from chronic illnesses as propagated by the narratives of pathologization.

Fat Heffalump, a renowned blog of an Australian fat activist named Kath, showcases the fat-shaming experiences of the author as well as the members of the fat community she is part of. The author writes; "I talk about life as a fat person and work towards obtaining the basic human right for fat people to live their lives in peace, dignity and with respect, without fear of vilification, ridicule or discrimination". She reflects on the discriminatory practices in the USA that deny basic human rights to the fat population, ranging from access to workspace rights to accessing the health care system. The narratives of pathologization are so biased in such a way that they assume the root causes of any illness that affects the fat body as a result of his 'overweight' or 'obesity', and often advise the latter to lose weight than subjecting them to further medical examinations. Similarly, a fat woman is assumed to be lazy and unproductive based on the appearance of her body, resulting in a low wage rate. The section of the blog where she narrates her motivations for blogging contains 77 comments by fat people across the world, who are tormented by the feeling of being "physically unattractive", underconfident, worthless, and constantly judged and ridiculed in a culture obsessed with thin, toned, sculpted ageless bodies. One of the followers opens up about how she was reduced to a contagious being in her relationship with a man who treated her body as a harbinger of illnesses as propounded by the obesity epidemic. She also shares her intimate memories with her partner which made her feel that she is sexually undesirable for having a body that never fits in.

In one of the blogs titled 'Dear Emma Thomson', Kath narrates how devastating for fat women to see slim actresses wearing fat suits in cinema portraying stereotypical characters that are "mean and scary bullies". She notes that such reductive depictions demonize fat women and lower her self-esteem by making her body appear like a fat suit in reality when she gazes at her own reflection in the mirror. She writes;

> "I am a very fat woman. I also work with children. They don't see me as scary or mean. I'm like Miss Honey to them, only I'm almost 50, very fat, and not in any way pretty. But I'm colorful and smiley and cuddly. They want to crawl on to my lap when I read to them, or hug my leg as they talk to me in the book stacks. Or lay their heads on my enormous bosom

> when they're tired or grumpy or sad. “Can we just get an actress with the body type, rather than using prosthetics?” and “Does this character really need to be fat?”

The author shows how a fat person is stigmatized at the juncture of multiple indices of oppression like gender, ability, race, class, etc. The author recalls that, whenever she is badly wounded after accidents and she cannot act like an able person, her disability is pre-assumed to be the result of her 'misfit', non-conforming body. She shares an experience of her fat and disabled friend who is often met with contempt when she accesses the public amenities meant for the disabled population as her fatness is viewed as revocable by disciplining her body through diet, restrained consumption, and physical exercises. While narrating her memories of childhood, the author notes that a fat person rarely possesses the privilege of having nostalgic feelings of childhood as they would be victimized for being a fat kid by disciplining mechanisms starting from the dining table. In her words, nostalgia is for the privileged, and what she can remember is only a series of traumatizing memories.

In her blog titled 'Big Fat Deal', Monique van den Berg demystifies fatism, i.e., the popular prejudices against fat people and the cultural hatred towards fat bodies. She explores how the popular culture constructs the ideal body physique by valorizing thin bodies and inculcating the feelings of being inadequate and inferior in women having non-fitting body types. In one of her blog entries, she narrates the experience of fat shaming endured by a 19-year-old girl, who had been attending the filming of the American idol and was shifted to the back row from the front seats for having an 'undesirable', 'undisciplined body. In her blog entries, Monique van den Berg subverts popular jokes cracked at the expense of fat bodies such as 'fat people cause famine', 'one cannot see fat people in concentration camps', etc., referring to the supposed overconsumption and sedentary lifestyle led by the fat population.

Through her writings on her blog titled Claiming Crip, Karin Hitselberger reclaims her identity as "an unapologetic, disabled, fat woman navigating through the world on wheels"(Hitselberger). Being trapped inside a fat body is perceived to be an unfeminine trait or a masculine attribute that a woman needs to get rid of at all costs. She regards her past experiences in which her body was shamed and dehumanized, as "disastrous and life-scaring" as she is doubly stigmatized for being fat and permanently disabled in a culture obsessed with thin, able-bodied female physique (Hitselberger). She points out that people around her demanded her to refrain from being identified as a fat woman as fat is essentially bad, ugly, and unhealthy or even worse than disability in a culture dictated by normative body ideals. For Karin, her fat identity is politically similar to her identity as a disabled woman, hence, one doesn't need to escape from it or desperately try all cures offered by the capitalistic diet culture to achieve a physically fit, female body. Hitselbergerwrites;

> "Each of my identities is in itself whole, but each of my identities also intersects with every other identity I hold in a way that makes the experience of living with this multitude of layers different and distinct from living with any one of them on its own. Being fat doesn't take away from any of my other identities, but is an identity and an experience in its own right. It shapes the way I am understood and seen in our society and the way I move through and interact with our world. It is one of the many layers that make me the beautiful and complex person that I am."

In one of the blogs in a series of writings that contextualize fatness in Urban India, Deeksha Tiwari points out how the Bollywood movies promote the thin body ideal through reductive portrayals of female fat bodies as physically unattractive, sexually and romantically undesirable, and morally flawed and validate the acts of bullying, or stigmatization and marginalization of anyone based on body size and appearance. She notes how she was bullied in her childhood due to the flawed depictions in movies such as *KalHo Na Ho*(2003), which showed fat people as essentially funny entertainers, unproductive individuals, and good-for-nothing fellows. She describes how devastating it is to see fat people as sexually desirable only in select visual spaces such as pornography that fetishizes corpulent female body parts as mere objects of lust. Sesali writes;

> "It is worth noting for the record that I've lived in a fat body for most of my life. The realities of fat phobia/fat discrimination in our culture are such that I'm hyper-aware of the messages about fat bodies that include us being lazy, uncontrolled, and insecure. And to be honest, in the process of ingesting all these images and their various reiterations from people in family, friendship circles, and communities I've spent more than my fair share of time hating my body. Depression and anxiety have been contemptible companions at various points in my life, often a result of existing in a fat body." (*A Must-read for "Fat" Women - Indian Women Blog - Stories of Indian Women*).

In the fatosphere, fat women who are tormented by the 'thin mystique', can expresstheir trauma, fears, hopes, and aspirations truly without any weight of judgment and form communities and collectives of fat people by helping them heal and empowering each other to progress in life. They subvert the dominant models of fashion, clothing, arts, and aesthetics through counter-narratives that challenge the traditional embodiments of health and beauty. It helps fat women who have been discriminated continuously against at different phases of life to regain self-confidence and self-esteem and navigate their complex ways of living.

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Bibi Sadiqua

Concocting the Diasporic Voices in Ahdaf Soueif's *The Map of Love :* Retelling of a Nation's Cultural and Political Past

Abstract

This research paper intends to analyse the diasporic lives of the Egyptians and the British during the reign of British colonialism in Egypt. The novel, ***The Map of Love*** *(1999) by AhdafSoueif juxtaposes the lives of people across a century, deciphering how history repeats- both culturally and politically; colonialism is replaced by neo-colonialism and the traditional culture is replaced by the modern one. Yet, the human relationships share the same friendship and love regardless of the time. Indeed, they bind the lives of characters across a century. The 19th century politics of Egypt goes hand-in-hand with the personal and cultural lives of characters in diaspora. The thrust of this paper is to critically analyse the diasporic consciousness of people during the former years in Egypt.The premise of this study is based on the Postcolonial framework.*

Keywords : Diaspora, Colonialism, Subversion, Nation, Culture, Political and Past

Introduction

The text unfolds at the onset of the millennium when Isabel Parkman arrives in Egypt with a trunk- 'a pandora's box', from which the lives of the characters of the past century resume life. Amal, Isabel's host, is a channel who bridges the past and the present through her narration. She reshuffles the details of the past to assist Isabel in a research project meant to be conducted on Baroudi family tree. The story of the past century unfolds with Lady Anna Winterbourne's arrival in Egypt. She is a rich English woman of high ranking political background and is recently widowed. Anna visits Egypt to take a tour of Pyramids, Sinai and the Egyptian museums and paintings. She is kidnapped, having been mistaken for an Englishman and finds herself at the residence of the then Egyptian nationalist aristocrat- Sharif Al Baroudi. She is befriended by his sister, Layla. Eventually, Anna is consumed in love with Sharif and they are happily married. An active member of Egyptian politics, Sharif is assassinated in a plot instigated against him by both British and his own kind; as both the sides were enraged because of his marriage to Lady Anna. After Sharif's death, Anna returns to England with their daughter Nur. At this point in the novel, the lines of history get blurred and the story takes the turn when Isabel arrives in Egypt in 1997 with the trunk which contains all the Souvenirs and record of Anna's life in Egypt. Isabel wishes to rediscover and rebuild what is lost in the span of a century's time. All the while, she is in love with Amal's brother, Omar- a conductor staying in America. Both Anna and Isabel share the same mindset and attitude towards

Bibi Sadiqua is a Research Scholar, St. Aloysius College, Mangalore University, Mangalore

Egypt- both marry Egyptian men, despite of coming from the powerful nations of the world- England and America. They find their true love in a culture and place alien to them. This paves way for many questions- what makes these women to stick on to Egyptian life? What draws them to Egypt in first place? Why do they leave behind the life of comfort in their home lands and settle in Egypt? Why do they risk their lives and career to stay with the Egyptians? Do they genuinely find something worthy in Egypt or are they temporarily attracted by the exotic nature of the east? Are they Orientalists? Are the internation marriages in the text, political acts too?

As one begins to explore the above questions, one arrives at Soueif's strategy of subversion through the very story line of the novel. While, the traditional diasporas are rooted in the set trend, wherein people migrate from East to West, the trend is reversed here. Anna and Isabel are from the coloniser's world and yet, migrate and settle down in Egypt. The aim of this study is to examine whether they voice out the prototypical concerns of the diasporic populace in general or do they narrate different experiences altogether. Also, the paper intends to examine what are the experiences of these diasporic subjects, coming from the coloniser's world, as these characters are the representatives of Western diaspora. More precisely, the paper focuses on Anna's experiences in Egypt as a subject of diaspora.

The retelling of Anna's life is done by Amal's reading of journals, papers and diaries found in the trunk brought by Isabel. The trunk originally belonged to Lady Anna, which had travelled with her from England to Egypt and back. Thus, the trunk here, is the symbolic narrator of Anna's story and the author supplements Amal as the agent of this narration. The actual story of Anna's life is mostly penned down by her own self; while some of it, one learns from Layla's Arabic scripts. As Anna narrates her story, she interweaves it with the political status of Egypt. It is in Anna's narration that the cultural and personal blends with the political.

The author gives voice to its protagonist through the medium of writing- the act of writing her own story. And this write up makes up for the main plot of the novel. By this, Soueif has attempted to highlight the importance of autobiographical elements in diasporic narrations, as the corpus of preliminary literature by Arab diasporic women was autobiographic in nature as well. Fadia Faqir in her introduction to *In the House of Silence* (1998), aptly theorises the importance of autobiographies in the literature penned down by Arab women. She states-

> The large number of autobiographies published in the 1990s is a desperate attempt to protect and preserve the self and its memory. Within theocratic, military, totalitarian and neo-patriarchal societies the writing of an autobiographical text becomes an act of defiance and assertion of individual identity. It shows that censorship, in its attempt to turn a nation into a herd, may silence the herd but never the individual. (9)

The author goes on with the portrayal of her women protagonists. Layla, Amal or even Anna (after her Egyptian marriage) are not hapless dependent characters or victims of social or political structures like gender discrimination, patriarchy, and so on. Interestingly, all of them write- they write theirs and other women's stories as well. This renders them the power to express their 'self' and hence, powerful. As Nouri Gana's analysis of modern Arab women writers, as taught in the class, in her introduction to *The Edinburgh Companion to the Arab Novel in English* (2015) goes-

> Ahdaf Soueif's, *The Map of Love*, … deconstructs the saturated horizon of expectations of students, their assumption that Arab and Muslim women are oppressed, veiled, exotic and erotic subjects with little or no voice. Not only is the Arab world as a geopolitical entity saturated in the American imaginary with orientalist images, but most students come to class, not as blank states, but with their imagination already informed or misinformed with those very orientalist images. (30)

But the question arises would Anna and Layla in 19th century Egypt, enjoy the same prestige and privileges of education and freedom from veiling if they were to belong to either the working or the middle classes? Mabrouka, a previous slave and presently, the servant at Baroudi house is illiterate, superstitious, still a slave in mind, and also veils in front of men of the household and Sharif's mother Zeinab, very understandingly offers him women from her harem since he is alone and divorced for twenty odd years. Further, Emily, Anna's maid from England seldom enjoys any social standing with Anna's new life at the Baroudi house, though she is from the coloniser's world. She is conveniently sent off to England. Thus, the hierarchy operates at both cultural and political levels.

Egyptian culture and politics get a re-reading through Anna's diaries and journals and her voice reverberates even after a century. As she gets familiarised with Egyptian culture and is taken in by the friendliness and hospitality at the Baroudi house, she is preoccupied with the new place, while distancing herself from old friends. As Anna marries Sharif Basha, she voluntarily affiliates her identity to Egyptian existence while, slowly uprooting the previous one. Anna's life in Egypt is picturised in a larger frame in the words of Geoffery Nash in the essay, "AhdafSoueif: England, Egypt, sexual politics", published in a book of critical essays, *The Anglo Arab Encounter* (2007)-

> The Anna-Sharif relationship develops on Egyptian soil and is seen to validate Egyptian national aspirations. Hovering in the background is the Cardinal Richelieu-like figure of Lord Cromer (ostensibly the British Agent and Consul-General, he was virtually sole ruler of Egypt) who actually appears on stage in the scene in which Anna and Sharif go to the British Agency to get their marriage registered. Anna is connected through her father-in-law, Sir Charles Winterbourne, to a tiny group of British Anti-Imperialists centred on another historical figure, Wilfrid

> Scawen Blunt, the Tory advocate of Eastern nationalities. She is therefore predisposed to accept Egyptians on their own terms. (79)

By this scenario, Soueif subverts typical structure of the diasporic narratives where people from the colonised or the third world, migrate to the West and face the issues of identity, survival and adjustment. Here, Anna gives up England in order to marry and settle down in Egypt. Surprisingly, she accommodates to her new life in Egypt very comfortably.

The author here brings in the hospitality of the Egyptian culture and their generosity to accept a foreigner readily into their household at the cost of political wrath incurred by the then colonisers- the British. Anna actually falls in love with Sharif for his generous nature when they travel to Sinai together. She is also taken in by Layla's selfless friendship. Anna is fascinated by the house of Baroudis and the paintings in it. By this one can arrive at a perception that Anna was indeed diasporic and 'unhomely' in her home country which was free politically. She was confined by her own 'psychic space' after her unhappy marriage to Edward Winterbourne, followed by his eventual death. It is in Egypt that she found love and space to express and explore her individuality. Soueif is delighted in tracing Anna's life from being a person to becoming a personality. In this, the author eulogises Egyptian culture which is all embracing.

Simultaneously, the narrative offers a critique of Coloniser's culture which is cold, reserved and inhospitable. When Anna and Sharif's visit Lord Cromer to register their marriage, he is very rude and unwelcome both in his gestures and attitude. His words are imbued with coloniser's hatred and disgust towards Sharif and his marriage to Anna– "I know you are a man of integrity and a man of the world, and I am sure you are aware- to put it bluntly- of all that Anna stands to lose through entering into this… contract. She is a woman of rank and position… I want you to sign an undertaking that you will not take another wife while you remain married to Lady Anna." (Soueif 322).

The above words by Cromer are infused with anger and insults. The typical coloniser's agenda is exemplified through his speech and unfolds a white man's perception of Egyptians as undignified and uncivilised lot. His concern here, is not to secure Anna in her marriage but, to demean the position of an Egyptian and to convey that Sharif does not hold eligibility to marry Anna. Thus, he shuns their marriage as an 'inappropriate act' and denies to register it. Further, Cromer keeps speaking to Lady Anna in English, remaining oblivious to the matter that Sharif Baroudi doesn't know English. Yet, Anna is conscious of the above fact and throughout the conversation she speaks only French (the only common language Anna and Sharif know) so as to respect Sharif's presence.

The novel very conveniently incorporates Anna's existence in Egypt. Her active participation in Egyptian politics adds to the marital bliss and Anna- Sharif companionship. Not only does she share Egypt's political concerns but also supports the Egyptian cause for freedom. Anna represents the subjectivity of a subject in diaspora yet,

from the coloniser's world. This very fact that the author attributes diasporic positioning to a character from coloniser's world, is a political act of subverting the hegemonic narratives which often stereotypes the diasporic populace from the third world. Further, Soueif implies the benevolent vision of connecting the two worlds irrespective of the political differences. They are bonded by the mutual love and affection in the Baroudi household; here, a microcosmic representative of the Egyptian cultural world. As the Anglo Indian critic, Geoffery Nash elucidates-

> Soueif's concern in *Map of Love,* however, seems not only to be about rewriting a colonial encounter from the point of view of the colonised (although this she certainly does), but to posit an alternative meeting of the equals, as embodied in the coming together of the two couples and their families. Both Western women develop strong empathetic ties with their respective sister-in-laws. Anna's relationship with her sister-in-law, Layla, is closely paralleled by that between Isabel and Omar's sister, Amal… Soueif ensures that both Anna and Isabel come to sympathise with the Egyptian/Arab cause. (82)

Fascination with the past is one of Soueif's preoccupations. She emphasises on the 'roots' of everything- from language to culture. In *The Map of Love*, she traces the entire family tree of a century through the contents of a trunk- which hides the formidable treasure of a century's history- 'a treasure chest', holding the secrets of lost past. ShadenM.Tageldin acknowledges Soueif's fiction as the second birth of Egyptian novel in English in the essay titled, "The Incestuous (Post) Colonial: Soueif's Map of Love and the Second Birth of the Egyptian Novel in English" in the text edited By Nouri Gana. She emphasizes the importance of 'roots' and presence of history from the past as brought out by Soueif in her texts and analyses the same in terms of Arabic language. She elucidates-

> Soueif's conception of historical "origin" and causality, then, is endlessly regressive: each "beginning" is haunted by its origin in a prior "end"; each present contains the seed of the past. Just as we cannot understand Soueif's adult decision to write in English unless we hark back to the earliest "seeds" of her personal history, so too will we understand the language of politics of post-revolutionary Egypt, she suggests, unless we hark back to the cultural history of pre-independence to the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries with Egypt was under British dominion. Teaching Isabel Arabic in *The Map of Love,* Amal explains that in Arabic everything stems from a root, a root "mostly made up often three consonants- or two." Her advice to Isabel as she struggles to learn Arabic- "Always look for the root". (90)

Pan-Arabism is the style of writing and narration that Soueif adopts. It is evident through Asya's character in *In the Eye of the Sun* that Soueif is nostalgic and idealises

Nasserian era in Egypt and she is for the Arab Union for Palestinian cause. In the present novel, the Pan-Arabic character is opted by Sharif who is a nationalist propagating Egyptian culture. He believes in the bright future of Egypt and comes out with developmental measures in education system and Egyptian politics.

Mrinalini Chakravorty in her essay comments on Pan-Arabism as found in novels of Soueif, in a book of critical essays, edited by Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, *Arab Women's Lives Retold* (2007)-

> Pan-Arabism as represented in these texts constitutes a more dynamic engagement with the cultural and historical realities of the present-day Arab world than the late-nineteenth- and early- twentieth-century versions of the "Arabism" tat Fanon dismisses. For one, the Pan-Arab politics evoked by these novels is not atavistic or blindly universalizing in that it does not seek to idealize a distant and sterile epoch of some common past that is unavailable to the realities or "events of today". In addition, Arab identity is also carefully represented as a predicate of various and often divergent national and ethnic belongings. And finally, Pan-Arabism is also shown as a literal expression of the ethnocultural and religious heterogeneity that is the lived experience of the Arab world and the source of a political force that informs the Arab struggle against Western hegemony. (133)

One more character who fought for the Egyptian cause is Sharif's father- the senior Baroudi. He loses the fight and goes into retreat out of despair, guilt and shame. He confines himself to a shrine in the underground, literally, which leads to a secret door to Baroudi household. On similar lines with Anna, Sharif's father is also diasporic in his own country, at his own home; although the causes behind it are different. That is to say, one need not be diasporic outside one's country, one could also be diasporic at one's home as well. Soueif successfully interpolates fresh insights into the concept of diaspora, modifying its definitions through the subjectivities of characters in diaspora. As Avtar Brah opines -

> Diaspora space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dislocation as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes. It addresses the global condition of culture, economics and politics as a site of 'migrancy' and 'travel' which seriously problematizes the subject position of the 'native'…diaspora space is a conceptual category is 'inhabited' not only by those who have migrated and their descendants but equally by those who have migrated and their descendants but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words, the concept of diaspora space (as opposed to

> that of diaspora) includes the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those of 'staying put'. (181)

As part of active readership, few limitations could be enlisted in Soueif's fiction in general. First, Soueif blends too much politics with fiction. No doubt it aids the readers in getting a panoramic view of the writer's world, it becomes a challenging task for non-Egyptian readers. Secondly, the author's political perspective is too elitist i.e. it seems to address an audience belonging to the upper and aristocratic classes. Lastly, the fictional texts are too autobiographical. Though autobiographies formed the corpus of Arab Women's literature in the initial times, the writings have taken a lead towards more creative and impersonal narratives.

Conclusion

The trunk is a symbol from the past, representing Anna's diasporic consciousness. It is personified to have powers of its own- the power to store inside, the lives of people who lived a century ago. Its power also lies in giving life to the (un)dead by raising them through the scriptures and souvenirs. This is the research gap that runs as a parallel text in the novel. The scope here is to re-discover the stories which were anonymously buried a hundred years ago and to connect the dots between two eras- 'one lost and the other yet to be born'. The revelation occurs towards the end is that the only researchable truth is the friendship and the chalice of love that binds people across nations and across time. Thus, the discovery is not about what was lost but, what is found. This paper has brought out Anna's experience as a diasporic subject in Egypt. Secondly, how are the diasporic experiences different when the positions of being diasporic is reversed i.e. when a character from coloniser's world takes the position of the colonised. Lastly, as to how Anna's journal stands as a representative of her diasporic subjectivity, to re-tell about Egypt's cultural and political past.

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Bilal Khan

Gojira or Godzilla? The Nuclear Horror and its Spectators

Abstract

The perception of Godzilla within the latest media has presented a debate among the popular culture regarding it. The question of which Godzilla is more authentic has recently been raised when two Godzilla movies were released in proximity to each other. Hence, since the release of two Godzilla movies in Japan and America consecutively, Godzilla Minus One (2023) and Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire (2024) one can see an obvious leaning of the American audience towards the former. The available body of literature acknowledges the cultural differences between the two renditions of Godzilla but the lacuna stands where the spectator and their behaviour are ignored in this body. Present literature on the spectatorship of Godzilla has only considered cultural grounds where the spectator's ideologies are essentialised. This paper attempts to look at the concept of Godzilla represented in the contemporary visual culture which now stands as an ambiguous cultural artefact, thereby picking out some special case points for discussion from different movies to understand the change in spectator behaviour regardingthe spectators' nationalities and how they perceive Godzilla through works from the apparatus theory of cinema.The apparatus theory propagated by thinkers like Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry functions on the psychoanalytical and ideological basis to understand the cinema as an architectural and institutional system which partially determines the spectatorship of certain films. Through textual analysis, it was found that the American spectator is leaning towards a more "authentically" Japanese Godzilla informed by the power dynamics and the historical-ideological basis the two countries share.

Keywords: Godzilla, psychoanalysis, apparatus theory, spectatorship, identification, technique.

Introduction

In recent times, Hollywood popular cinema has solely focused on gathering audiences based on high-budget spectacles and narrative cinema. Both of these have been the mark of Hollywood in its domestic space and even in the international market. It is no accident then that Hollywood international blockbusters are usually extremely expensive spectacles. But in between there are some exceptions, that despite being multi-million-dollar budget films full of CGI spectacle do not reach the mark of a blockbuster. Indeed, the monopoly of spectacle comes with the risk of saturation. This is the case with the American reboot of Godzilla, the famous monster first put on screen in Japan by Toho

Bilal Khan is a post-graduate student, The English and Foreign Language University, Hyderabad, India.

Studios as *Gojira (1954).* With the recent release of two Godzilla movies in Japan and America in the same year, *Godzilla Minus One (2024)* and *Godzilla x Kong: The New Empire (2024)* respectively, one can see an obvious leaning of the American audience towards the former.

Multiple platforms like YouTube are hailing *Godzilla Minus One (2024)* as a masterpiece, almost art cinema and these claims are validated by an Oscar. On the other hand, the American version is being referred to as a subpar movie which is maybe described best as "cool". This demarcation between the two Godzillas begs the question of what is so unimportant in the American Godzilla and why cannot the American audience resonate with it. But before that, there lies an ontological question of what makes Godzilla American or Japanese. For these questions there has to be a historicising of Godzilla itself and then its appearance in the USA.

Not a lot of academic work was found that did a comparative analysis of these movies given they are being released in such proximity to each other. But, an abundance of this theme is available on popular platforms like Reddit, YouTube and Instagram. The lacuna that stands in the popular arena as well is that the spectator of these films has not been discussed. Focus on cinematic techniques and the authenticity of Godzilla come under scrutiny most of the time. This paper attempts to look at the concept of Godzilla represented in multiple movies which now stands as an ambiguous cultural artefact picking out some special case points for discussion like *Shin Godzilla (2016)* to understand the change in spectator behaviour regards to their nationalities and how they perceive Godzilla through works from the apparatus theory of cinema.

Scope of Research

The paper looks at Godzilla as a cultural phenomenon which originated in Japan in 1954 as a response to the postwar trauma of the country. Given it had been several decades after the incident itself the image of Godzilla keeps on changing. For this particular reason, the paper does not want to look at a singular adaption or screen appearance of Godzilla but would focus on *Gojira (1954)* directed by Ishirō Honda, *Shin Godzilla (2016)* directed by Hideaki Anno and Shinji Higuchi and *Godzilla vs. Kong (2021)* directed by Adam Wingard.

Through the movies and the general artefact, the paper attempts to look at the spectator of the two different countries. What ideological and socio-cultural aspects play into making the Japanese Godzilla more aesthetic and authentic? The study does not contain empirical data on the audience but has sourced comments and reviews from public platforms like Rotten Tomato. The limitation of the paper is substantiated to some extent by the theoretical findings of apparatus theorists who extensively worked on audiences and their behavioural patterns regarding cinema.

Research Objective:

• To understand the difference between American and Japanese portrayals of the monster Godzilla and the spectatorship they have produced.

Research Question:

What kind of spectatorship entails in regards to identity, ideology and culture that gives rise to two very different reception to a franchise with the same object of attraction and what makes one of them better or worse than the other?

Literature Review

The concept of Godzilla is diverse in its portrayal due to a whopping 38 movie saga but the origin of this beast is rather important for current discussion. For this one has to go back in 1954 and focus on Honda's Gojira. The name itself comes from two Japanese words "whale" (*kujira*) and "gorilla" (*gorira*) (Pelea 20). *Gojira (1954)* is an interesting movie because of its proximity not only to the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki but also because it happened right after the American occupation ended in Japan. But there is an immediate anecdote that pushed forward the production of the movie. In 1954, America was testing its newly invented Hydrogen bombs near the equator in the Pacific Ocean. An unfortunate tuna trawler known as *The Lucky Dragon* was passing by and got caught in the bomb site. The sailors returned to Japan with severe radiation poisoning. Indeed, this incident that unfolded in the early months of 1954 partially ignited a new debate on the nuclear age, Japan's image as a victim of modernity and the birth of Gojira in November 1954 (Ryfle 47).

This earlier rendition of Godzilla is very different from the later Godzillas that Toho itself produced. It was a force of nature that had been awakened by the disturbance of humanity. It is also important to remember that Hollywood released Merian C. Cooper's and Ernest B. Schoedsack's *King Kong* in 1933 creating a genre out of monster movies, which William Tsutsui, a known researcher and fan of Godzilla called "monster on the loose" (2). The success of *King Kong (1933, 1952)* and *Beast From 20,000 Fathoms (1953)* did inspire Toho Studios' Tomayuki Tanaka to think of a monster movie on a similar scale (Brothers 36). But what came after was not borrowed or inspired from anyone. Even though, Japan's monster was an inspiration the sequels that it started and the franchise that spawned after gave the platform for "kaijū eiga" or "monster films" (Pelea 20).

Fig.1 Goijra (1954)

The reception of Godzilla in 1954 was very interestingly received in Japan. The obvious understanding of Godzilla was that it was an amalgamation of Japan's fears and anxieties that materialised into a giant monster that had come to destroy Tokyo yet something else was also happening. Multiple authors situate Godzilla not as a monster to be feared by the Japanese public rather it was empathised with (Pelea, Anderson, Noriega). This crucial detail explains that Godzilla was never portrayed as an Other by Japan, it was a monster who was a victim of something else that the Japanese saw as the bigger problem.

Scholarship points towards the Westernisation of Japan and modernity as the overarching problem. Crînguţa-Irina Pelea pushes for this theory the most aggressively. Indeed, for Pelea the Japanese Godzilla has to be acknowledged as Gojira and the American version to be called Godzilla. The cultural differences between the two carry multiple theological and cultural semantics for the author. Through her comparative analysis of the concept especially through more Japanese scholarship Pelea posits that the image of Godzilla is understood as a fellow victim of Western influence within the country. The advent of science is responsible for the birth of the beast and it is suffering because of the West. Interestingly, Pelea also notes that Godzilla either in *Gojira (1954)* or in *Shin Godzilla (2016)* never destroys cultural heritage sites. It is always seen as destroying the skyscrapers of Tokyo, a mark of the West (23). As a guardian of traditional Japanese values and an "angered god" Godzilla stands as an inherently Japanese symptom of postwar trauma and the fear of modernity.

Although Pelea's research is closest to the current paper, it takes some huge conclusive leaps of faith which borderline works under the label of essentially cultural. For example, her analysis of Professor Goro Maki's suicidal "angst" in *Shin Godzilla (2016)* would suffer from "impenetrable opacity" for the American spectator (33). Inevitably it is a cultural reading that posits the reception of Japanese Godzilla as something *better* or more *culturally acceptable* than the American one. But there seems to be no rationale for this other than an invocation of culture and theology. She also does not talk about the film having a cult following in the genre, particularly among the English-speaking audience.

On similar lines but less focused on the Shinto cultural-religious reading is Mark Anderson's discussion of this debate in detail where he situates Japan's stance on modernity. He discusses the important conference titled "Overcoming Modernity" (*Kindai no chokoku*), and the different stances Japanese intellectuals presented in it. It is clear from Anderson's work that modernity as a pathology interrupting the Shinto spirituality runs deep inside the Japanese psyche. In fact, the anxiety towards the atomic bomb is read here as modernity and Gojira (at least the one in 1954) as its manifestation. Hence, for Anderson, the Freudian concepts of mourning and melancholia are at work here where the excessive repulsion towards the mechanical (atomic bomb, technology) and the acceptance of bio-spiritual (Godzilla) are just symptoms. Symptoms of Japan's

melancholia which by the logic of the Freudian concept projects issues on the subject of melancholy themselves and not on the Other (26). Pelea supports the claim by calling the destruction of Tokyo (albeit just the modern sectors) "masochist tendencies" (36).

The politics of fear and anxiety is inherent to Godzilla and precisely even more when the spectators of America and Japan are being discussed. Chon Noriega picks up the problem and tries to psychoanalyse the problem of Godzilla which is sympathetic to the Japanese audience even though simultaneously it is to be feared as well. Much like Pelea, Noriega takes the cultural road but with socio-historical ideologies intact. He explains that the understanding of the self and the other in the West is reflected in their monster movies. In *Beast From 20,000 Fathom (1953)*, the "rhedosaurus" awakened by the H-bomb testing appears to destroy New York. Here, Noriega argues that the monster is an Other in the Western culture as in other American movies too the monster appears with determiners like "It" (66). Once the othering is successful these monsters have to be destroyed but interestingly monsters like rhedosaurus who were awakened by a nuclear bomb have to be defeated by the nuclear bomb as well. And one must ask why not because the first country to harness nuclear power as a weapon was America and the Truman administration left no doubt that it was an "American" achievement. Indeed, the solution to the problem of modernity or the atomic age has to be the atomic bomb itself (Noriega 67). The other has to be destroyed but in the Japanese scenario, the monsters are not completely others. They have names and personalities to them. Borrowing Takao Suzuki's work on the sociolinguistic aspects of Japan, Noreiga posits that the other has to be part of the culture to formulate itself (67). Hence, Godzilla is not completely the other of Japan, on the contrary, it is Japanese and a part of its culture. This assimilation of the other also reflects in the fact that Godzilla is a sympathetic character for the Japanese spectator which should not be destroyed.

Yet, unique to Noreiga's analysis is the fact that he sees Godzilla as a defence mechanism where it is the result of the projection of the self which is Japan but also through transference of the other which is the USA (68). It problematises the inherently Japanese call of Godzilla and makes it into a personification of the complex relationship between Japan and America. It should have been obvious that the post-WWII trauma that Japan is trying to address first through *The Lucky Dragon* incident and later by *Gojira (1954)* must have included the perpetrator of that traumatic event as well. Noriega is bringing new factors into this playing field to understand the social, economic and power-based relations that are tacit to such representations. The interesting part of this discourse and Godzilla, in general, is that it inaugurated quite a lot of new discourses within the international scenario.

The multiplicity of discourses involves new analyses like Michael J. Blouin's understanding of Godzilla as a "'nuclear text' par excellence' (86). Blouin focuses on the nuclear history that Godzilla inherently shares with its conception and the calls the

othering factor of it as "thing-in-itself", an unrepresentable aspect of the nuclear age that is being shown through Godzilla (89). But Blouin also discusses the relationship Godzilla shares with its fellow monsters in movies that came after 1954. For example, he reads the known rivalry between Godzilla and Mothra as something grotesquely man-made against Nature, given shape through Mothra (91). But much like Pelea and Noriega, Blouin reserves the image of the monster as a saviour.

Most of the literature on Godzilla also invoked Susan Sontag's theorisation of destruction and its imagination. It's important to note that she directly does not address Godzilla but makes a comment on the cinema that has destruction as central to it due to the coming of the nuclear age. One can see Godzilla as "unremitting banality", one of the two types of disaster-related destinies Sontag discusses (Blouin 93).

Where Blouin deems Godzilla to be a kind of horror that can completely break down the signifying chain, Susan J. Napier reads Godzilla as a science fiction narrative that explains the "darker side" of the Japanese mentality. This is not unique in any manner but it is what follows that makes Napier's analysis crucial: she deemed Godzilla to be a "secure horror" borrowing this concept from Andrew Tudor (332). Whereas most of the critics have focused on the destruction caused by Godzilla in *Gojira (1954),* Napier points out that the horror was at the end of the day secured by the help of Japanese scientists working for the government. It has a nationalistic twist to it where the sympathetic untamed monster is tamed by the state. Thus, Napier's analysis points towards the nationalistic characteristics of Godzilla in its destruction as well as its containment.

At this juncture, one can start to ponder about the dynamics of Godzilla and how its image started to evolve within and outside Japan. In this context, Tsutsui writes:

> Long-time staples of movie palaces, drive-in theaters, and late-night television, the Godzilla films—which evolved over time from sober adult fare to lighthearted children's entertainment to high-tech action thrillers—became *cult classics* and their giant, radioactive star became a global icon. (emphasis added) (2)

The emerging icon as noted by Tsutsui was that of a "global icon" from a "radioactive star". One can almost see the disappearance of the destructive trauma-inducing or therapeutic healing Godzilla from 1954. This Godzilla which changed due to the economic boom within the domestic and international sphere has to almost shed away its traumatic past. Tsutsui also makes an observation that was not found in other authors—the fact that Godzilla was inspired by the success of monster films like *King Kong (1933, 1952)* and therefore, the American spectator was already familiarised with such movies. In fact, it melded right into the saturated market of Disney and Marvel superheroes. One can also see Pelea's fears of the untransability of Godzilla in America as the American spectator was already trained in a particular way. But it is also important to

remember that this Godzilla comes out of Japan as a global ambassador of "excitement, humor, creativity, distinctive sensibility, dark subtexts, and addictive charms of the Japanese pop culture industry" (Tsutsui 2). This Godzilla is already far removed from its original context of the 1950s and has been reincarnated into a marketable "superhero" for kids; "tamed and transformed" in the 1960s (Tsutsui 3-4).

Fig. 2 *Godzilla vs. Megalon (1973)*

The changes in Godzilla within Japan were also a consequence of the economic boom that the country saw in the 1960s-70s. This gave rise to another uniquely Japanese postwar media which is the "cuteification" (Fig.2 showing Godzilla performing an elevated dropkick) of the popculture (Tsutsui 4). The concept was made available and somehow the dark monster of postwar Japan became mainstream and infantilised. This change was also partly responsible for its success in the movie *King Kong vs. Godzilla (1962)*. A box office success made Godzilla into a global franchise with an appeal among children (Ryfle 63). This change is also available in the literature the current paper discusses where *Gojira (1954)* invoked a lot of academic debates yet the changes after were more or less ignored. But the worst thing that could happen to Godzilla was an American adaptation.

The first serious adaptation Godzilla got from the West was in 1998 directed by none other than the "master of disaster", Roland Emmerich. The *Godzilla (1998)* was so far removed from the familiarised franchise that it gave rise to a notorious code name for the monster, "G.I.N.O" which stands short for "Godzilla In Name Only". In Fig.3 one can see that the specimen shares no commonality with Godzilla and also lacks the radiation element of it. Sometimes the monster is also referred to as Zilla to distinguish it from Godzilla.

Fig. 3 *Godzilla (1998)*

Discussion

The apparatus theory could come in handy to understand a lot of spectator behaviour regarding cinema as an art form. The theories proposed by Chrisitan Metz, Laura Mulvey, and Jean-Louis Baudry emphasise cinema as an architectural and institutional apparatus that has a particular mechanism that positions the spectator in a particular way. Even though the theories particularly place the apparatus as important it does not mean the ideological function of this subjectivisation is neglected. Indeed, one can probe into deep ideological and cultural issues within the apparatus theory. The question of Godzilla that has been discussed earlier gives insight into multiple discourses but there exists a lack of research in understanding the ideological positioning of the spectator in the West and the one in Japan.

Metz's seminal enquiry into the cinematic space is given in his, *The Imaginary Signifier*. Metz argues that there is a uniquely cinematic signifier that works within the apparatus of cinema and it is this signifier that makes it different from other arts. This difference, laid down in psychoanalysis presents some interesting analysis of cinema and its consumption. To start, Metz argues that any signifier on the screen is merely an absence, a "shadow" of what used to be there in realtime (409). Hence, there is a double reduplication of fiction, first the inherent absence (and then thereby a presence) and then the fiction of the narrative on the screen. Indeed, as Metz argues "the imaginary constitutes the signifier" (410).

But the real question is what does this signifier signify? Metz follows up with the transcendental subject or the all-perceiving subject that is constituted by the imaginary signifier of cinema. This transcendental signified who is absent from cinema perceives the whole of reality within the darkened room with the projector positioned behind them in such a way that makes one believe that the cinema exists only for them (Metz 412). Indeed, the cinema is not a mirror but a screen on which they project and introject to attain this transcending position an ultimate place of power. But that means they are not identifying with the actor but their like, their accepted image, the ideologically "softer" image. At last, Metz declares that it is the spectator with whom they themselves identify (413).

If the spectator identifies with themselves, one must understand this apparatus to be working under particular ideological functions to enable such an identification process. But is Godzilla as a monster a being to be recognised with? The genuine concern in this light of thinking is that monsters are supposed to be

other—something that does *not* make up the ego. But this also creates a dialectic of self and other where the absence of the other within the self only makes a presence and the other an important self-defining variable. And this analysis about Godzilla can be posited by the response of the Japanese public to be sympathetic towards Godzilla—they identified with the monster. Therefore, the *Gojira (1954)* was successful—by identifying with the monster in the film the Japanese spectator was identifying with themselves. The unacknowledged self-injury that the Japanese people have gone through which to 1952 at least remained unknowable due to America's occupation.

Yet, what made Godzilla's identification possible for the American spectator? The answer is within the monster itself. It is a personification of Japan's defeat which makes it the quasi-symbol of the West. When Noriega posits that the American spectator has to agree that they are the other in this movie, perhaps, the obverse happened where they did identify themselves as not the villainous other but as the victorious other. The identification processes of the spectator would happen nevertheless irrespective of America's acceptance of their crimes. Arguably, it is the innate Japaneseness of the first Godzilla that made them so readily available for the identification process for the American spectator. If Japan could project a masochist self-blaming image on itself, why cannot the Americans project their own identity over Godzilla by the logic of sadism and drive pleasure from there? The spectacle of the film only pushed forward this curiosity which might be the reason for Godzilla's global success.

Precisely, this is the reason that the later Godzilla films are largely considered too American for the spectator. This also explains the failure of *Godzilla (1998)*, the narrative of utter destruction by nuclear force was changed to a narrative of a Dr Nick trying to uncover a giant geopolitical coverage of nuclear testing in the Pacific Ocean. Godzilla becomes too discoverable or readable for the American public—its strengths toned down for a version which is merely an animal who was caught in the explosion. Godzilla on the other hand is never completely non-human.

Later, Metz talks about particular codes through which the spectator is jerked out of their slumber from the screen to be aware of the fact that they are indeed absent from the screen and were for this long finding presence in the screen through a reduplication layering of cinema. The second process of the imaginary signifier is counted here as a subcode which can be understood as the code of an auteur. The auteur, according to Andrew Sarris must have a good knowledge of the

technique, must have a distinguished style to his filmography marked by a pattern and lastly the interior meaning of the cinema itself (586-87). Apparatus theory would concern itself with the first two premises of the auteur theory. Indeed, this can entail the popularity and the cult nature of *Shin Godzilla (2016)*.

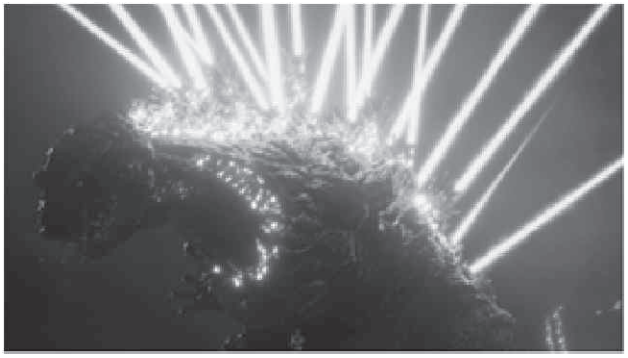

Fig. 4 *Shin Godzilla shooting atomic lasers out of his dorsal scales.*

The success of the Shin Godzilla is based on its difference from the current Godzilla on the market. Anno is already known in the Japanese industry and international stage for his extremely successful anime series *Neon Genesis Evangelion (1995)*. As Metz writes, the auteur code works under the pretence of "unknown", where unknown angles or shots represent the auteur's vision (414). The question asked by Metz is how the other common angles fail to do so. Why is *Godzilla (2014)* not known by its director? There is an intense focus on Shin Godzilla's differences when it comes to people who are its fans. Words like "authentic" are used commonly and the scarce use of CGI in the film is also hailed as an achievement (Valle). The Shin Godzilla of 2016 is inherently different from the American reboot released in 2014 and Godzilla in general as a whole which had become too cheesy and mainstream. The spectator recognises the auteur who is authentically Japanese making an authentically Japanese Godzilla movie—as one critic writes on Rotten Tomato, "Godzilla's real home is Japan, and anything else feels like a glitzy vacation".

The fact remains that the spectator of Godzilla needs to align themselves with the Japaneseness of it because the power dynamic again shifts to the master-slave or victor-defeated within the cinema hall. Anno's Godzilla was indeed different but it was also unknown and had nationalistic undertones, like Origami being the solution to defeat Godzilla. This would "awaken" the already hallucinating American spectator, still hallucinating but on a different tangent to project their anxieties under the discourse of America as the winner of the war. On the other hand, the American reboots keep on making the Godzilla more and more American. Even though the film features a Japanese doctor to invoke the authentic name Gojira in the first few movies, Godzilla is that neutral beast who is awakened to restore balance to the planet and not destroy it. It emerges to

defeat alien forces like Ghidorah and other titans bow down to it. This performative human ritual makes it more non-animal yet more non-Japanese as well. This reboot also fashions an American secret agency known as M.O.N.A.R.C.H. that studies these monsters. A spin-off was also released recently focusing on Monarch and how it drives Godzilla to defeat more evil titans that can harm the planet.

In this last rendition, Godzilla has become institutionalised. It is studied, being controlled by the American government and being let loose on titans who are an other to the state. This is the Americanness of the Godzilla who fights alongside Kong to defeat giant mechanical monsters or titans because the human understandings of feudal hierarchies (King of the Monsters), American institutionalisation (Monarch) and the advent of science can all bring it back to the realm of the known. It is almost too non-animal to be identified with at this point.

Another insight one can borrow from Metz is the fetish of the cinema to be the cinematic equipment. The equipment makes the disavowal of being in the movie possible. As Metz says, the "incredulous disavows the credulous: no one will admit that he is duped by the 'plot'" (429). Indeed, an outright acknowledgement of how the equipment has been able to successfully project the plot creates the conditions where the fetish proper is the equipment that makes the inherent lack of the object (from Godzilla to the human actors everyone is absent from the screen) disappear. A very famous YouTube channel, IGN takes advantage of this fetishism with a recent video titled "Godzilla Minus One Did VFX the '90s Way and That's Why It Won an Oscar". The 90s way remarked here is basically using less CGI and more animatronics. The same voice was already heard for Shin Godzilla where it felt more "real" than *Godzilla vs. Kong (2021)* where it felt like wrestlers (too non-animal/beasts) fighting in a ring (Valle). The fetishism of technique is very much visible for the fan base as CGI marks the Americanness of Godzilla starting from its debut on American soil back in 1998 which was the first time a CGI Godzilla was depicted on the screen. Thus, Metz is not wrong to situate "love for cinema" within the field of technique and equipment of cinema for the quasi-cinephile (432).

Hence, the quasi-Godzilla cinephile must always look for the technique that could bring the Japanese horror of 1954 back on the screen. In fact, according to Jean-Louis Baudry another apparatus theorist, it is the equipment that makes the differences within the shots disappear to create an "ideological surplus" (41-2). This ideological surplus has to be understood through the dominant ideology at work within the institution. Given that the Japanese cinema previously consumed by a particular class in America has always been considered parallel and better than American cinema, the dominant ideology validates Godzilla by institutional incentives like the Oscar. It is no accident that the latest Japanese Godzilla film, *Godzilla Minus One (2023)* is based in the postwar era of Japan evoking the horrors of the nuclear holocaust. In other words, for the spectator to identify with themselves, they need this particular ideological surplus which argues for Japan as the victim and Godzilla as the preparator in the West.

Conclusion

The paper attempted to look at the discourse surrounding Godzilla within the popular realm and tried to probe the possibilities of why some of its parts are cult classics while some are forgotten in the sands of time. Through extensive use of psychoanalytical apparatus theory, it analysed some patterns inherent in cinema and unique in particular nation-states due to the reigning ideology. The paper has proposed the larger argument that the American spectator enjoys the destructive non-human like Godzilla for it possesses the capacity to be identified as American albeit inherently Japanese. This Japanese inevitability works in favour of the American spectator and not against them.

The concept of Godzilla is dynamic, debatable and special to say the least. One imagines if Honda knew about the extent to which the films would go and the spectatorship it would create. Arguably, he had something else in mind. Even before his death, the director lamented Godzilla as a symbol that failed to stop the armament race (Ryfle 63). Nuclear deterrence is one of the leading causes of war in the twenty-first century where America reigns with its neoliberal hegemony. Godzilla was awakened to warn humanity as a victim of humanity itself but today it is a saviour far removed from its political ideology.

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Cynthia Elizabeth Thomas

Forging a Nation : A Reading of *Freedom Hospital : A Syrian Story*

Abstract

Outbreaks of conflicts and the disruption it causes to regular people at some corner, remote or otherwise, has almost become a mere event on the loop of a news cycle. Albeit it is anything but random for people subjected to the said upheaval, which throws them off any semblance of routine life frequently dispossessing them and depriving them of their livelihoods. People are bereft of basic utilities and access to healthcare and sustenance. In this context the meaning and configuration of a nation transforms rapidly as entrenched inFreedom Hospital: A Syrian Story, a graphic narrative by Hamid Sulaiman translated from French to English by Francesca Barrie.The text under scrutiny gives a dense account of the episode and experience of the people who live through a political turmoil and left to grapple with the varied definitions and nuances of the country of their descent through the medium of a graphic narrative which conjoins the verbal and the pictorial in tandem.This paper works towards the substantiation thatinspite of the many forms of governance that is in operation tries to redo what a nation entails people strive to recuperate and recoup with whatsoever may be at their disposal.

Keywords : Nation, Graphic Narrative, Conflict, Illustration

Freedom Hospital: A Syrian Story is a graphic narrative by Hamid Sulaiman translated from French to English by Francesca Barrie. It has its basis on Sulaiman's lived experiences in the country of his birth and origin, Syria, though eventually he flees from the region, consequently setting up his domestic base in France. The paper seeks to suggest that the burgeoning of a new nation- state,in a paradigm that is formerly unknown to the people of the terrain, could transfigure instantaneously and also on how the inhabitants accommodate and retaliate to and against the incipient mode of governance, that is largely devoid of components of tolerance and secularism. The conflict and the subsequent tension across the region cause a dual humanitarian and healthcare crises. The eponymous hospital is the vital centre in which aid is differentiallymobilised to deliver accessibility to medical assistance to as many assailable people as possible.

Yasmin who has instituted the hospital downplays the service it is to people, notwithstanding that it is not at its optimum, “It's more of a mobile outpost than a hospital”(Sulaiman 21). The hospital undergoes a few iterations across the narrative, for instance, it was once bombed and is in wreck, yet Yasmin lays it out again from the debris (Sulaiman 201), finally when Yasmin absconds with Fawaz with adept guidance from Salem they piece together another Freedom Hospital in a Turkish refugee camp across the

Cynthia Elizabeth Thomas is a PhD Scholar, Institute of English, University of Kerala

Syrian border(Sulaiman 282).The hospital's metamorphosis is tightly aligned to the variations the country weathers specifically with respect to its modular aspects.The particulars that go into the piecing together of a nation emerges as the pivotal element of *Freedom Hospital: A Syrian Story* by Hamid Sulaiman. One of the distinct concerns of this paper is contention of the category that this text belongs to. As claimed by Sulaiman in the postscript of the material "I chose to blend fiction and fact … I'm interested in showing how events unfolded in apersonal way" (286). To provide insights to meet this end he crafts a synthesis of the verbal and the visual- an amalgam- thus, the resultant interaction would be the graphic narrative of *Freedom Hospital : A Syrian Story*. This yields a palpable similarity with Kuhlman's rumination on what this form entails " "Graphic narrative," however, is a broad enough term to encompass both truth claims and the fictional aspects" (Ch. 7). Sulaiman adeptly proceeds into the description of a tension- torn country, which is at odds with its own population.

The nation has descended into chaos, as Sulaiman posits, during the Arab Spring many have become fatalities and a quite large a number have become targets; coerced and exploited. The region is rendered politically tumultuous and a hotbed of illnesses. Nation at the most fundamental level is a multitude of people with a collective consciousness and a collective identity, though this assumption may not typically and consistently hold onto a bearing on many a nation. This comes in contradiction when a power- wielding body asserts its will on the people inspite of the aversion from the very people whom theyprofess to govern. Bashar al-Assad, the president of the country has deemed himself to be the embodiment of Syria and its will. As Yasmin and Sophie make their way through a region were he enjoys heightened popularity they masquerade themselves to be ardent votaires of the president, as Sulaiman describes (22,23), though they have no intentions of being so and are quite contrary to what the momentary camouflage they part took in . Nevertheless he has amassed plenitude of people to be on his faction, quite likely, at their own peril. As Wright and Lauer points out such a personage "refers to the idealized, even god-like, public image of an individual consciously shaped and molded through constant propaganda and media exposure." (29), as evidenced by the streets that Yasmin and Sophie pass where the walls are plastered with posters of the president. As the duo makes their expedition with Abu Taysir they observe the surveillance tower with an armed personnel, as noted by Sulaiman (16).To ensure conformity from people through ferocity if needed, this incessant surveillance of the population is specifically afforded owing to the apparentness of the monitoring format. This apparatus produces a "conscious and permanent visibility that ensures the automatic functioning of a regime of silent discipline … it introduces a regime of power based upon visibility and silence" as perceived by Macey on Foucault's conceptualisation ofpanopticism(289). It is pertinent to note that the regime does not shy away from brutal force, the arrangement of surveillance acts as an addendum not a kernel, this begets a deeper resonance when read in concurrence with Delanty's ideation ,"the nation state, the effective expression of

modern society as a territorial phenomenon, had become a war machine" (19).

The political gadgetry that the state employs under the iconography of the nation may appear in a spectrum of modes ranging from the army and a supreme leader to a religious institution and the press. Against this background, the commander exercises exclusive prerogatives within the territory, furthermore declares absolute sovereignty in the matters of nation and the demographics within the area. Philpott discerns "the sovereign state the legitimate political unit" (364), however the legitimacy must rest on and be rendered to the governing body by the people that the former supposedly administer, so as the nation can affirm itself to be a sovereign state. The state is to be in place for the security and general welfare of the people not for unlawlful detention and execution of its citizens whom they claim to represent and protect. As registered by Sulaiman, Abu Taysir is decapitated(247) and Salem is shot (277), both are drawn as single page spreads so as to emphasise the gravity ofboth the ruthless events, a technique often employed in graphic narratives, which is identified as a "splash page" (10) (Rey Cabero et al. 11).

Instances such as the aforesaid is in concord with Weber's definition of a state," the only human community that (successfully) claims a monopoly of legitimate physical violence for itself, within a certain geographical territory" (46). This is not to assert that every country runs itself by unleashing violence over its people, but most countries do operate under a legal framework which makes it viable for the government to discharge, under certain stipulatons, force and policing of its people. Admittedly the aforementioned one is certainly an extreme case. Children are not spared from the savagery either, as noted in *Freedom Hospital: A Syrian Story,* a thirteen-year old is killed(65). There are further mentions of arrest and torture of schoolboys at Daraa(70) and murdering of 64 children (108). It has to be noted that "killing and maiming of children" is the first of six grave violations against children in times of war ("Six grave violations against children in times of war"), which has been noticeably been absent and disregarded in the conflict, not to mention that it seems thus always and everywhere, without fail. The adult populationdoes have their share of anxieties and episodes of panic. As seen in Hamid Sulaiman's*Freedom Hospital: A Syrian Story*, Yasmin and Fawaz apportion their tribulations and what will come of the former's hospital and to their lives at large (214), for the purpose of indicating an unbroken conversation between the two characters Sulaiman employs an interconnected array of balloons; "the container of the text-dialogue spoken by character"(Eisner 163) and tails; "pointer leading to balloon to speaker" (Eisner 163). Though these two traits are ubiquitous within the medium of graphic narratives the unceasing pattern that the duo forms makes an impact, as instanced in the precedent.Sulaiman opts for a spread of two pages on which snow falls on a black background it also serves an evocative purpose as the fallen snow resembles a bloodstain pattern (216-17), this is an antecedent to an illustration of youtube video in the consecutive pages. Accordingly, this becomes a typical case of aspect- to -aspect

transition as defined by McCloud, that is "time seems to stand still in these quiet, contemplative combinations … rather than acting as a bridge between separate moments, the reader here must assemble a single moment using scattered fragments" (79).

A nation is to have its foundation supposedly on the inclusionary values of liberty and fairness, it does have autonomy over its internal and external affairs and should be able to endeavour recognition within its borders and beyond it. Nation has been conceived in a myriad of ways across the literature on the same, for the purposes of this paper Renan seems to be amply functional," A nation is therefore a large- scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future" (19). Walid Abu Qatada makes an eliciting speech towards a large gathering of people where he enlists 'the sacrifices' he has made which will contribute to the strengthening of their nationas jotted by Sulaiman(197).He continues his deliverance by detailing how he envisages the nation is to be formed in the ensuing days, which includes propaganda, affliction of violence ,threat to livelihood and even a strident policing of wardrobe choices, which would be adjudged in terms of appropriateness by the regime, as added by Sulaiman(198). The above-mentioned speaker and his kindred spirits patently have forgotten that a country ought to be bestowed with the will of its people. It is for the people, not against them.Within this narrative many are against the system and its devastatingly drastic measures, for example, Yasmin, Sophie,Fawaz, Abu Taysir, to name a few. Drawing from Renan, a nation should not be concerned "in annexing or holding on to a country against its will" (20), the reverse appears to be the order of the day. Qatada inadvertently adds that "soon we will celebrate the great Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (Sulaiman198), which surreptitiously attests that the country is to be formed and is not as organic an entity as himself and his acolytes hitherto purported. This does interactdeftly with Anderson's proposition on nation, "it is an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (6), though as a precedent to this Anderson does caution that nation and its various entailments "have proved notoriously difficult to define, let alone to analyse"(3). Nonetheless his perspective on nation is informative.

In the context of *Freedom Hospital : A Syrian Story,* the nation as apprehended by the likes of Walid Abu Qatada is imagined, primarily owing to the fact that it does not have any autonomy or governance even within the geographical terrain it poses to hegemonise over,additionally, it is expressly impossible to instil in a massive number of people that there is a fostered sense of the communal and the fraternal among them. The contention with respect to sovereignty has already been discussed elsewhere in the paper. This nation will also be limited as it is to be bound by borders, the site of discord occurs when people necessarily do not will to be within its frontiers are left without choice and are often intimidated into acceptance of a new model of a country that they have no recollection or remembrance of. Renan propounds that a nation has some constituents, one among them is " the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories" (19), notwithstanding the fact that memories could be for many reasons incoherent and disorienting as Abdul Razak

comments in the narrative “thoughts and memories become confused” (Sulaiman189). The regime unfalteringly tries to legitimise the parameters that they deploy to form the nation to be admissible. The entailments that are factorised into the marshalled nation are as diverse as geopolitical to religious whilst claiming the validity of their position, they appear to aspire for a continuous stable national identity and cultural consistency. Despite the substantial understanding that identity may be multifarious and cultures undulate over time and is rarely ever constant. Nonetheless, power- mongers are resolved to be at the apex without a trace of affinity towards the people they ostensibly are deputised for.

This paper has attempted to comment on the many forms a nation could take within a relatively shorter span of time and the modes and ways by which it could impact the residents of the area and the mechanisms of adaptation people would be required to make; even mandated to. This has been done under the framework of nation studies in simultaneitywith the close scrutiny of the graphic narrative*, Freedom Hospital : A Syrian Story*by Hamid Sulaiman, translatedinto English from French by Francesca Barrie. However, the paper does not claim to possess the ideational rigour to make pronouncements of any nature with accord to the events that have occurred and since unfolded in the territory, neither does the paper extend resolutions, as it is rather beyond its intended scope. Even so texts such as*Freedom Hospital: A Syrian Story* does have the potential to be instructional,so as to understand the myriad forms a country can take that many a time could turn detrimental to its people, this also serves as a cautionary statement so as the seeming stability and continuum elsewhere is not to be taken for granted.

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Elna Raj
Dr. M. Ashitha Varghese

Narratives of Resistance : Language and Marginality in Jhanvi Barua's *Next Door*

Abstract

The purpose of this research paper is to examine and demonstrate how Jahanvi Barua's Next Door simultaneously and tactfully celebrates the diversity and cultural richness of the region while debunking the homogenous identity which the politics of representation has left deeply entrenched. This paper examines the narratives of resistance in the anthology which makes it a seminal text in the repertoire of minority/resistance and "fourth world literature". It mainly focuses on the post-colonial and political use of language as it utilises the global reach of the English language while defamiliarizing it with the incorporation of terms in the vernacular in pursuit of asserting regional and cultural identities to debunk at once the superiority attributed to both western and mainstream Indian culture and literature. Thus, the study is an exploration of the implicit and explicit instances of linguistic resistance as the stories discuss and exemplify the normalization of the unjust politics of marginality, gender, maldevelopment, violence, and silence.

Keywords: cultural diversity, resistance narratives, post-colonial literature, linguistic resistance, vernacular integration, marginality

Jahnavi Barua's anthology, *Next Door,* both implicitly and explicitly demonstrates traces of resistance across multiple levels. While writing her stories in the English language for its global reach, she relies on bilingualism to asserts the regional and cultural identities of the northeastern region of India, especially Assam, to both the national and international audiences who have inadvertently or scrupulously denigrated, relegated, and also homogenized its otherwise diverse identities with the introduction of the category and or stereotypes of the Northeast.

Several linguistic attributes of her anthology, *Next Door*, along with its discussion and or critique of the historical, cultural, environmental, and other contemporary issues in the region, as well as the post-colonial trait of "ambivalence", a term mooted and discussed extensively by Homi K Bhabha in *The Location of Culture.* that it is replete with could be accentuated to validate the argument that the anthology is a pertinent text in the repertoire of minority and resistance literature in India.

According to Deleuze, minority literature could be explained by "using three main characteristics, firstly deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation (18). It has to be

Elna Raj is ICSSR Doctoral Fellow, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore.
Dr. M. Ashitha Varghese is Assistant Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore.

noted that both Bengali and English languages became popular in Assam during the colonial period. Since Bengali officials were recruited by the British for official proceedings in different departments, the Assamese language was subjugated not only by English but by Bengali. It was only later, when the Christian missionaries arrived for evangelisation, that the use of the English language became popular in Assam. Equally relevant is the author's stories which are enriched by her first-hand experiences of life in the Northeast, especially Assam, as well as the subsequent migration to and experiences in other regions inside and outside Indiafor instance her relocation to Bangalore and later, to the UK.

Central to the context is also a consideration of what could be argued for as a subset of minority literature, that is, the idea of "fourth world" as defined by George Manuel in 1974. He defined the fourth world as the indigenous people descended from a country's aboriginal population and who today are completely or partly deprived of the right of their own territories and its riches. It also constitutes natives, ethnic minorities, and the indigenous population who belong to economically and politically marginalized groups. The relevance of voices from among groups minority has been accentuated by Ashish Nandy, which Vandana Shiva quotes in her book, *Staying Alive:* "one must choose the slave's standpoint not only because the slave is oppressed but also because he represents a higher-order cognition which perforce includes the master as a human, whereas the master's cognition has to exclude the slave except as a 'thing'. Liberation must, therefore, begin from the colonized and end with the colonizer" (50).

Minority literature plays an indispensable role in resisting subjugation and consequently becomes an area of struggle to claim identity. Thus, it is termed as 'oppositional' or resistance literature (Sengupta 39). Invariably, all the stories in *Next Door* exemplify the transgression of one or all of "the rigid binaries between the colonizer and colonized, core and margin, civilization and barbarity" (Fay and Hayden 47), and also critique the unjust politics of exclusion and or marginality, gender, language, and representation among others.

Firstly, the anthology is written in English, which is the writer's second language, "A language which is not one's own, though one may have a good knowledge of it; a second language is a language which is one's own, though not one's first in order of importance, nor usually, the first to be learned. A foreign language is used for absorbing the culture of another nation; the second language is used as an alternative way of expressing the culture of one's own" (Naik 286).

Jahnavi Barua utilizes the international recognition of the English language to articulate the identity and diversity of the Northeast and its literature while resisting against the monopoly of the colonizer's language through her act of interspersing the narratives in English with words in Indian languages such as Assamese and Hindi. In this regard, she exemplifies a mode of resistance similar in its decolonizing spirit to that of

post-colonial writers such as Ngugi Wang Thiong'o and Chinua Achebe.For Achebe, his use of English entails 'altering', 'making new' a language which may have been forced on him but which, by now, he has claimed as his own. That appropriation of the oppressor's language constitutes a strength for Achebe. In a later essay, called "Colonialist criticism", first published in 1975, he writes: "And let no one be fooled by the fact that we may write in English for we intend to do unheard-of things with it" (Achebe qtd. in Maybin and Neil 281).

In her anthology, *Next Door,* Jahnavi Barua incorporates numerous Assamese words that capture the identity and cultural richness of the region, its traditional occupations, industries, and rituals among others.This is pertinent, for "it is equally important to insist on the need for metropolitan institutions and cultural practices to open themselves up to indigenous texts by encouraging learning and use of the languages by metropolitan scholars" (Ashcroft 17). The *Next Door* is also remarkable in terms of its use of regional appropriations of English as exemplified by the use of "goberment" for government, and "Saar" for Sir in addition to the simultaneous use of English and Assamese/Hindi words.

In the "Holiday Homework", a story of the bonding of members of three generations of people — an old man addressed as Barua-sir, and his neighbours, a young boy (Siddhartha Sarma) and his mother, Amrita. The writer's introduction of Siddhartha as "the boy [Siddhartha] makes little noise" to establish him in stark contrast to the "boys who [only] trail noise and bedlam and destruction in their wake" (159) that Barua-sir has known could be argued for as a deliberate attempt to debunk the popular misconception about and or tendency to homogenize people, especially boys or men from the North-East of India, as invariably violent.

Linguistically, this story exemplifies the remarkable conjunction of the Assamese word Xonand the English word Son, perhaps a clear consequence of the simultaneous reliance on the lingua franca for official purposes and the vernacular to celebrate/preserve one's language and literature. Siddhartha, the son in the story, is addressed as Xon, which means 'gold' in Assamese. Apart from relying on transliteration to present the Assamese word in her story written in English, the writer informs the reader of its enunciation, in relation to the similarity of and difference from uttering a similar-sounding English word, "Ah, Son or Xon, the first letter pronounced as a soft 'H' sound, the whole word said in a way that it rhymed with 'loan'. Xon, which means 'gold' in our tongue. A good name, a strong name, for a son" (243).

Moreover, as in the above case, the writer/narrator relies on transliteration to present an Asomiya hymn, "Ki diyapoojim", and even its spiritual significance and impact. It could be argued that Jahnavi Barua's use of the hymn and its espousal of selflessness and forgiveness stands in contrast to the popular preconception of the region as a perpetually violent atmosphere, and articulates the need to relinquish envy and selfishness, and instead embracing the acts of forgiveness, concentration, worship, and wisdom.

Several stories hint at the racist demeanour that Asian individuals, especially Indians, confront abroad. “A Fire in Winter” narrates the story of Dhrubajeet Mahanta or Jeet, and occasionally reminds one of Franz Fanon's description of his personal experiences “as a black intellectual in the whitened land” (14). His experiences abroad as a bright research scholar both “a wit and the sport” is told along with that of their maid, Buri, who nursed him more than his birth mother.

As the story progresses, tormented by the news of Buri beheading her husband and his mistress and also setting her body alight, Jeet leaves Manchester for Glasgow to visit his sister. At this juncture, the story accentuates his girlfriend, Rebecca, as well as her family's racial prejudice towards Asian men. For instance, Rebecca is infuriated as he seeks solace in his sister's affection and remarks: “Asian men seem to have a sister fixation, along with the old mother one”. Furthermore, he emphasizes (as Rebecca questions why he hardly spends time with her family): “that's because they don't seem to have been having a man of color sitting at their table” (1725).

While Mr. Fraser, his sister's neighbour, expresses his surprise as he travels “all the way from England!” to meet her; Jeet wonders if he would react positively had he known that he had come “all the way from India, all the way from the north-eastern tip of it, from the banks of a river that flowed down from the forbidden hills of Tibet?” (1836-60). He also gazes at the Portobello Beach, only to 'see' and feel that: “the Brahmaputra was before me[him]” and to be reminded of the steel grey waters and gulls (1883).

While articulating his confrontation with racism abroad, he describes his observations on Buri's life to demonstrate the ordeals of women in the Northeast. Vandana Shiva writes, “The category of masculinity as a socially constructed product of gender ideology is associated with the creation of the concept of woman as the 'other'. In this asymmetrical relationship, femininity is ideologically constructed as everything that is not masculine and must be subjected to domination” (47).

Having lived in the glare of the public world all her life; Buri never had had access to privacy in any form. She was for her father a mere source of financial security, he never visited her after the first two years of sending her away from home for work, but always sent in someone to collect her pay.

Barua's female characters, however, resist the oppressive circumstances where they find themselves in. Buri's choice to marry a 30-year-old man at the age of 51 despite others' opposition and her act of thrashing the man who peeped at her while bathing exemplifies a desire, as well as responses which flout oppression and exercise of agency. In several other stories, too, Jahnavi Barua foregrounds the normalized patriarchal oppression and the consequent denial of agency to women.“The Tiger” is set in Manas National Park during a family holiday. The story narrates how Babli is left alone with Ashish Singh, Assistant Conservator of Forests in Mothanguri, while the rest of the family is drunk at the party in the forest. While the man uses the opportunity to force

himself on her, a tiger is spotted near them, but only leaves after it has drunk its fill.

Babli's mother is a patriarchy indoctrinated woman who persistently scrutinizes and controls her. Babli incessantly remarks in the story that: "you [her mother] never let[s] me [her] do anything. Never let[s] me[her] go anywhere!" (2644). Although Babli was initially dumbfounded as Ashish laced his fingers through hers and kissed her; she lets his fingers lie in his. Her act of initiating physical intimacy with a man was her deliberate choice to subvert her mother's suppression of her desires.

"Sour Green Mangoes", too, narrates the disillusionment of a young woman, Madhumita, who is frustrated by her monotonous life as she is left to shuttle between her apathetic family and friendless workplace. Her overprotective parents live a carefree life as they depend wholly on her savings, and also deprive her of basic freedom and privacy. Eager to taste the mangoes in their neighbour's yard, she sneaks in only to be discovered by her neighbour, an engineer from Jorhat whose wife and family are away. As he cups her breasts, tantalized by his touch, as well as ignited by a desire to disobey her parents; she promises to return as he tells her: "Come back anytime you want… Anything you want, you only have two ask" (1200).

"Awakening" is a poignant story about Uma, who loses her only son Anuj to on-campus violence. After her journey to his hostel and college in Bangalore; she gradually becomes closer to her husband, who **w**as formerly aloof and distant. Central to the story is Uma's revelation about her own mother's humiliation for refusing to have a second childdespite the doctors' warning against having a second child due to her poor health condition.

While Uma is tormented by her mother for her silence as she copes with her son's death, her husband is 'normal and acceptable'. JahnaviBarua, here, sarcastically points out the harsh reality that "apparently, different things were [are] desirable in a man and a woman"(2084), although suffering is genderless. It is also relevant to note that her son was killed in a scuffle on campus as he rebuked the local boys who had misbehaved with some of the hostel girls.

Contrary to the aforementioned stories which exemplify how women exercise their agency to subvert suppression and satisfy their desires; "Next Door" accentuates the extent of domestic abuse and the politics of silence as women are brutally raped or killed:"You think that what time they would have grown accustomed to it, but they never do… We hardly need the television, do we; folks next door provide enough entertainment" (2743).

In the story, the narrator frequently addresses the reader as "You" who thus becomes embedded in the story to be reminded of the fact that the denizens of the North-east never get accustomed to but instead would resist, oppression and exploitation. It could be argued that it is this quotidian confrontation for basic rights and or survival that makes the

writer say that the "folks next door provide enough entertainment".

In the story, "Next Door", the writer describes the plight of Tengesi, a woman abandoned by her husband, as well as her daughter Maya as they are left to be humiliated and assaulted by her son who is an alcoholic. The events and or experiences are narrated by their neighbour's son and daughter using the third person:"sometimes when she [Tengesi] is late you hear the slapping sound of flesh hitting flesh. You hardly ever hear Maya. A soft murmur, a whimpering cry is all that you have heard" (2759).

As the story progresses, the children in the neighbourhood are intrigued by the silence that replaced Tengesi's words of abuse the next morning, and wonder if both the women had deserted the house for safety: "you had not heard Tengesi's morning invocations. You never hear Tengesi again. And no one ever speaks of it" (2759). Here, Barua accentuates the politics of the silence sustained by the oppressor's violence and the consequent death of the victim, as well as his physical strength and or aggression which prevents even those with the ability and the agency, as is the case with the narrators/neighbours to help fight against or end the abuse.

Ultimately, as the children see Maya in the verandah — "her belly, round a giant grapefruit"(2759), the realization that the son had impregnated his sister, and that Tengesi had been killed in the confrontation with her son dawns on the children who walk away 'silently' as they are left forever to grapple with the haunting truth.

Meanwhile, few stories in the anthology criticize the anthropocentric developmental projects that derail the balance of the ecosystem, as well as the very survival of all living beings on the planet simultaneously as they foreground, and debunk the marginality of the region, its culture and literature, as well as the stereotypes, and issues of the North East which are unknown to and or unaddressed by mainstream Indian literature, media, and population.

Moreover, the narratives impugn either patriarchy and or anthropocentric developmental projects, thereby evolving as feminist or eco-feminist accounts respectively. For instance, "The Magic Spell" depicts the experiences of Nilima, who exercises her agency and refuses to quit her job when demanded so by her husband. While exhibiting resistance and non-conformity to patriarchy; the writer impugns human solipsism and anthropocentric developmental projects to ultimately forge a balance between both deforestation and development, and feminism and patriarchy.

This story is also pertinent in terms of its use of stories within the story, which could be argued for as a method to reclaim the art or practice of storytelling which was once a quintessential aspect of the very identity of the North-Eastern literary tradition. Furthermore, it exemplifies the migration and or dislocation of the indigenous community in the past, the consequent severing of family ties, as well as the persistent combat between tradition and modernity since the establishment of the colonial regime.

Hence, the story is at once an attempt to leave the reader with hints of the sufferings of the land and its community, as well as to celebrate its identity.

The story, "River of Life", narrates the story of a mentally retarded man, Santanu (who feels estranged after his mother's death), and his resoluteness to save the Brahmaputra from "the foreign power" which was about to alter its course. On being told that "there is always the Supreme Court... a refuge, after all, a place to go to in times of trouble", although the routes were unknown to him and he had never been on a bus before, he left for Dispur and Delhi (484). His determination to save the river is pertinent, and is in itself an indictment of the indifference and apathy of the people, as well as the government towards the issue.

Insurgency is an important theme in the anthology. While digressing from the condemnation of the violence and danger posed by insurgent groups, the writer educates the readers about the underlying cause for their rise and the consequent political instability and rampant violence and in that her narratives evolve to be an indictment of the reasons that contribute to an insurgency, rather than the generalization and condemnation of the region for the same For instance, **"**Honeybees" juxtaposes the plight of innocent police officials who are posted in dangerous zones, as well as the unemployed youths from the villages who join insurgent groups and ultimately get killed in the encounters. In the story, Madan and his best friend Anupam decide to join the Assam Police who were recruiting in Nalbari for men for the Home Guards -- "in the fight for the motherland". Due to lack of alternatives and unemployment, despite the laborious task and also the deteriorating circumstances that they found themselves in, the unemployed youths from villages choose to serve the police for although the pay was not much and the job offered food and clothes and shoes — so that all the money could be saved for them to purchase a plot of land that would be unaffected during floods. Similarly, "The Patriot" exemplifies a case of Stockholm syndrome as Dhiren Majumdar, a former under-secretary in the Department of Education, Government of Assam (and the father of the Deputy Commissioner of Kamrup) develops compassion for the member of a banned terrorist group who sneaked into their wooden house after being severely wounded. The writer reiterates through the story that unemployment of the youth, regardless of being educated, as well as the lack of alternatives are the reasons for the persistence and rise of insurgency: "Do you know I passed my pre-university examinations? You had not thought I had, had you? And when I passed my interview for an appointment as a lower primary school teacher, they said I needed to pay one lakh rupees for the post. One lakh! Where would I get that kind of money? The bastards" (1539).

Thus, the account is remarkable for its protest against the stereotype of the region as primitive and its people as uneducated, while critiquing the politics of exclusion of the economically backward families which contribute to their involvement in insurgent

operations.The stories in the anthology foreground and or subvert the politics of gender, maldevelopment, violence, and silence -- all of which contribute to and sustain the politics of marginality of both the region and its population. However, the stories present yet another point-of-view that life continues to be, as easy and complicated as it is elsewhere. The sustenance and severing of family ties correspond to that between human beings and Nature. Many women subvert patriarchal norms, while some are 'silenced' for eternity by the same. While sustainable development attempts at once to preserve and prosper, over-exploitation, too, persists. Insurgent groups wreak havoc, but also due to unemployment and lack of alternatives. Despite the annual inundation and occasional malice that derail the rhythm of their lives, the people of the Northeast confront and overcome them. Many of them persevere to become scholars, doctors, farmers, etc either abroad or in India, some continue to be in the Northeast -- all of them confront their battles, most of them due to their region of birth and upbringing. These range from racist remarks abroad to poverty and ignorance within the country and the State. In conclusion, Jhanavi Barua's stories are eco-critical accounts, which simultaneously depict the quotidian struggles of the denizens of the North-East as they defend themselves from the politics of gender, maldevelopment, violence, and silence, and live their lives as normal as elsewhere.

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Gireesh. C
Dr. Dennis Joseph

Dialectics of Theory / Praxis : A Case Study on Mahasweta Devi and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

Abstract

The paper is an attempt to read the cultural and political significations of theory and praxis, normally conceived as the continuum of one to one engagement with a larger binary in action. The narratives of Mahasweta Devi, translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have been interpreted from the vantage point of practical enunciations of the theory propounded by the translator, ie.,Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. The study approaches the various changes in translation of Mahasweta Devi's subaltern texts in relation to the dialectical assemblages in Spivak's translated negotiations. The result is a complex network of mutual positioning in the author/translator existence. Translating the author from a theoretical standpoint makes Spivak's rereading on Imaginary Maps and Breast Stories to a self –emulated critiques ontext, author ,translator ,reader ,and critic into the abyss of interpretations. Gayatri Spivak has achieved a rare blend of theory/praxis- matrix in Mahasweta Devi through a reversal of conventional modes of critical analysis. This critique does not have a stipulated hierarchy of reading habits or customs ,rather it opens a radical reclaiming of one's own political and cultural meanings.

Keywords : Theory/Praxis, Translations, Dialectics, Critique, Interpretations

The ideas of theories are situated on an elusive plain of significations in the cultural imaginations of texts in myriad ways of actualities. Theoretical assumptions always mark the binary of praxis, as such, they always point to particular and specific objects in sight. The ontological and epistemological questions on theory lead this binary into aproblematic location of interpretations. The conventional demarcation has been marked as the direct relationship of theory as an analytical mode and praxis as the immediate practical reflections. Such categorical assumptions on the texts as the world generateliminal spaces in Spivak's translations of Mahasweta Devi. Thus , a matrix has been developed from the theory/praxis binary in order to produce specific hierarchies of interpretations. The history of theoretical discourse has never been on a linear trajectory with the temporal and spatial imaginations of the times. There are various reasons for the so called rigidity and incomprehensibility normally attached to the conventions of the theoretical scholarship. One of the striking parallels that can be identified with the emergence of an exclusive domain of theoretical knowledge has been associated with the idea of praxis. As a result, theory has always been tied together with the immediate

Gireesh. C is an Assistant Professor of English, Govt. Arts and Science College, Kondotty.
Research Scholar –St. Joseph's College (Autonomous) Devagiri, Calicut
Dr. Dennis Joseph is an Associate Professor of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous) Devagiri, Calicut

practical needs of the times or the spatial interpretations of the material world around.

The usual conceptions of theory-critical, political, philosophical, cultural, literary, linguistic. etc, attach special attention with their positions and perspectives. Consequently, theory as a heterogeneous combination of thought process, has been identified as a crude and rough form of intellectual exercises on public tastes and attitudes. The sense of heterogeneity erupts from the theory's multi-disciplinarity and multi-cognitive style of analysis of signs on the public ideological system of theorizations. Theories site complex fields of interpretive mechanisms and weave network of ideological constructions. Therefore, it is not easy to make a simplistic notion in relation to its philosophy, language and rhetoric and its representation. Here, the representation becomes a complex phenomenon in action. Representing the origins of textual autonomy normally bestowed on the external aspect of an outside element - a theory - conveniently placed as the inherent order of the textual existence. Thus, theory has acted as a theological interventions to the text – a piece of materiality that needs origins on experiences. Spivak exemplifies situations on the radical proliferation of such predicaments that make a translator as an active representer in Devi's narratives.

The emergence of theory and praxis to particular matrix of materialty opens wide discourses on textual autonomy and interpretative mechanism. The concepts related to the praxis as the inherent domain of the text and the sign problematise the entire machinery of interventional mode of critique in our times. A three-fold domain of interpretive machines take place in theory/praxis binary in the wider situations, i.e.,linguistic, philosophical and plural sites of critical mode. The philosophical strains of theoretical assumptions possess multitudes of positional ties-ontological, epistemological and phenomenological- through which the theoretical process has been regenerated into varied forms of critical analysis. The ontological questions are generated from their existential realm and open crucial questions on the self –reflective mannerisms of critique. As a result, theory has become a self revelatory critique of its own vulnerabilities. The epistemological associations of the texts' interpretations become a mutual field of criticism in which the other has been always assimilated not by violence but by association and appropriations. These are not exclusive sites on the matrix of theory/praxis , rather they are contingent modes of critiquing the sense of a universal methodology for the ever evolving mode of textual solution on every ages.

The epistemological aspects on the theoretical stance problematises the very structures of the existing knowledge system to which the theory works on its own interpretive culture. Theory has been neither on the misinterpretive side of knowledge-making machine nor an interpretive medium , rather it accounts for a mediating position on the larger nuances of episteme with discursive practices of the texts as aresurrected process. This has always been a mighty debate around the emergence of knowledge production in the theory and the customary mechanism of the praxis. Theories reproduce

systems of episteme already produced as the 'structures of feelings'-an affective-political sphere as commented by Raymond Williams on the entire possibilities of articulations. In the structures of lived experiences, theorizations have become an organic process than a merere-reading for the semantic precision. Theories do not have a self placed advantage of being the centre of an action. They become activated while a multitude of other factors are combined into a disparate sense of critique. These factors are not predetermined order of the temporal procedures such as critical readings or interventional mechanism with a teleological order.

The theoretical reproductions are not a linear imitation of the knowledge mechanism as such, for theories resist modular process of reproducing the lost aura, rather they reproduce impure segments of absent aura of the textuality. The epistemological association of various theories of critiquing the rites of knowledge force theories a reproducing mechanism of the immediate reality. The ideas of enunciations reverse the conventional humanities as liberal structures in cultural imaginaries of theoretical rereading. The liberal – humanist conception of a singular position on the textual as well as narrative recitals have been subverted in the plural concept of theorization. The idea of pluralism does not signify multitudes alone , it questions perspectives of signaling onto which the traditional locations are played for preconceived ideas of the times. The interdisciplinary nature also has triggered themes to put itself for plural pathways to interpret various notions of ideas in specific. Plurality is not a neutral space of silent order. It is a political spectrum critiquing its own perspectives without trying to a dominant order of political analysis.

The illusions of theoretical applications are materialized through the imminent application as praxis- as specific practices of cultural and social aims for the particular semantic order. This is termed as the theory /praxis binary in the contingent order of critical thought. The questions relate to such emergence of the praxis as the presence of meta-analysis as the theory as the absent origins of self reflexive critique clash with their own positions of meanings making process. The liberal forms of praxis structures the singular fashions of textuality whereas an assemblage of praxis might deal into a self-critique, non-regulatory sphere of political interpretations. Praxis is not an immediate opposition of theory , rather it is attached to areas of intangible practices demanding as the matrix of theory as the values on which subtle social, cultural and political practices are structured, analyzed and disseminated in the public imaginaries and the lived experiences. The possible reasons of apprehensions on theory as the solid set of specificity comes from the desires of conceptual clarity in practices; of materiality that can be identified in the mundane fields of human interactions as flesh of the other as the lexicon of hymns. An unambiguous site on singular conceptions makes theories into a mirror of realities than a self –revelatory critique of texts. But in many cases, theories disavowinter pretations, when praxis produces results with pointing to desires of applicability on the texts. A neat distinction between theory and praxis itself is a liberal

arrangements of the textual signs in a particular forms of ' transcendental signifiers' as Jacques Derrida reminds on the significations on singular signified. As praxis has never achieved practical concerns ,theories touch these aspects of social practices from a renewed sense of cultural attachments in translations.

The trajectory of social, cultural and political practices erupt into a theoretical dominance can be seen in the translated texts of Mahasweta Devi by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Devi's texts titled, *Imaginary Maps*and *Breast Stories* were translated by Gayatri Spivak from a varied sources of theoretical position, engaging self –emulating style of critical analysis with forewords , afterwords and interpretive essays appended on the texts. These translated texts exhibit ample textual sources of theory /praxis where the author and the translator share an uneven spaces of self-critique and moments of engagements. Mahasweta Devi narrates three subaltern gendered texts in each of *Imaginary Maps* and *Breast Stories* . The stories in the collection, *Imaginary Maps* are "The Hunt" , "Douloti , the Bountiful" and "Pterodactyl , Puran Sahay and Pirtha" navigate through the subaltern resurgences of resistances from the vantage points of reversing the affective sensibility of the popular order of significations. The stories in *Breast Stories*– "Draupadi", "Breast-Giver" and"Behind the Bodice :Choli Ke Pichhe"-do not take a stipulated position as such , rather ,they pose silent rhetoric of various practices of ideological structures that make them witnesses of massive loss of lived experiences.

Gayatri Chakravorty has translated *Imaginary Maps* in 2001 and *Breast Stories* in 2002. Both these texts , as Brinda Bose comments expose self proclaiming nature of the translator as the self justified master of her own theories. Brinda Bose' criticism on Spivak comes out from the theoretical position adopted by Spivak on two grounds. One is her academic sphere as the Western member and the second one is her rights of representing the subaltern. She comments "Spivak's feminism suffers at the cost of justifying theoretical scholarship" (Bose 273)These questions are still valid, actually Spivak has answered those accusations in her own words as " strategic essentialist "position on the reproductions on the interventional politics. The concept of strategic essentialism places a massive theoretical interventions in practical needs of the ethical and responsible position in Spivak. The concept defends many of her own authorial stance in advance. Eventually, Spivak has defended her position as a critique who herself placed as a sort of native informant for the First World. Spivak posits self critique as a powerful domain in her theoretical analysis.

Mahasweta Devi's narratives have been generally considered as the realistic texts with varied social missions to transform the public consciousness at large. This is a pre-judgment on her plethora of narratives in Bengali by a variety of translators including Gayatri Chakravoty Spivak. The theory /praxis binary enters into the translations of Mahasweta Devi when Spivak theorises Devi for the subaltern position and justifies theoretical scholarship for a radical conclusion of political association. *Imaginary Maps*

includes a well-known foreword and an introduction to the possible meaning making on the Third World narratives. Here, Spivak associates Devi's narratives to the threshold of making active interventional politics through the portrayal of gendered subaltern in action. The stories in the collection pose the ideological constraints conceived by Spivak on the narratives of Devi that have been theorized by the translator herself. She has encountered the rhetorical gaps in Devi from the theoretical points as the First World scholar who reads the Third World like Senanayak, a dominant character in the story, and makes a space for the modern reader in advance.Gayatri Spivak makes a radical comment on the mutuality of translated process as "to surrender in translation is more erotic than ethical "(Spivak 183).

Gayatri Spivak with her rereading on the narratives of Mahasweta Devi has generated two fold assumptions on the nature of critique as the self – reflexive process. One of the major reasons for this attitude comes from the notion that the author should be translated endlessly with ethical interventions. A theoretical domain of dialectics has been emerged from the author and the translator in the conceptual formations in Mahasweta Devi and Spivak. Such social practices are not the domains of the exclusive fields of significations. Because, Spivak has oriented from the gendered norms that are produced from the popular imaginations. In Mahasweta Devi's *Breast Stories*, Spivak has appended an introduction based on the Marxist-Potstructural approaches through which rereadings are deconstructed with a self reflective mode. The critical and theoretical postulations driven by Spivak have been directed not as the theory /praxis binary but as a dialectical assemblage in action. The section titled 'breast giver': for author, reader, teacher, subaltern, historian…" is a close example for the analysis. Spivak's translations on Devi are theoretical intervention to the social practices of subaltern experiences moulded from the dialectical orientations as textual analysis. Here, the predominant concern is that theory doesn't easily correlate as the tangible forms of praxis or praxis as devised directly from the theoretical postulations.

Spivak as the translator /theoretician and Mahasweta Devi as the author / practitioner logic is highly minimalistic for it does not account for the social circulations of the fictional narratives. What has been achieved from the twin, contesting phase of mutual readings are relevant in assessing textual formations as praxis. In both of these cases , theory has emerged as the self-modulated matrix of reflexive criticism as the complex mediations of the author and translator. The concept of an author with stipulated praxis framework has been situated in the fictional movements in Devi ,whereas Spivak from her theoretical perspectives supports many of Devi's ideologies as an author of specific being of social and cultural transformation. As a result , Spivak has to cut short theoretical rigidity on Mahasweta Devi so as to reach out the textual process in the author.These processes have been taken place brilliantly in Spivak's appendix to the *Breast Stories* as the totality of theory /praxis binary into dialogic mediations.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism itself acts as a safety valve to the theoretical rigidity and practical sense of the modernity devised form the frontiers of Post structural medium of textual plurality. The dialogic of theory /binary has become subtle fields in these two contradictory figures as dialectics of theory /praxis matrix emerges out of this textual, cultural, and political refashioning in Devi and Spivak. This position is not a conclusive one, rather provisional and unstable in many modes of critical contestations. The dialectical positioning helps Spivak to loosen Devi's narratives as well as praxis oriented philosophy to a different spectrum of critiques. The very position of translator and author poses self proclaiming challenges in Devi and Spivak. Praxis/theory dialectics reduces the interpretive risks of solidifying meanings into established structures of identities. Dialectics opens a larger fields of mutually contesting spheres of ideologies placing all the positions into critical assumptions. The author /translator , theory /praxis , the First world scholar /the Third world informant binaries have become thin in Devi and spring the moments dialectical assemblages erupt on the texts.Thus, the usual frames of praxis as a result of the theorizations of the present have been subverted in the translations of Devi by Spivak. Praxis has achieved a self –reflexive space of critiquing the other with its own unstable order of ambivalences.

Gayatri Spivak's attempts to translate the varied modes of Mahasweta Devi's narratives juxtapose the normalized conceptions into the structures of interventional politics of the gendered subaltern and the radical proclamation of high theorizations into the Third World homogenization of literary theory. The paratextual theorizations of Spivak have opened a wider semantic location to Mahasweta Devi without specific orientations to the predetermined textual positions. Dialectical assemblages with the rhetorical gaps of Devi as an author and Spivak as the translator /theorist navigate from the established order of identities on which both the author and the translator assert their immortality by theorizing the other by assimilations. This process has been materialized through the radical rejection of theory as the higher order of signifying practices to a non-binary moments of praxis as the embedded affective experiences on the texts and the world.

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Jyothis Cyriac
Annie V. Verghese

Destigmatizing Disability and Sexuality : Perspectives and Possibilities through the Lens of *Accsex*

Abstract

In popular imagination, disability and sexuality are often conceived as incongruous terms and there is a tendency to ignore the realities of both issues, considering them taboo and stigmatised. As a result, media depictions of disabled people having sexual lives are hardly seen.People with disabilities are also sexual beings who have feelings and fantasies like any other human being, but they are often unable to fully express their sexuality. Although a plethora of studies have been conducted and are ongoing within the field of disability studies, research combining disability and sexuality is rare.

This paper attempts to critically examine the blending of these two terms in popular imagination. By analysing the documentary Accsex, directed by Shwetha Ghosh, the paper tries to emphasize a change in perspective about disability and sexuality. Accsexbrilliantly documents the lives of four differently abled women and their views about sexuality, exposing the flaws and facts in the media representation and societal notions about disabled people and their sexuality. The candid and assertive narratives of the four women, by subverting the notion of abnormality associated with disability, explore their ground reality. Accsex also to touches upon certain common issues like education of the differently abled, healthcare access, stereotypes related to body image and sexuality, and so on.Moreover, by analysing the innovative techniques used by the filmmaker, the paper also attempts to understand the role of documentary films as a powerful medium for advocacy.

Keywords : Disability, Sexuality, Accessibility, Stereotypes, Stigma, Misrepresenta - tions

Shweta Ghosh's *Accsex*, a documentary about four different women with disabilities who "reclaim agency and the right to unapologetic confidence, sexual expression, and happiness" (Ghosh), is an excellent attempt that explores different stereotypes and misconceptions associated with disability and sexuality. It is an eye-opener to the ground reality of the disabled. Through the candid, assertive and engaging narratives of their life, these women subvert the notion of abnormality associated with disability and redefine the new normal in the context of their living reality. Abha, Natasha, Kanti and Sonali share their views on life, experiences and aspirations within "the questions of acceptance, self-assurance and resistance to the normative" (Majeed). *Accsex*, released in September 2013, has heralded many discussions regarding women's disabilities and sexuality. The

Jyothis Cyriac is an Independent Scholar
Annie V. Verghese is an Assistant Professor in English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous), Devagiri, Kozhikode

film has been screened at several festivals and various avenues, including public and organizational screenings, colleges, film clubs and cafes throughout the world and has garnered many awards and acclaim to date.

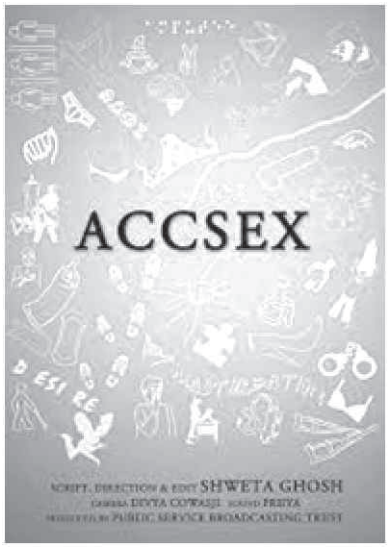

Fig.1. Poster of *Accsex*

Abha, who did home schooling till 8th grade, has three master's degrees and founded an organisation to deal with the issues of persons with disabilities. She feels that financial independence, access to public spaces and access to sexual health services and information are a few concerns that influence a person's sexual expression. Kanti, one of the friendliest and most cheerful staff members at APJ School, has had her fair share of challenges when it comes to relationships. She does not think that disability should be considered while seeking a life partner and she would love to be with a non-disabled man who respects her rights and desires.

When the documentary is shot, it is already three years since Sonali and Yogesh have been married. Although things can appear challenging on some levels, for them life is ordinary. They like going out to eat and watching movies together. Natasha finds it amusing that people find her 'normal'. She wishes that there was no such separation of the 'normal' from the 'abnormal'.In order to avoid being constantly reminded of her perceived inadequacy, Natasha has created an identity for herself as an independent person who enjoys creating art, writing, playing and dreaming of a better future.

Accsex, the title of the documentary itself is precise and insightful. *Accsex* is a combination of two words– Access and Sex, implying access to sex. It is the most apt title for this documentary that eloquently confluences the two terms that usually never go together– disability and sexuality.

Accesex begins with the warning that it "may subvert the viewing expectations of an able-bodied audience" (00:00:22). It opens by depicting symbols of people who are able-bodied as well as disabled. Next a few traits that one might expect in a partner are listed (e.g., loving, sexy, intelligent), concluding with a one-word question "disabled?". Then a series of binary terms that often categorise people are listed (e.g., sexual-asexual, beautiful-monstrous). Posters of Bollywood films that dealt with disability are shown one by one which provide a chance for the audience to reflect over how the mainstream cinema portrayed disability. *Accsex* sets the tone of the fifty-one-minute documentary with its opening scenes itself.

The documentary then proceeds to introduce Sonali. She is seen working when shown for the first time. She claims that her parents sent her to study at the National Association for the Blind in Delhi from Amritsar. "It's not about other people accepting my disability […] It's about me understanding it," (00:02:56 – 00:03:05) she says. She also outrightly rejects the disrespectful yet common notion that she is 'abnormal' because she is visually impaired. "Abnormal, for me, would be something out of the ordinary," (00:03:55 – 00:04:00) says Sonali Jain. "If I am disabled, there are lakhs of people who are disabled who cannot do the same things. How is that abnormal?" (00:04:05 – 00:04:10) she adds.

Then the film introduces Kanti, who contracted polio at an early age. However, Kanti is seen effortlessly riding her scooter on the busy streets of New Delhi in the introductory scene. She recounts an incident when she wanted to go to Shirdi, a pilgrim centre. Her father rebuffed her request to go. She claims that he insisted that "two females" cannot go together as she wanted to go with her mother. Not ready to give up, Kanti completes the trip with her younger brother and she also manages to balance herself on a horse during the trip despite everyone's warning that she would fall off.

Abha is scrolling through a series of photographs from her childhood on Facebook when she is introduced for the first time. Here the filmmaker also comes in as an interviewer. It can be seen that Abha politely but firmly asserts herself to her mother who tries to enter, claiming the space she shares with the filmmaker and asking her mother not to open the door to avoid disturbing the lights they have set in her room. Thesignificance of this claim can be understood later on when Abha shares more about her experiences and overprotective nature of her parents.

Natasha is drawing when the camera first captures her. She shares a story that happened when she was much younger. A classmate asked her when her "illness" would be cured and she would stop being deaf. It was necessary, according to Natasha, to explain that deafness is not a disease and that she would always be deaf. She chuckles, "I remember that was very funny for me"(00:07:15). She also discusses about the universal symbols for accessible restrooms for the disabled. She elaborates on how the symbol is dehumanising as well as desexualising.

When you got to the toilet and you see the signs for 'man' and 'woman', he is very full bodied; he has got flesh. His arms, stomach and legs are all proportionate. His head is proportionate to his body.But if you see the man on the wheelchair, he looks like furniture. His edges are very sharp as opposed to the man's symbol where the edges are rounded. I prefer the icon by Nathaniel Sidwell. It depicts a man on a wheelchair and he is very proportionate; his arms are at the proper place and rounded. The wheel is separate from the man. When you see this, you feel like this is a human, a man in his own right. The other symbol does not look like a person. People with handicaps tend to be desexualized (00:23:55 – 00:24:08).

Fig.2,3,4 Screenshots from the film *Accsex*

Accsex is permeated with private experiences and enlightening narration. The switch between the narrativesof the four women and their distinctly varied tales is creative. Viewers encounter them in various settings, including their homes, workplaces and public spaces. They are captured with and without their family, friends or lovers. Collectively, they illustrate what it means to live at the confluence of gender and disability through experiences involving visits to the gynaecologist, access to public spaces, being physically assaulted in school, ongoing infantilization by family members and the taboo surrounding sexuality.

While presenting the intimate feelings and aspirations of the four women characters, this documentary also highlights various other concerns of persons with disabilities. Abha points out the dehumanizing attitude of society that perceives people with disability as either 'pitiable' or 'superhuman', completely neglecting their identity as an ordinary human being. She asks, “What are we applauded for? Just for existing?”(00:26:16). Kanti is not ready to compromise her job and financial independence despite all the external

pressures and discrimination that she faced even from her father. Natasha discusses gender-specific norms of behaviour, such as covering one's mouth when laughing and sitting like a woman. Sonali explains how other people's reactions play a significant role in the way one perceives his/her own appearance, when one cannot see. This develops into body image over time. The film also highlights the lack of sex education among the disabled community by portraying how misconceptions like menstrual blood being 'dirty' still prevail. Mini-tales on sex, libido, menstruation and body image are interwovenalong with these stories.These are illustrations sketched by Natasha, to which animation has been applied. These mini-tales do not come across as digressions from the narratives of the four women;rather they accentuate the topics that the film explores.

Fig.5,6 Screenshots of the mini-tales in *Accsex*

There are different kinds of disabilities. Sensory disability and physical disability are two significant types of disability. It is observed that there is a hierarchy of stigma associated with different kinds of disabilities. Visible disabilities (physical disabilities) may be more stigmatised than invisible disabilities (like hearing disabilities), thus pointing toward a hierarchy of stigma faced by persons with disabilities. Natasha's narration vividly depicts the hierarchy of stigma associated with disability. Though people appreciate Natasha's beauty at the first glance, their attention goes to her hearing impairment when they discover it. "It was a bit of a wonder to many when I told them of my deafness. They would tell me, 'Oh, you seem so normal', and I would be likewhat did you expect?" (00:22:30) says Natasha.

This hidden hierarchy is also reflected in Abha's narration, who has a physical disability. While talking about her experiences in the hospital, she remarks with pain that she is being considered a mere human body, not a human being. As Abha says:

> If I go to a gynaecologist for a check-up, I will be picked up like a sack by four ward boys and dumped on the examination table…No one will care about the dupatta falling off my shoulder. Even the doctors will not care because to them, I am a human body, not a human being, a woman with my own dignity" (00:11:20 – 00:11:28).

In the case of Abha, the wheelchair makes it obvious that she has a disability. "If I walk into a beauty parlour in India, people give a look that says, 'why does she need it?' But, it's my body and my wish" (00:11:40 – 00:11:45) asserts Abha.

It is comparably easy to find a life partner for a person with invisible disability than a person with visible disability. The media and the constructed societal perceptions contribute a lot in idealisation of the 'perfect body'. According to*Sexuality and Disability in the Indian Context*published byTARSHI:

> In societies where there is a premium on beauty, youth and fitness, people with visible disabilities are particularly stigmatised. The more 'different' they look from the 'ideal' as projected through the mass media and films, the more discrimination and stigma they encounter. In society's collective illusion and idealisation of the 'perfect' body, a person's visible disability gets the most attention and their other aspects as individuals are ignored. So, for instance, a person with one hand or leg is seen as a person without a limb rather than a human being with desires, hopes, fears and longings like anyone else (111).

In the popular imagination, sex is something related to the beauty of the body and physical fitness. Sometimes society's view is so narrow that persons with (visible) disabilities are perceived as not capable of sex and that they lack sexual feelings. This flawed perception most of the time influences a disabled person's attitude leading to low self-esteem, negative body image and inferiority complex. The notions of what is desirable and attractive and what is not and the myth of the 'perfect' body get internalised, often suppressing desires and aspirations. Seldom do people with disabilities get a chance to express their ideas and experiences about relationships and sexuality.

Instances in the documentary film that point this – Sonali, who is visually impaired, tries to 'see' herself by what others 'show' her. Sonali explains, "When you cannot see, you always perceive yourself based on what others tellyou about you" (18:14 – 00:18:20). She says that when people tell her that she looks good in a particular colour, she buys clothes in those colours. Another instance is in one of the animated mini-tales. The girl in the wheel-chairhighlights how all the models in magazines are tall and slim; therefore, they look 'sexy', and she is fat and therefore 'not sexy'. However, she refuses to accept this notion and argues that even she can also look 'sexy'.

A particular scene from the film *Barfi* (2012) is shown where the character of Priyanka Chopra, who has some autistic features, tries to imitate the dressing style of Ileana D'Cruz's character, the so-called 'normal'.The scene portrays that urge to have that specific body shape and the desire to fit into that beauty standard. This video is played alongside Abha's assertion on her positive body image – "I love myself… I admire myself" (00:26:30), seeming like an attack against the unauthentic representation of the disabled in mainstream cinema.Though a well-acclaimed film, it failed to do away with

the infantalisation associated with disability.The media regularly stereotypes differently-abled people as behaving and dressing like children.Disabled people are seldom regarded as adults. Abha speaks about her experiences at family gatherings.People would approach her, treat her like a childand give her excessive hugs. Specifically looking at the Indian context, this protectiveness of the parents and the infantilization of disabled people is widespread. According to*Sexuality and Disability in the Indian Context*:

> Even today, the woman is seen as the repository of the family's honour in many if not most Indian families. Whether she has a disability or not, the onus of upholding the family's izzat lies with the woman. Parents tend to be over-protective of daughters especially once they attain puberty. This may or may not be so in the case of girls and women with disabilities. Families that believe people with disabilities are non-sexual, childlike and/or sexually unattractive may not see the need to protect their daughters with disabilities from unwanted sexual advances. It is often an unconscious belief that is played out as carelessness with respect to looking out for the safety of children and adults with disabilities. On the other hand, parents of girls with disabilities may feel more pressured to ensure the safety of their daughters because they are aware of the vulnerabilities they face. This added pressure can take the form of protectionism, strictness, unwillingness to give their daughters any space/privacy to make friends or be with friends etc (128).

There are stills in the documentary film that unravel the general beauty concept of the mainstream society.

Fig.7,8 Screenshots from the film *Accsex*

These 'perfect' body images appear in between the narrative, persuading the audience to rethink their internalised beauty concepts. A random flash mob video from a shopping mall is also incorporated into the narrative. Interestingly, the background song of the narrative is none other than "Hey Sexy Lady…"

In the Indian context, disability and sexuality are two incongruous terms often considered stigmatised and taboo. Moreover, in legislation, programmes and policies, the concerns of people with disabilities are frequently viewed from a welfare perspective. An overview of educational literature and media reveals how the mildest physical and

psycho-social disorders are viewed through a charity-tinted lens and are perceived as 'abnormal'. Only a handful of attempts have been made in the pantheon of cinema to combine disability and sexuality. Truthful representation of disability and candid portrayal of a disabled person's sexuality is rare.

Making *Accsex* was not an easy processand it was also the debut film by Shwetha Ghosh. Dealing with such sensitive topics requires extensive research and a careful selection of the people who are to become the subjects of the film. It was hard to find people because she had to get them talk not just about their disabilities but also about their sexuality. "Sexuality is a more private matter, and most people are unwilling to share their experiences about it. I already knew Natasha and Sonali, but finding the other two took much effort," (Paul 1) says Ghosh. In addition, PSBT offered a limited time to complete the whole filming process, roughly four months. Although Ghosh wanted to include people from different strata of the society in this film, she had to limit the setting to Delhi and restrict her area of focus to physical disability. The limited fund was another reason that constricted her from expanding her research area.

The film revolves around women from the urban social strata because they all live in and around the capital city. Everyone has access to education and can afford good health care facilities. All the four women have jobs to depend on and can make their own decisions. This is not the case with millions of people in India living with disabilities in the rural, interior regions of the country. Most of the time, they do not have access to education and good health care facilities due to the geographical location or financial and social backwardness. This a major research gap that needs to addressed. There is a lot of scope for further research in this area of disability studies, that is, the reality of the disabled from the lower strata of the society.

Shwetha Ghosh uses some innovative techniques in the film that make the audience to transcend their role as mere passive viewers to active viewers. There are parts in the film where there is intentional blurring of video, jumbling the subtitles and muting of audio. This isto give the able-bodied audience an experience of being in the shoes of differently-abled people, at least those with sensory disabilities. On first watch, the audience would be confused about whether all these are technical glitches or deliberate attempts made by the filmmaker.Close inspection reveals that Shwetha has effectively used this technique at specific intervals to make the so-called able-bodied at least momentarily experience the disability.

Fig.9,10 Screenshots from the film *Accsex*

The title of the film first appears in Braille script and then in English, in the beginning of the film. Similarly at the end, credits first appear in Braille script and then English. Through this the director utilizes the power of advocacy of media especially that of documentary films.

However, Ghosh points out that later she realized that from the perspective of a differently-abled person, this 'momentary experience of disability' does not serve its purpose. It is rather problematic because they cannot experience this step-in, step-out process and cannot experience the so-called able body even for a moment. For a non-disabled person, it is possible to experience disability, though it is not their lived experience, through techniques like cripping up. ('Cripping up' is when a non-disabled actor takes on the role of a disabled character and their portrayal often involves mimicking the physical characteristics of a specific impairment or medical condition). The non-disabled person crips up for some time to step into the experience of a disabled person and this is easily reversible. So,in the case of the technique used in *Accsex*, the question of political correctness arises, that is, to create such a momentary experience because disabled people cannot enjoy the privilege of stepping in and stepping out of disability.

According to Bill Nichols, the famous American film critic, there are six types of documentaries. Among them, "reflexive documentary mode focuses on the relationship between the filmmaker and the audience, pushing viewers to reflect on their perceptions and re-analyse their notions of truth. Unlike the expository documentary, the reflexive mode does not examine outside subject matter—it exposes the documentary-making process" (Film 101: Understanding Reflexive Documentary Mode). There is a particular scene in the documentary where Abha's mother interferes in the conversation between the filmmaker and Abha. She comes and enquires if they need anything to eat or drink and Abha warns her not to interrupt the filming process as the lights and arrangements have been made in the room. Although it seems natural, Shwetha included this interference deliberately without editing, as part of making the documentary reflexive. This particular technique becomes even more pivotal because Abha complains regarding the overprotective nature of her family in the conversation and the film maker wants to make it clear to the audience that a film is being made and the subject (here Abha) is not compelled to say anything.

> The process of movie making should be visible. The audience needs to know a film is being made. Its more about letting people know there is someone behind the camera who is mediating what you are watching. Abha's assertion gives her a lot more agency because she is aware that a film is being made (Ghosh).

Another commendable technique employed in the film is the use of the film's subjects to enrich the narrative as a sort of participatory process, that is, by interspersing of

illustrations sketched by Natasha and the poem at the end written and recited by Abha. It gives a perfect ending to the film as it features the four women in all their confidence, celebrating their beauty and sexuality and embracing their disability with grace. In fact, at the end of this documentary, the existing idea of sexuality is deconstructed. The director herself also mentions:

> We asked these people to pose in a way that made them feel sexy and it threw opennew definitions. For instance, Sonali and her husband, Yogesh — both are blind — held hands through the shoot. Sonali said that they not be able to look into each other's eyes, but they could hold hands. It shattered our assumptions of what can be considered sexy (Paul 2).

People with disabilities are also sexual beings and have similar desires as non-disabled people. They have the right to explore their sexuality and seek pleasure while being comfortable with their body. For this, they need information and assistance to enable them to have healthy, self-affirming sexuality andequal rights as their non-disabled counterparts. This will empower them to be more confident and make decisions about their sexual lives. Documentaries like *Accsex* eloquently address these concerns, but remain underexplored within the field of disability studies.

Accsex also opens the door to the vast lacuna in sex education. Sex education is often looked upon with mistrust and neglect as there is a flawed idea that it only imparts information about how to have sex. Along with information about safe sex, topics like menstrual hygiene and management, contraception and other sexual and reproductive health concerns also comes under sex education. The issue is that this information is considered irrelevant for people with disabilities and hence not provided. The avenues for people with disabilities to learn about sexuality are few as many do not attend school or college. This issue aggravates if they are based in some rural area with limited internet access or libraries. They depend on their family or other local institutions for information in such cases. In one of the animation scenes in *Accsex,* the narration touches on this aspect by revealing the anxiety of the first menstrual experience.Documentaries like *Accsex* can contribute tremendously towards this goal as it is an excellent medium to spread awareness. For instance, the animation sequences regarding menstruation and body image are insightful and compelling, even for school children.

Accsex invites attention to the area of media representation of disabled people. The film also challenges to re-evaluate the existing ideas regarding sexuality. This documentary can enlighten young minds, dispel their misconceptions and contribute to eradicating prejudice and apathy towards disabled people and their innate sexual aspirations.

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Kavitharam T. R.

Redefining Post-humanism : Analyzing the Cyborg as the Perfect Husband in the Korean Drama *My Happy Home*

Abstract

'My Happy Home' is a Korean drama in which a humanoid cyborg is enacting the perfect husband concept of a(ny) woman .There is a paradigm shift in the sense that the cyborg version earlier in the reels were eerie almost always aroused 'uncanny valley' effect. This proposed study analyses the paradigm shift in the approach of human being towards the cyborgs and also the concept of 'happy home'. In the digital era, human emotions are becoming more sensitive, and people are increasingly unwilling to settle for anything less than absolute perfection.South Korean drama "My Happy Home" offers a gripping story that expands the definition of happiness at home in the post humanist world of today. This article explores how the series juxtaposes the traditional human qualities of tenderness and care with the precision and reliability of a cyborg, crafting a new paradigm of an ideal partner in a domestic setting. The drama deals with the transformation of a human into a cyborg, designed to be the perfect husband who can surpass the human limitations in his ability to support his wife's emotional needs.

Keywords : Fantascienza, Humanoids, Post-humanism,futuristic, trauma andcyborg companion

In the rapidly evolving landscape of technology, post-humanism and cyborg fantascienza (science fiction) have emerged as critical frameworks for exploring the boundaries of human identity, capabilities, and the integration of advanced technologies. Post-humanism, at its core, challenges traditional notions of humanity by envisioning a future where artificial enhancements and cybernetic integrations fundamentally redefine what it means to be human. Cyborg fantascienza extends this exploration through imaginative narratives that blend human elements with robotic and cybernetic enhancements, offering profound insights into the potential and pitfalls of such integrations.

The South Korean drama "My Happy Home" exemplifies this exploration by presenting a unique narrative that intertwines the life of a scientist with the creation of a cyborg husband. The protagonist, a brilliant scientist traumatized by her parents' faithless marriage and a deceitful friendship, immerses herself in her work, achieving significant advancements in robotics. Her former friend whom, whose own research has failed, returns under tragic circumstances and is transformed into a cyborg husband, embodying the post-human ideal of technological perfection.

Kavitharam T.R. is an Assistant Professor in English, Panampilly Memorial Government College, Chalakudy

This transformation serves as a central narrative device, allowing the series to delve into the complexities of creating a perfect partner through technological means. The cyborg husband is programmed with qualities such as tenderness, empathy, and unwavering loyalty, which stand in stark contrast to the emotional and psychological struggles of the scientist wife. This juxtaposition highlights the potential and challenges of integrating technology into intimate relationships, offering a nuanced perspective on the quest for domestic bliss in an increasingly technological world.

By examining the themes of post-humanism and cyborg fantascienza, this article explores the broader implications of "My Happy Home" for understanding the evolving nature of human connections. The ethical and emotional complexities presented in the narrative prompt a deeper reflection on the future of love, companionship, and domestic life, urging us to reconsider the boundaries of humanity and technology in our pursuit of an ideal domestic existence.

The drama centers on the theme of the transformation of a human into a cyborg, designed to be the perfect husband—one who surpasses human limitations in his ability to provide emotional support, household management, and unwavering loyalty. In its infantile stage of Robotics it was planned to carry out the tasks of super human possibilities which were impossible to ordinary humans, while evoking the aesthetic sense of fear and wonder. However, in this drama, the purpose of robotics takes a unique turn, focusing on satisfying the emotional needs another human being. It envisions a cyborg as the ultimate faithful husband, embodying the ideal partner of one's dreams. Reflecting new trends in drama, this story explores the concept of a perfect emotional companion in non-humans, such as robots or aliens, challenging traditional notions of human relationships. Which is the least thing which can expected from a cyborg to be an ultra-faithful husband and to be a manifestation of a husband in dreams.

Plot Overview

Korean dramas have garnered worldwide acclaim for their engaging storylines, emotional depth, and cultural richness. The viewer needsto understand the word 'Makjang,' that denotes a sub variety of Korean drama renowned for its dramatic plot twists, heightened feelings, and larger-than-life characters. This willing suspension of disbelief is required for the enjoyment of this drama. It is a very short drama, only 1 hour and 15 minutes long.

Yoon Se Jung, a genius scientist, is married to Kang Sung Min, a cyborg with advanced technology in his body, whom she deeply loves as he is the perfect and faithful husband. To outsiders, Sung Min appears like any ordinary man, fulfilling his duties as a husband, but he requires regular recharging and must avoid water, which Se Jung manages. It must have ended like a fairy tale tag line like the lived together happily ever after but the bleak turn the story revealed when Ji Ah a woman from their past returns and attempts to restore Sung Min's memories as a human.

The truth is revealed that Yoon Se Yung (the wife) is the person who transformed him in to cyborg ,when he met with a tragic accident .Sung Min's memories were erased by her , she implanted new ones to create their ideal marriage. The traumatic past of the wife suffered the loneliness and deception by her surrounding human beings and Se Jung's deep-rooted resentment from college when she was betrayed and marginalized by Sung Min and Ji Ah during a group assignment. Resolving to rise above her personal traumas, the scientist immerses herself in her work, making significant contributions to the field of robotics. Her achievements earn her recognition and respect in the scientific community, yet her personal life remains void of trust and emotional connections. The ethical dilemmas involved in making him a humanoid, coupled with her post-traumatic stress, lead to her resentment and anxiety, ultimately resulting in her suicidal death. The story ends with the cyborg husband, deeply in love with her, pleading with his father-in-law to transform her into a cyborg.

In the final scene, the scientist father is seen having a family dinner with his loved ones. Now, they are a happy family because all members are programmed to be faithful and content.

Post humanism and the Cyborg Husband

Post-humanism is a philosophical and cultural movement that challenges traditional notions of humanity and humanism. It questions the centrality of the human subject in various fields such as ethics, philosophy, science, and technology. Post-humanism seeks to redefine what it means to be human in the context of advanced technologies, ecological crises, and the recognition of the interconnectedness of all life forms.

"My Happy Home," despite its short time period, addresses numerous issues such as depression, campus bullying, faithless marriages, and the suffering of women who are more inclined toward their hearts and emotions. The manipulation of memories and the transformation of a human into a humanoid raise significant ethical questions regarding objectification, autonomy, agency, and consent. The cyborg husband, being a product of programming, lacks true autonomy. His actions and emotions are predetermined by his scientist wife, which raises ethical concerns about his ability to consent to his roles and responsibilities. This lack of autonomy challenges the ethical foundation of their relationship, as the cyborg cannot make independent choices. This drama raises many questions regarding post-humanism and the man-machine combination.

- Cyborgs are designed to perform risky tasks that humans are incapable of, such as collecting materials from space and retrieving treasures from the depths of the ocean. They also handle tedious and monotonous jobs, like those in the packing sections of factories. When a genius scientist transforms and programs a cyborg to satisfy her emotional insecurities, it reveals deeper societal and circumstantial programming. This raises the question: Has the society she lives in, or the

circumstances surrounding her, led her to believe that real human beings are incapable of satisfying the emotional needs of others?

- As discussed earlier, when you install specific information and emotions while manipulating original memories to satisfy your emotional needs, how satisfying can that truly be?
- In the digital age, is there a chance that, just as a cyborg can be programmed to be a perfect husband, humans might gradually become more mechanical and start to lose their human values?
- Another question is: Due to feminist ideals, have women become increasingly aware of their emotional needs and are now seeking a new culture that provides the much-needed emotional security?
- Which is the better option: facing death or continuing to exist as a cyborg? While this question is rooted in fantasy, it is a thought-provoking one that addresses an existential dilemma. It challenges us to consider the value of natural human life versus an extended existence with altered capabilities and potentially compromised autonomy.
- In "My Happy Home," the narrative delves into the complex emotional and ethical dimensions of integrating a cyborg husband into domestic life. The protagonist, a scientist, creates a cyborg husband by programming specific qualities and behaviors into him, aiming to construct an ideal partner. This raises the question: How do the emotional capacity of the cyborg, the ethical considerations of programming a partner, and the psychological trauma experienced by the scientist wife impact their unique relationship?

Cyborg's Emotional Capacity

One of the central themes in "My Happy Home" is the cyborg husband's ability to exhibit profound emotional capacities, such as tenderness, empathy, and care. These qualities, which are traditionally considered uniquely human, are programmed into the cyborg by the scientist wife. This deliberate programming challenges the notion that machines are incapable of understanding or responding to human emotions. The cyborg's actions, such as cooking, providing emotional support, and maintaining household harmony, demonstrate that technological entities can be designed to fulfill emotional and relational roles.

The emotional depth of the cyborg husband raises questions about the authenticity of his feelings. Since his emotions are programmed, viewers are prompted to consider whether these programmed responses can truly be equated with genuine human emotions. From the wife's perspective, one wonders if she is genuinely happy, knowing that all the love and consideration she receives are merely the results of her programming.

This dilemma poses the question of whether it would have been better to let him die or to convert him into a cyborg. As a humanoid, the earlier notions of the uncanny valley come into play, potentially marring their life together as the line between human and robot blurs. The fluidity of identity is revealed when the cyborg's memories start to return, causing him to lie— a behavior identified by the blinking red light in his battery, signaling actions beyond his programming. Her anxiety prompts her to constantly check the blinking indicator on his back. Irritated by this, her cyborg husband retorts with dark humor, wishing that her back could blink like his to reveal her true thoughts. While this exchange is laced with black humor, it emphatically proclaims that marital faithlessness is far from a mere joke. In the end, the tables turn as he gets her back—literally—when she becomes a cyborg herself, sealing their shared fate in a technologically bound relationship.

The Emotional and ethical Dimensions

The protagonist of "My Happy Home," a scientist, creates a cyborg husband by programming specific memories and behaviors into him, aiming to construct the ideal partner. This intricate process allows her to craft a seemingly perfect marriage, free from the betrayals and traumas of her past. However, this section delves into the emotional capacity of the cyborg, the ethical considerations surrounding his creation, and the psychological trauma Se Jung experiences due to her unique relationship with her cyborg husband. The narrative examines how the artificial nature of Sung Min's programmed affection both fulfills and torments Se Jung, highlighting the complex interplay between technological manipulation and human emotion.

The trauma she experienced during her childhood, caused by her parents' constant fighting, haunts her through a pair of couple dolls she obsessively keeps facing each other, reflecting her PTSD. She becomes distressed when she discovers the male doll turned away from the bride doll. "Women who have experienced betrayal trauma often face profound emotional and psychological impacts, as the breach of trust fundamentally alters their perception of safety and attachment." When her husband explains that it was a slip of memory, she becomes even more upset, arguing that a cyborg, being programmed, cannot have such lapses. It is at this moment she realizes he is beginning to regain his memory. Scarred by her parents' turbulent marriage and ostracized by classmates who dubbed her "Frankenstein girl and " Se Jung's journey through life has been one marked by resilience and brilliance in the face of profound emotional challenges.

Se Jung, the protagonist of "My Happy Home," suffers from severe cognitive dissonance as she grapples with contradictory feelings about her relationship with her cyborg husband. "The quality of the parental relationship often has a profound influence on a woman's ability to form secure attachments in adulthood, shaping her expectations and experiences in romantic relationships." On one hand, she yearns for a perfect partner; on the other, she is troubled by the realization that this perfection is a product of her own

manipulations. This internal conflict is akin to a split personality, where one part of her seeks contentment through an externally tailored relationship, while another part is aware of the selfish manipulation involved. The moral and ethical dilemmas she faces intensify when the cyborg, Sung Min, begins to regain his original memories. These questions, about the authenticity and morality of her actions, drive her to the brink of suicide.

The drama situates futuristic elements, like transforming a dead body into a humanoid, within a contemporary setting, highlighting how modern society often shirks traditional marital commitments and emotional responsibilities. This fusion of advanced technology with present-day emotional struggles underscores the complexities of human relationships in an evolving technological world.Though this remained to be fantasy drama the post-humanism envisages burring of these thin boundaries between man-machine duo "The post-human condition is characterized by a fusion of human and machine, where the boundaries of identity and corporeality are fluid and constantly negotiated." (Hayles 3). At its core, post-humanism questions what it means to be human in an era of rapid technological advancement. It posits that human beings are not the pinnacle of evolution but part of an ongoing process where technology can profoundly enhance or even redefine human existence. This philosophical framework addresses various aspects such as: Technological Integration: The blending of human biology with technological enhancements to augment physical and cognitive abilities.

Whilethere is an ontological concern like death or existence counted as better option the Trans-humanism movement advocates the use of technology to improve human physical and intellectual abilities aiming for immortality and beyond human capabilities just another type of being which can be called as Homo-Deus. Augmenting body part such as pacemakers is ordinary incident in the contemporary period. If this momentum continues like this it may lead Trans-possess other organs like brain in future.The Ending of the Drama

The Ending of the Drama

The last scene of the drama "My Happy Home" depicts a family having dinner together. During their interaction, the red lights blink behind both the daughter and son-in-law, hinting at their cyborg nature. The mother, who now enacts the role of the perfect woman, was previously upset and deranged due to her husband's faithlessness. Her current calm demeanor as the perfect housewife suggests that she, too, might have been converted into a cyborg by the scientist. The tears in the scientist's eyes may signify his regret for forgetting his human qualities, which led him to the current situation as the head of a cyborg family, in which he himself programmed all the emotions that make it appear to be a happy family. Thus, the drama concludes on a bleak note.

Challenging Gender Roles

In many cultures, domestic responsibilities like cooking, cleaning, and nurturing have historically been ascribed to women, reflecting deeply ingrained gender norms By

programming the cyborg husband, Sung Min, to excel in these traditionally feminine roles, the narrative of "My Happy Home" challenges these norms. The scientist wife, Se Jung, who has been betrayed and traumatized by male figures in her life, creates a partner who can provide the emotional and practical support that she feels was lacking. This shift in domestic roles subverts the traditional expectations of gender-specific duties, presenting a scenario where a male figure, albeit a cyborg, performs roles typically associated with women.

The programming of the cyborg husband in "My Happy Home" to embody traditionally feminine qualities like cooking and nurturing both challenges and reinforces gender roles. Se Jung's control over the cyborg signifies a reversal of power dynamics, highlighting her agency in the domestic sphere. However, it also perpetuates stereotypes, suggesting that such traits are essential for a perfect home. "The deliberate reinforcement of gender stereotypes through technological means poses ethical dilemmas," reflecting broader societal biases (Wolfe 45). Additionally, the cyborg's lack of autonomy raises ethical concerns about control and consent. Thus, while the narrative subverts traditional norms, it also underscores the ethical complexities of using technology to shape human behavior, highlighting the interplay between technology, gender, and power.

Societal impact that drama produces

Cyborgs are designed to perform risky tasks that humans are incapable of, such as collecting materials from space and retrieving treasures from the depths of the ocean. They also handle tedious and monotonous jobs, like those in the packing sections of factories. When a genius scientist transforms and programs a cyborg to satisfy her emotional insecurities, it reveals deeper societal and circumstantial programming. This raises the question: Has the society she lives in, or the circumstances surrounding her, led her to believe that real human beings are incapable of satisfying the emotional needs of others?

It is a high time to rethink about hold up what remains human to be human in the technological flow. The narrative encourages a dialogue about the future of relationships in a technologically advanced society. It raises awareness about the ethical considerations and emotional complexities involved in creating artificial partners, shaping societal attitudes towards the role of technology in personal relationships. The series also reflects on the cultural and philosophical dimensions of post-humanism, questioning the essence of humanity and the evolving nature of relationships in a technologically advanced society. It encourages viewers to consider how future technologies might redefine domestic harmony and the very fabric of human interactions.

Conclusion

In "My Happy Home," the narrative is deeply entrenched in post-humanist themes. The drama depicts the transformation of a human into a cyborg husband, a process that embodies the principles of post-humanism by merging human attributes with advanced

robotics. This transformation is not merely physical but also emotional and cognitive, suggesting that technology can enhance human capacities to create an ideal partner. Post-humanism posit challenges concept of being a man in this technological era. At its core, post-humanism questions what it means to be human in an era of rapid technological advancement. It posits that human beings are not the pinnacle of evolution but part of an ongoing process where technology can profoundly enhance or even redefine human existence. This philosophical framework addresses various aspects such as: the blending of human biology with technological enhancements to augment physical and cognitive abilities;the concept of cyborgs beings that combine organic and mechanical parts; re-imagining a cyborg as emotionally perfect partner. Putting aside the ethical and moral considerations, the narrative underscores the complete assertion of female agency, where the protagonist seeks to realize her envisioned ideal by exerting control over her circumstances.

In summary, "My Happy Home" redefines post-humanism through its innovative portrayal of a cyborg husband as perfect. By blending human tenderness with technological perfection, the series challenges traditional notions of love and companionship. As we continue to integrate advanced technology into our lives, "My Happy Home" offers a glimpse into the potential future of domestic relationships, urging us to reconsider the boundaries of humanity and technology. This exploration of post-humanism, emotional and ethical implications and cultural reflections provides a comprehensive understanding of how technology can transform our most intimate connections, paving the way for a more harmonious and technologically enriched future.

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Mudita Choudhary
Dr. Veerendra Kumar Mishra

Exploring the Phenomenology of Violence in Jean Paul Sartre's *No Exit*

Abstract

A fight to overcome scarcity and the existential consequences of others' presence in the world create an objective dilemma that modifies possible reciprocity with others based on mutual recognition of freedom. Any attempt to rationally explain acts of violence, both individual and collective, must take into account this fundamental structure of the human predicament. The morality of 'Being' and the morality of 'Doing' must be understood in relation to the various forms of violence (from class violence to metaphysical violence). Through his plays, Jean-Paul Sartre aims to provide an ontological understanding of violence, highlighting the ambiguity of human relationships as the key to understand why humans resort to violence and how it becomes a means to secure existence, assert freedom, and challenge oppressive structures. The majority of Sartre's characters deal with violent situations; in addition, they lack interpersonal empathy, and each "being-in-situation" experiences the consequences of violence differently. This paper will look into the play No Exit as an attempt to understand Jean-Paul Sartre's perspectives on the subject with the lens of some of the aspects of his existential philosophy along with Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Zizek's critique of ideological frameworks.

Keywords: Scarcity, Other, Existential, Being, Violence, Freedom

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel does not address violence in great detail, but one can understand his thoughts on it in relation to his more comprehensive philosophy, German idealism. His understanding thus infers from several facets of his writings, especially when it comes to the state, history, and dialectical process. His views on violence were thus propositions that followed his dialectic. Hegel saw conflict as a necessary component in the development of history, which he describes as a thesis, a proposition that is followed by an anti-thesis, which is basically a negation of the proposition made, and lastly, synthesis, which refers to the common ground, an uplifted stage where the truths inherited in the thesis and anti-thesis combine to form a new profound thesis.

His dialectic approach holds that conflicts and contradictions are indispensable components of historical growth rather than a simple negation or disruption of peace. In his book *Violence and Its Causes* (1981), Jean-Marie Domenach emphasizes Hegelian analysis in contemporary conceptions of violence and its role in shaping the evolution of human societies: "to pose the problem of the duality of violence: positive or negative, good or bad, according to the ends it pursues or, rather, the historical forces that support it" (Domenach et al., 32).

Mudita Choudhary is a PhD Scholar, Banasthali Vidyapith
Dr. Veerendra Kumar Mishra is an Associate Professor in English & Modern European languages Banasthali Vidyapith

Hannah Arendt, a 20th-century political theorist and philosopher, is known for her criticism of Hegel's philosophy and emphasis on politics and the public realm. She distinguishes between political, social, and private domains in her seminal work, *The Human Condition* (1958). She considers Hegel's dialectic as an exemplary of a danger as she believes it "rests on a much older philosophical prejudice: that evil is no more than a priva-tive modus of the good, that good can come out of evil; that, in short, evil is but a temporary manifestation of a still-hidden good" (Arendt 56). Skeptical of this deterministic view of how history unfolds itself, she emphasizes on the importance of individual conduct, responsibility, and active participation in the public discourse rather than just some powerful social forces and impersonal entities. Independent decision-making and action, rather than obedience or ideology, guide actions in the socio-political domain, where individual action could impede the plurality of thoughts. In her book *On Violence* (1970), she provides a key understanding of distinction between power and violence, she writes: "The extreme form of power is All against One, the extreme form of violence is One against All. And this latter is never possible without instruments" (Arendt 42).Philosophers examine violence from different perspectives and try to locate its origins and ramifications, both in inherent human conditions and in social conditions, which often seem to overlap. Edmund Husserl, one of the most prominent philosophers of the twentieth century, is often difficult to understand because of his obscure writing style and penchant to coin new terms to characterize his explorations of the mind. Husserl shares Descartes's vision to build a concrete foundation for knowledge, a science of sciences upon which all mental processes could be based. He therefore perceives crisis as a phenomenon that entails phenomenological inquiry above the historical and empirical. Husserl's "Eidetic reduction" and "Bracketing" postpone judgment on the reality of the outside world while concentrating on the fundamental structures of phenomena and consciousness. Accordingly, it is possible to view violence in society as a phenomenon that necessitates phenomenological study in order to comprehend its deliberate and experienced dimensions.

Phenomenology often concerns with phenomenon and consciousness but violence is also intrinsically embodied and affective. In an article "Towards a Multi-modal Phenomenological Approach of Violence" (2020), Cristian Ciocan, calls out the limitations of phenomenological method in its context to understand Violence.

> In the lived experience of an actual, real event, we do not simply "perceive" the phenomenon of violence, as we detachedly perceive a cube or a building, distantly apprehending its multiple concordant aspects. We do not only fully participate in this phenomenon, being bodily and affectively immersed within it, but we are especially overwhelmed and overturned by it, and find ourselves unable to operate a coherent synthesis of experience, as is regularly the case in so-called "normal" life. (Ciocan 153)

Heidegger's phenomenology moves the emphasis from pure consciousness to the study of the being-in-the-world, especially in his groundbreaking work *Being and Time* (1927). Heidegger is interested in the existential aspects of life and what it means to be human. Since the world doesn't stem from a profound understanding of existence, it makes sense that its evolution will result in random, chaotic outbursts of violence and devastation. Heidegger's investigation thus constitutes an effort to rectify the problem by posing the long-ignored question of what constitutes 'Being'.Sartre's philosophy parallels Heidegger's 'Dasein', as Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1943) reveals Heidegger's thoughts about human reality, which he believed "can always pass beyond the phenomenon to its being" (Sartre 35).

A varied range of philosophical ideas informed the philosophy of France's most prominent existentialist, Jean-Paul Sartre, including Husserl's phenomenology, Arendt's ideal of political action, Hegel's dialectical method, and Heidegger's ontology. Although Sartre often diverged from their views, the deep influence of their philosophical framework gradually takes shape in two of his giants, *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), the latter being an intricate and extensive piece of work that explores a variety of aspects of social and political philosophy. In *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre discusses violence within the context of his larger examination of social institutions, alienation, and the potential for revolution, despite it not being the work's primary issue. Influenced by existentialist and Marxist thought, Sartre grappled with the concept of scarcity in the context of human relationships and societal structures, defining violence as a structure of human action under the influence of Manichaeism and within a context of scarcity (Sartre 149).

A fight to overcome scarcity and the existential consequences of others' presence in the world creates an objective dilemma that modifies possible reciprocity with others based on mutual recognition of freedom. Any attempt to rationally explain acts of violence, both individual and collective, must take into account this fundamental structure of the human predicament. The morality of 'Being' and the morality of 'Doing' must be understood in relation to the various forms of violence seen in Sartre's plays and novels, from class violence to metaphysical violence. The majority of Sartre's characters deal with violent situations; in addition, they lack interpersonal empathy, and each "being-in-situation" experiences the consequences of violence differently. . They face some of the worst attitudes, and the core of many ideologies is the pursuit of the ideal 'Being'.

Through his plays, Sartre aims to provide an ontological understanding of violence, highlighting the ambiguity of human relationships as the key to understanding why humans resort to violence and how it becomes a means to secure existence, assert freedom, and challenge oppressive structures. This paper will look at *No Exit* in an attempt to understand Jean-Paul Sartre's perspectives on the subject in an effort to better understand the origins of violence.

Ciocon highlights the fundamental problem while engaging in a phenomenological discourse on violence as he differentiates between "direct perceptive experience of an awake and self-aware consciousness" and " abnormality of structures of experience" where "one's coherence as subject is fatally disturbed" (Ciocan 153). He also called violence excessive, where "our main preoccupation would be rather to escape and survive and less to question the violence "in itself," in "what it is," "how it is," or "why it is what it is." (Ciocan 151-152). Therefore, among Sartre's other plays, *No Exit* offers a particularly intriguing combination of philosophical discourses on violence because it is not conventionally preoccupied with theatrical action or story continuity. The play tackles the issue of violence from an ontological perspective and is therefore contemplative. Sartre challenges the audience's preconceived notion of violence as something always visible to the naked eye and rather shows how it unfolds and manifested in interaction between the characters and through the power dynamics that they share.

It is a one-act drama performed in one act by four actors in one scene (the valet appears for a very short time). At the beginning of the play, a valet leads a man named Joseph Garcin into what is soon revealed to be a horrifying chamber, which is depicted as a series of chambers. The valet's fleeting entrance reminds the protagonists of the never-ending cycle of condemnation and retribution. The room has no windows, no mirrors, and only one entrance. Estelle Rigault eventually follows Ines Serrano in joining Garcin. When they enter, the door locks and the valet departs. As soon as the characters settle down and start interacting, the reader is given insight into their past life on earth as they anticipate being tormented. Though there are no textual evidences of any punishment, their anticipation reflects their own experiences, regrets and guilt.

Garcin's desire for bravery and his actual inability to uphold his ideals demonstrate that morality, ethics, and values are not always valuable or predetermined. As a journalist with an academic background, Garcin imagines himself as a symbol of valor and martyrdom, but readers gradually realize that what he could have imagined when seated in an office chamber does not always translate to a real-life situation. This raises the question of what a journalist aspires to do: to demonstrate that he is a courageous reporter who is concerned about the injustices that exist in the world. However, despite his best efforts, Garcin fails miserably to be a coward on the battlefield. Garcin thinks of himself as someone he is not. His intellectual background has surely shaped him, but his pursuits are incongruous with his ideals and turn out to be mere optics when it comes to acting upon them in reality. Analogously, in his striking illustration, Sartre shows a waiter who is very self-conscious about his job and fails to recognize that "Striving to be a thing so as to escape the responsibility of being free is certainly an identifiable form of bad faith" (Cox 35). Garcin is a typical representation of bad-faith where an individual, according to Sartre, takes refuge in external roles to deny confrontation with his own existence.

In his book *Six Sideways Reflections On Violence* (2007) , Slajov Zizek, a philosopher,

cultural theorist, and public intellectual from Slovenia, expanding upon the theories of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, addresses the ways in which symbolic systems, including language, ideology, and culture, might sustain some types of violence. Zizek distinguishes between subjective violence, i.e., evident violence, and structured violence, engrained deeply in the system, and highlights an ideological framework of hypocrisy through an example to better understand it. He writes: "The exemplary figures of evil today are not ordinary consumers who pollute the environment and live in a violent world of disintegrating social links, but those who, while fully engaged in creating conditions for such universal devastation and pollution, buy their way out of their own activity, living in gated communities, eating organic food, taking holidays in wildlife preserves, and so on" (Zizek 27). People who live privileged lifestyles, adopt eco-friendly activities, and support charity eventually dispel the guilt, and with this, they dispel the thought of the problem that existed in the first place. Zizek emphasizes the pernicious nature of this form of violence.

Similarly, Garcin pretends to live for a transcendent cause but actually is immersed in sadistic pleasures of life "Well, here's some-thing you can get your teeth into. I brought a half- caste girl to stay in our house. My wife slept upstairs; she must have heard—everything. She was an early riser and, as I and the girl stayed in bed late, she served us our morning coffee" (Sartre 25). He is Nietzsche's "passive nihilist" who is highly immersed in bad faith. As the ultimate adversary and "the other" at the work place, Gomez was able to swiftly seize Garcin's freedom. However, Garcin also used his freedom to look away from Gomez whenever he could and to torture his wife in an effort to show how free he was. This escape causes one to put off confronting existential reality such as that the "other" is an ever-changing, ever-present reality that one's freedom may always be impacted by the freedom of the "other," and that one may always exist as a subject and object simultaneously. This transition from a constantly escaping, postponed world of living experience to Jean Paul Sartre's infernal chamber, where all three characters are constantly watched and the existential confrontation cannot be postponed, can be explained by Gary Cox's assertion in *Sartre and Fiction* (2009):

> He is a subject absorbed in what he is doing and does not judge himself. He is free to transcend the meaning of his act and does not have to define himself as a snoop. Later on, if he reflects on his act, he can avoid branding himself aware by telling himself a voyeur by telling himself his act was simply an aberration and so on. Suddenly however, he realizes he is seen. All at once the meaning of his act has escaped him. It now belongs to the other for whom he has to become an object. In catching him in the act the other has caught his freedom and is at liberty to judge him as he pleases, to inflict meanings upon him-spy, sneak, pervert (Cox 24).

The play's opening portrays characters as helpless victims of the situations life throws at them. Zizek in *Six Sideways Reflections On Violence* talks about how it's human nature to be drawn to the personal narrative. He uses Mary Shelley's Frankenstein as an example. Even if the monster is the murderer, it steals the readers' hearts and seems to be a creature who wants life and love. Despite this being the case, the monster's life narrative undoubtedly obscures and forgets the reader's ethical awareness. Estelle, like Garcin, portrays herself as the ultimate victim. Through her tragic backstory, she tries to garner sympathy from others, especially Garcin, as she flees the responsibility of her actions. She dramatically admits:

> What else should I tell? I've nothing to hide. I lost my parents when I was a kid, and I had my young brother to bring up. We were terribly poor and when an old friend of my people asked me to marry him I said yes. He was very well off, and quite nice. My brother was a very delicate child and needed all sorts of attention, so really that was the right thing for me to do, don't you agree? My husband was old enough to be my father, but for six years we had a happy married life. Then two years ago I met the man I was fated to love. We knew it the moment we set eyes on each other. He asked me to run away with him, and I refused. Then I got pneumonia and it finished me. That's the whole story. No doubt, by certain standards, I did wrong to sacrifice my youth to a man nearly three times my age. [TO GARCIN] Do you think that could be called a sin? (Sartre 15-16)

According to Zizek, this tendency to engage with the personal narrative obscures the fundamental truths of human nature and action and enables people to maintain power and control. It is a kind of story that Estelle decides to tell herself about herself; the ultimate criminal is able to portray himself as the ultimate victim. A stark contrast exists between the self-portrayals and the actual account of the heinous crimes of characters, emphasizing the fact that "the experience that we have of our lives from within, the story we tell ourselves about ourselves in order to account for what we are doing, is fundamentally a lie the truth lies outside, in what we do" (Zizek 47).

According to Sartre, there are two sides to the human predicament. The first fact is facticity, which encompasses an individual's personality, characteristics, and circumstances that often form the basis of their actions in the world. These factors can even alter this facticity, and one can transcend this aspect to experience themselves, thereby revealing the other aspect of the predicament, known as transcendence or freedom.

According to Sartre, humans are basically free, continually transcending given surroundings and making free choices. The primary form of bad faith is to deny this freedom and affirm it through facticity. The social conditions encourage human beings to

identify themselves with their jobs: “there is the dance of the grocer, of the tailor, of the auctioneer, by which they endeavor to persuade their clientele that they are nothing but a grocer, an auctioneer, a tailor. A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer, because such a grocer is not wholly a grocer. Society demands that he limit himself to his function as a grocer” (Sartre 87), but for Sartre, this is a misguided way of thinking because it encourages people to identify themselves with their facticity and deny their transcendence, as seen in the case of Estelle. She is a well-to-do woman who chooses to marry a middle-aged man for his wealth and engages a young man in an extramarital relationship for her unfulfilled needs, with whom she has an illegitimate child. Ultimately, to get rid of the child and responsibility for her actions, she drowns the illegitimate child in the lake, leading the young man to commit suicide.

Throughout the story, Estelle tries to initiate a romantic relationship with Garcin in an attempt to remain a self-bound feminine thing and assert her identity as a woman in relation to a "masculine man," a quality that Garcin secretly feels embarrassed to lack but works hard to prove. Estelle's selfish motives and manipulative behaviour led her to the murder of her child and the eventual suicide of her boyfriend, yet she continues to manipulate Garcin by using her femininity as an instrument to preserve control and power. She suffers an ultimate form of bad faith, as she believes she can separate her acts from her identity. It can also be understood through a common mind-body dualism where, for Sartre, “the body is not primarily an object alongside other objects to be acted upon (Cox 25), but rather "the for-itself acting in the world” (Cox 27). Estelle is a typical representation of this pattern of bad faith.

One of the major aspects of Estelle's self-deception is her attempt to seek validation from others for her sense of identity and worth. She defines herself through the gaze of others, which prevents her from truly understanding herself and taking charge of her existence. She is the most gullible and docile of all the characters. Instead of confronting her own desires and values, Estelle conforms to societal expectations of femininity, perpetuating a false sense of self: “I feel so queer. [She pats herself.] Don't you ever get taken that way? When I can't see myself, I begin to wonder if I really and truly exist. I pat myself just to make sure, but it doesn't help much,” to which Inez replies, “You're lucky. I'm always conscious of myself in my mind. Painfully conscious” (Sartre 19). The fundamental distinction is that while Estelle seeks validation from external sources, mostly men, through her body and appearance, Inez is conscious of her own existence and frailty and doesn't rely on others for any validation. It highlights the internal struggle of Estelle in understanding and accepting who she really is, as opposed to Inez, who is highly conscious of herself. Estelle associates herself with an image, an identity that has become her ultimate facticity rather than a possibility and a condition subjected to further change, as in the case of Sartre's woman in *Being and Nothingness*, who responds to a flirt in a particular manner when he takes her hand:

> To withdraw it is to break the troubled and unstable harmony which gives the hour its charm. The aim is to postpone the moment of decision as long as possible. We know what happens next; the young woman leaves her hand there, but she does not notice that she is leaving it. She does not notice because it happens by chance that she is at this moment all intellect. She draws her companion up to the most lofty regions of sentimental speculation; she speaks of Life, of her life, she shows herself in her essential aspect—a personality, a consciousness. And during this time the divorce of the body from the soul is accomplished; the hand rests inert between the warm hands of her companion—neither consenting nor resisting—a thing (Sartre 85).

Estelle's body is instrumental, an unchanging fixed identity, disconnected from the meanings and interactions emerging around her, leaving her body to be used as a function or object separate from her, to be used in exchange for validation. Sartre, on the other hand, argues that the body cannot simply exist as a thing for which one bears no responsibility that the body and consciousness are inseparable, and that one cannot restrict or reduce consciousness to a fixed identity. For Sartre, Consciousness has no fixed essence; it is ever evolving, ever changing; it is in fact "a flight or escape from any form of self-identity" (Cox 15).

In *Being and Nothingness*, according to Sartre, consciousness is the act of focusing on something that is distinct from itself. Because consciousness perceives what it is cognizant of as something it is not, it is fundamentally a negation: "It is, we may say, even if it is a being which is not what it is and which is what it is not" (Sartre 101). Even in instances where consciousness is aware of itself, its perception of itself as something it is not establishes the fundamental truth that consciousness is "always predisposed to find something lacking. Indeed, he maintains that lack is intrinsic to the very meaning of every situation for any particular consciousness" (Cox 21). This intrinsic lack in Garcin, Inez, and Estelle makes their world alternate between how they see other people as manipulable objects and themselves as beings with agency, or vice versa, where they are observed by others, hence exposed, ashamed, and powerless.

For Sartre, freedom is the inherent condition of man, therefore one doesn't seek freedom, one is free. This leads to a better understanding of 'being-for-others' and the friction that arises after the confrontation with the consciousness of others as free, assertive, subjective, and full of possibilities, which ultimately leads to conflict as people grapple with the complexities of their freedom and existence in relation to 'Others'. All characters in *No Exit* embody the conflict of 'being-for-others. The gaze of the 'Others' undermines their sense of self. Being uncomfortable, they undertake a project "of protecting myself against the danger that is incurred by my being- outside-in the-Other's-freedom" (Sartre 307). Similarly, Garcin and Estelle work hard to protect their identities

from potential harm from the 'Other', but Inez, who is perceptive, understands the harsh reality of their damnation. The more Garcin and Estelle choose to deny it, the more their narrative reinforces bad faith. Following their genuine confessions, they no longer remain the master and controller of the situation, as now the 'Other' "possesses part of what a person is and is free to judge him; free to admire, respect, or despise him" (Cox 24). With this shift in power dynamics and the loss of control, characters now face a new reality and navigate their damnation together. Their dependency on each other's validation almost takes the form of obsession to preserve a sense of self: "Second, there is the problem of utilizing the Other in order finally to totalize the detotalized totality which I am, so as to close the open circle, and finally to be my own foundation" (Sartre 307).

Inez and Garcin's relationship is the epitome of this exchange of power dynamics. Their interactions are filled with small details and human frailties; she is agony for him due to her cold disposition and disregard for his need for sociability, and he is torture for her because she feels mistreated by someone she doesn't feel any affection for. Just as he does in many of his other works, Sartre highlights the human body by focusing on Inez's hatred for Garcin, which serves as a symbol for everything human, including flesh, vulnerability, fear, and unwanted human contact.

Inez understands her own strengths and is perceptive of others' abilities. At the beginning, she is the first person who realizes that everyone will endure eternal suffering, saying, "A damned soul—that's you, my little plaster saint. And ditto our friend there, the noble pacifist. We've had our hour of pleasure, haven't we? There have been people who burned their lives out for our sakes, and we chuckled over it. So now we have to pay the reckoning." (Sartre 17)

The portrayal of Inez depicts her as a sly and cynical postal worker who takes pleasure in witnessing the suffering of others. What makes Inez different is her forthrightness and confident pursuit of her sexual orientation. She personifies the idea of interpersonal violence as she engages in psychological warfare with the other characters in an effort to dominate and control them through manipulation. Being a narcissist, she knows what others are capable of because she knows herself a little too well. She openly admits that she wanted to have her brother's girlfriend, Florence, and therefore disrupted the relationship between them by turning her against him. He endured excruciating pain until one day, suddenly, a tram struck him. Furthermore, she kept teasing Florence and held her accountable for her brother's death. In a cruel twist, Inez kept teasing Florence about the incident until one night Florence took matters into her own hands, turned on the gas, and ended it all.

Inez feeds on Estelle's vulnerabilities and insecurities and uses manipulation and charm to draw Estelle closer to her, preying on her need for validation, attention, and fear of being on her own. Estelle confesses: "When I talked to people, I always made sure there was one nearby in which I could see myself. I watched myself talking. And somehow it

kept me alert, seeing myself as the others saw me." (Sartre 19). Estelle's fascination with looking at herself in the mirror at all times prompts Inez to become one for her. As Estelle tries to look and find herself in Inez's eyes, she is terrified, as the reflection is no more convincing. As Estelle tries to look and find herself in Inez's eyes, she is terrified, as the reflection is no more convincing. The new reflection, though, poses a significant risk because it may judge her, alter her, and inhibit her sense of conceiving herself as she is, abruptly taking away her subjectivity and turning her into a powerless being.

Estelle desperately wants to seek validation from any man, this time Gracin, unattentive to the fact that even Garcin's self-identity is based on the approval of the other, i.e., Inez. As Estelle makes her advances to Garcin, Inez interferes, questioning Garcin's sincerity and challenging his manhood. Estelle's state of helplessness, anxiety, and indecisiveness reinforces the toxicity of the interaction while Inez remains the formidable witness to the whole scene. Inez appears to be the writer's voice in multiple instances, as "In Sartre's theatre, there is often one person who embodies absolute values, who knows all and who judges: a female character, more or less outside the action, who keeps on the immanent level what men, and above all oppressors, falsely attribute to God—the power to speak the truth, on human, political, and moral levels simultaneously." (Goldmann and MacDonald 112).

Inez, like Dostoevsky's Underground Man from *Notes from the Underground*, seems to find comfort in her own misery and that of others. She is not ignorant of herself like people who wallow in self-pity or who deliberately choose to embody their beings by identifying with absolute principles; rather, she thrives in actively inflicting pain on others to alleviate her own existential angst. On the one hand, Garcin and Estelle manipulate each other to bolster their self- image, while Inez, on the other hand, is disinterested in putting up any persona. Despite being in this self-aware state, Inez's bad faith might represent a deeper level of despair and annihilation of freedom as she continues to exhaust every possibility of becoming. She succumbs to bad faith by resigning to her fate, embracing a stagnant existence. She pretends to take a nihilist position. Unlike Garcin and Estelle, who grapple with their self- image, Inez seems comfortable with who she is. However, this comfort is a complete façade.

Bad faith here can be understood in both situations as a form of dishonesty about the true nature of the human condition, specifically freedom, because "the person is irresponsible; he treats his choice not to choose as though it were not a choice." He acts as though he cannot choose or doesn't have to choose. According to Cox (12), a person in bad faith may act as though he is immortal, believing that he will always be as he is now or that he will live on in an afterlife free of all inconvenience and acrimony.

Sartre's understanding of violence thus can be understood as a conflict inherent in 'being- for-others' and violence therefore must inevitably occur with the confrontation of the 'Other' in the form of objectification and counter objectification of free conscious

beings, as embodiment of freedom in the fact of scarcity as Ronald e. Santoni in *Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent* explicates:

> I see the Other as competing with me for a "particular natural substance" or "manufactured good"; I negate him and he negates me; human being becomes the enemy of human being; each, in the milieu of scarcity, appears as radically Other and carries the menace of death (menace de mort) to the Other; man, in facing "anti-man" (contre homme), becomes "nonhuman man" (homme inhumain), and violence is thus in the making (34).

Despite Zizek's reliance on Lacanian analysis of 'unconscious', there is certainly an overlap between Zizek's thoughts and some aspects of existential philosophy, or at least common influences on it. Zizek's concept of "real" as merely a symbolic order that attempts to thwart the possibility of making choices from which one can never fully escape aligns with Sartre's depiction of characters who, when faced with the responsibility of making a responsible choice, often exhibit bad faith. Sartre's idea of the 'Look' also coincides with Zizek's Lacanian emphasis on symbolic order and the unconscious that shapes desires and identities.

In Sartre's *No Exit*, characters choose to deliberately postpone experiencing anguish and despair and bear the responsibility of constantly creating themselves through choice, which accompanies the human condition of being free. According to an online published interview in 2014 with *The Guardian*, Zizek answers: "The problem is that we don't know what we really want. What makes us happy is not to get what we want. But to dream about it. Happiness is for opportunists. So I think that the only life of deep satisfaction is a life of eternal struggle, especially struggle with oneself." Therefore, violence, driven by a lack or scarcity of material conditions or from the very condition of 'being-for-others' or due to ideological restrictions, explicitly implicitly remain a condition of man's relations with others as Garcin admits at last: "So this is hell .. I'd never have believed it. You remember all we were told about the torture-chambers, the fire and brimstone, the "burning marl." Old wives' tales! There's no need for red-hot pokers. Hell is-other people!"(Sartre 45).

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Dr. Navya V. K.

Unfathomable Silences and Hushed Desires : The Core of *Kaathal*

Abstract

Kaathal -The Core (2023) is a Malayalam film directed by Jeo Baby and written by Adarsh Sukumaran and Paulson Skaria. Kaathal is woven around the complexities surrounding the forced coming out of the central character Mathew Devassy who is about to contest in the local body elections. His wife Omana files for divorce citing his unrevealed sexual orientation as a reason. The movie places homosexuality at the realm of a heteronormative society that places heterosexuality as a "normal" mode of sexuality. This movie showcases the representation of a homosexual relationship between Mathew and Thankan and explores the complexities of disclosing minority sexual identities in the Kerala society'. The first part of the paper intends to analyse Kaathal as an LGBTQ+ movie by placing it in the frame of Vito Russo test and proceeds to thematically explore how this Malayalam queer movie builds a supportive ecosystem for the Coming Out of Mathew by critically exploring how the institutions of family, religion and politics responds to / receives this disclosure. The second part of the analysis focus on how the same queer movie unconsciously expresses homophobia in the realm of representation.

Keywords : Malayalam queer cinema, Heteronormativity, Homosexuality, Coming Out, Homophobia

Kaathal -The Core (2023) is a Malayalam film directed by Jeo Baby and written by Adarsh Sukumaran and Paulson Skaria. Kathal is woven around the complexities surrounding the forced coming out of the central character Mathew Devassy who is about to contest in the local body elections. His wife Omana files for divorce citing his unrevealed sexual orientation as a reason. The couple's relationship is platonic and cordial but Omana has been suffocated in the relationship that had offered her no form of physical intimacy. Her decision to file for a divorce after twenty long years was catalysed by the decriminalisation of Section 377 of Indian Penal Code[1]. This movie places homosexuality at the centre of its plot and explores the unravelling of queerness in a society that practices compulsory heterosexuality. The first part of the paper intends to analyse *Kaathal* as an LGBTQ+ movie by placing it in the frame of Vito Russo test and proceeds to thematically explore how this Malayalam queer movie builds a supportive ecosystem for the Coming Out of Mathew by critically exploring how the institutions of family, religion and politics responds to / receives this disclosure. The second part of the analysis focus on how the same queer movie unconsciously expresses homophobia in the realm of representation.

Dr. Navya V.K. has completed her PhD in Cultural Studies from The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad.

[1] in 6 September 2018

Kaathal : A Queer Malayalam Movie and its Supportive Ecosystems

Malayalam film industry have rarely produced movies with queer content as it is neither accepted nor appreciated by the audience of Malayalam cinema. Homosexuality as a theme is considered as a taboo subject in the society as well. Queer people and homosexuality was either mocked or stereotyped in Malayalam films[2]. There are only a handful of movies that have discussed homosexuality as a theme such as *Mumbai Police* (2013), *Ka Bodiscape* (2016), *Njan Merikkutty* (2018), *Moothon* (2019) etc. *Kaathal* joins this spectrum of queer movies and it develops around the unravelling of the homosexual orientation of Mathew Devassy, one of the central characters of the movie. Mammooty plays Mathew and the presence of a star at the centre of the narrative is an instrumental factor in accelerating the otherwise unpopular/taboo theme and generated an active discussion on queer politics. So, this section employs the criteria of the Vito Russo Test to understand Kaathal as a queer Malayalam movie and proceeds to thematically analyse the features of this genre.

The Vito Russo Test get its name from LGBTQ activist and film historian Vito Russo who studied the portrayal of LGBTQ portrayals in Hollywood film.His pioneering work *The Celluloid Closet* (1981) unravelled the portrayal of homosexuality in the Hollywood film industry. The Vito Russo Test checks how often film depict lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex, trans or queer (LGBTQ+) people and the way in which they do so and it aims to further the discourse on LGBTQ+ inclusivity. This test covers three categories in a film: representation, complexity and relevance. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation(GLAAD) list the criteria as follows:

> 1.The film contains a character that is identifiably lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer.
>
> 2.That character must not be solely or predominantly defined by their sexual orientation or gender identity (i.e. they are comprised of the same sort of unique character traits commonly used to differentiate straight/cisgender characters from one another).
>
> 3**.** The LGBTQ character must be tied to the plot in such a way that the character's removal would have a significant effect, meaning the character is not there to simply provide colourful commentary, paint urban authenticity, or setup a punchline. The character must matter.
>
> 4.The LGBTQ character's story must not be outwardly offensive (avoids defaulting to well-known tropes or stereotypes with no further development). In films with multiple LGBTQ characters, at least one character must pass this point for the film to pass the test[3].

[2]For example, Chanthupottu (2005) directed by Lal Jose revolves around a queer character Radhakrishnan (called as Radha for his feminine mannerisms) is often criticised for presenting a problematic notion of queer identity. The character is reduced into a negative stereotype and his 'manliness' is restored to him towards the end of the narrative.

[3] https://glaad.org/sri/2023/vito-russo-test/

Kaathal revolves around Mathew and his Coming Out as a homosexual,as his wife files a divorce suit. Mathew and Thankan, two of the major characters of the movie are queer characters and their characters are not solely defined by their sexual orientations. Mathew is a round character- an introvert, a family man, an independent politician and he is well connected in the community. Thankan, his alleged partner also has unique traits and he works as a driving teacher and lives with his nephew. These two characters and the disclosure of their hidden sexual orientation, disclosure and reactions forms the plot. The movie consciously breaks all the queer stereotyping of Malayalam film repertoire and the queer characters are presented with their own uniqueness and individualism. These are the basic premises that qualifies *Kaathal* as a queer movie.

The discourse of homosexuality is placed in the context of a heterosexual marriage, catholic religion and local politics. In a society that ideologically adheres to compulsory heteronormativity.Heteronormativity is defined as the presumption and privileging of gender conformity, heterosexuality, and nuclear families over all other "deviant" forms of gender expression, sexuality, and families. Heteronormativity is an ideological code that promotes rigidly defined conventional norms, heterosexuality, and "traditional family values" (Oswald Blume and Marks, 2005).Heteronormativity is often used as an ideological tool to encourage conformity to the traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures.

In this movie, also heteronormativity is the dominant ideology and it closets the homosexual love between Mathew and Thankan. Mathew and Thankan lives in a society that strongly disapproves divergent sexualities. Mathew has confessed his sexual preferences to his father who in turn forced him to marry a woman and he lives in a heterosexual marriage that provides no space for physical intimacy for him or his wife. Further Mathew's affiliation to catholic religion which also follows a patriarchal cum heteronormative familial structure prevent him from coming out as a homosexual man. At the same time, after his forced Coming Out, the queer movie creates and gradually evolving institutional structure that supports the positive reclaiming of homosexual identity of the characters.

In the family space, both his father and wife are already aware of his homosexual identity. Omana reveals in the divorce trial that she came to know it after her delivery and both their acts of physical intimacy and getting pregnant happened only because of her initiative. Hence it remained as an open secret for them and the father is actively involved in suppressing his queer identity even after a doctor confirms it. Omana's mother, brother and the couple's daughter came to know of this closeted identity in the wake of the divorce but through the course of the narrative, they accept his queer orientation.Catholic religion which is known for its orthodox stands on both divorce and homosexuality, is shown as sympathetic and progressive as the father sympathises with Omna by understanding her issues.

In the sphere of local politics, the newly revealed queer identity Mathew becomes a topic of discussion. The film has shown how this discourse starts as an attempt to degrade and humiliate the candidate (both by his own party members and by the members of opposition) but progress by creating acceptance to this queer identity. Both the higher committee of the left party (CRP) and many voters say that sexual orientation is part of his personal life and it should be separated from his political /public life. Thus, as an independent candidate of the Left Party, he receives a supporting ecosystem. The party uses his candidacy as a "progress" card and his Coming Out did not adversely affect his political career. So, all the institutional discourses around the queer characters gradually develops a queer friendly ecosystem and the queer characters arrives at a point of possible open relationship. Thus, *Kaathal* thematically can be described as a queer movie.

Homophobic Niche's of *The Core*

As discussed in the previous section, while placing in the field of Malayalam movies, *Kaathal* comes across as a queer movie that represents homosexuality in a favourable light. At the same time, on a closer look it can bee seen that the shadow of homophobia is hidden at the level of representation. So, this section focuses on the representation of homosexuality through the lenses of homophobia. Two aspects that throws light on the nature of representation are the forced Coming Out of Mathew and the complete lack of physical intimacy while representing homosexual relationship.This paper argues that the absence of the display of physical desire is problematic as it points to some form of unconscious homophobia at the level of representation too.

The term “Coming Out” is a shortened form of "coming out of the closet", which is a metaphor for revealing one's sexual orientation/transgender status. Dictionary.Com defines Coming out, “one's acknowledgment and public disclosure of a sexual orientation or gender identity that does not conform to socially defined norms” (“ Coming Out”). Coming out is not a single event, but rather a life-long process and in a society that actively encourages heterosexuality and oppress homosexuality is a difficult choice to go for. Negative stereotypes and fear of labelling and exclusion/discrimination makes the process a difficult one. Homophobia and transphobia and resultant violence against sexual minorities are other challenges for coming out. The LGBTQ+ Resource centre website of UCCS comments on the complexities of Coming Out as:

> In our society, people tend to assume everyone is heterosexual, so LGBT+ people must continually decide in what situations they want to correct that assumption by disclosing their own orientation or identity. In every new situation, with every new person they meet, they must decide whether or not to come out. There are many stages to coming out, and the process is not the same for everyone. (“Coming Out”)

At the same time, Coming Out is a necessary step for the individual that allows for greater empowerment and for the building of a positive self-image. In *Kaathal* the

process of Coming Out is not chosen by the introverted Mathew but the constructed notions about his heterosexual self and the image of a 'perfect family man' have slowly collapsed as his wife files a divorce citing his sexual orientation as a reason. Catholic religious affiliation further complicates his disclosure as the religion considers homosexuality as a sin from which the believers must abstain. ("homosexuality")In his public life, he is reluctant to accept his homosexuality and he even rejects the allegation in the courtroom. Similarly in his political circle where deep discussions about his sexual orientation happens, he deflects answering the questions about his sexuality. But in personal life, he never refutes his wife's claim and he confess his identity to his daughter and both members of his family accepts him without much ado. His rite of passage out of closeted space is difficult for him as he was afraid of the social stigma associated by the act of disclosure. The heaviness and fear Mathew feels internally are captured in a shot where he is alone in the room and his shadow looming larger on the wall. Coming Out has personal, social and political aspects and as the narrative ends with his divorce, the troubled process of his emancipation starts and Mathew is shown as looking at Thankan from a distance.

The term homophobia refers to fear and dislike for homosexuality and of those who practice it. The term was in circulation from 1960s. Byrne Fone (2000) in his work *Homophobia a history* observes that the fear of homosexuality stems from the perception that homosexuality and homosexuals disrupt the sexual and gender order supposedly established by what is often called 'natural law'. According to him, another source of this attitude is the fear that the social conduct of homosexuals disrupts the social, legal, political, ethical and moral order of a society that is affirmed by religious doctrine.Violence and intolerance against LGBTQIA + community are extensive in the "progressive Kerala society" and it ranges from online hate comments to queer suicides. To cite a few cases from the recent past, Anannyah Kumari Alex (the first transwoman radio jockey in Kerala, took her own life on July 20th, 2021), Thahira Azeez (a transgender activist committed suicide in 2021), Anjana(queer student from Kannur district in Kerala, was discovered deceased on May 12, 2020, under unclear circumstances in North Goa) and Praveen Nath (body builder and activist May 4, 2023) are some victims of homophobia faced by the queer community of Kerala.

Kathal places it foot right by bringing out the theme of homosexuality through a Megastar of Malayalam cinema. Many reviews of the film mention how the presence of the 72-year-old star (whose company has also produced *Kaathal*) have generated acceptance for the theme. The News Minute observes "Mammootty deserves applause for utilising his star power to make this crucial intervention at a time when most of his contemporaries across languages seem focused on solidifying their silver screen hypermasculinity" (Shaji, Sukanya) and The Vogue review adds, "for sensitively utilising hisprivilege as a bankable star from the south of India and putting both his face andmoney in the film, Mammootty must be commended. For the parents andgrandparents of queer

children who have grown up watching and loving him since the'70s, much like the ones seated in the row behind me, having this 72-year-old Muslimmegastar hopefully validates queerness, at least in their eyes." (Khan, Arman)

Even though stardom validates queerness in the narrative but latently the film struggles to overcome its own homophobic tropes.In an interview with Manila Mohan (2023) director Jeo Baby answers why the homosexual relationship was represented without any intimacy scenes either as a flashback or memory. These answer again points to the latent homophobic anxiety of the star and the director, he says:

> It was a *conscious decision* to not include intimate scenes. Initially when Paulson and Adarsh came to me for discussion, they narrated some flashback scenes where physical intimacy was present but later when we worked together on the script, *they were removed to suit my level of comfort*. They approved my concerns. Then we approached Mammooty and *he has also given inputs to the script*. He asked if it will be better if we make the story in such a way that they (the homosexual partners) don't meet in the movie. We also agreed. Initially we planned an interval where the characters engage in conversation but later on Mammookka said it would be better if we can make an interval where the characters share eye contact from a distance, and we did so for the interval block. (emphasis mine)

On a close reading, the interview reveals a hidden fear from the part of the director and the star and that is reflected in the formation of the homosexual love narrative. The possibilities of representing a full-fledged and intimate homosexual story were nibbed at the level of script discussion to suit "the style of direction" and the convenience of the star. Though this style suits the directorial repertoire of the director and the star attributes of the actor[4] what it does at the level of the representation is that it limits an open expression of homosexual love. This is problematic when we consider how this homophobic choice restraints the development of the queer element.

If we closely analyse the narrative, most of the narrative revolves around the heterosexual divorce and the homosexual relationship is only hinted and referred. Mathew's love story with Thankan is presented as a few snippets of his lover and they don't even look eye to eye. Similarly, the more privileged Mathew's perspective id foregrounded and Thankan is reduced to a silent onlooker. While Mathew has a more privileged class and caste background, to a certain extent, the societal intervention is limited and there is no degrading by people whereas Thankan enjoys no such privilege.His facial expressions are the only clue about their relationship. At the level of the narrative, there is absolutely no scene of intimacy between the homosexual partners. Even when the whole movie revolves around the theme of queerness, no attempt was

[4]He is Known for playing restraint emotions

made to explore the aspect of desire between the partners. There is no handholding, touching or any form of physical intimacy that is presented in the movie. There are only silent looks and hushed feelings. There is a forthright portrayal of homosexual relationship in mainstream films like *Moothon* but *Kaathal*consciously abstain from any form of physicality.

On the one hand, this representation may reflect on the nature of Kerala society as well as the mainstream film culture that is very restrained and moralistic when it comes to the depiction of physical intimacy between partners. On the other hand, the nature of Mammooty's stardom is closely associated with restrained sexual desires. So even when he chooses to play a queer character, it is unlike his star persona to share physical intimacy with the partner.At the same time, it can be argued that this representation somehow is an extended version of homophobia that is unconsciously penetrated into the narrative. The narrative suffers limitations in expressing queer relationship to the full extend as the film culture and the society still has issues with the idea of queer sexuality as an acceptable form of sexuality.

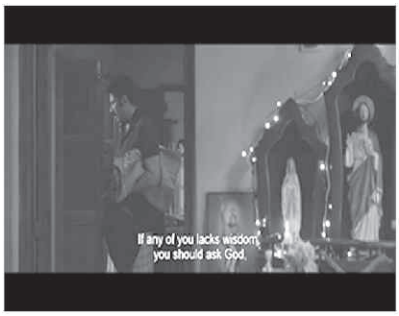

Image 1:The mirror scene - Mathew looks at the mirror at home on the day Omana filed divorce suit

Image 2: The metaphorical rites of passage -Mathew crossing

Image 3 : The Shadow scene -anxieties of threshold after listening to the conversation between his wife Coming Out and father about his relationship with Thankan

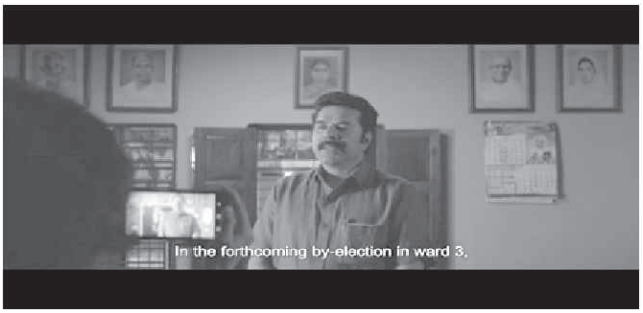

Image 4 : Coming Out in public by recording a video message for his voters

Image 5: Mathew gives his campaign notice to Thankan
Image 6 : Thankan is seen as walking towards hesitant looks and no touch or eye contact Mathew but the pan short showcases a distance

Image 7&8: Thankan touching the posters in the first and second halves of the movie – the first touch is a hesitant one second one is an expression of open love. Interestingly, he places the poster over the derogatory description (Kundan) of homosexual identity on his wall.


Image 9&10: The final Mirror shot – scene showcases the ambivalence of Mathew and hope of Thankan and again their bodies are not connected and the physical distance remains.

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Neenu Suresh

AI in the Preservation of Oral Traditions : Challenges and Innovations

Abstract

Oral traditions are foundational to cultural heritage, embodying the histories, values, and collective identities of communities worldwide. Yet, the very essence of oral traditions being passed down through spoken word renders them susceptible to fading over time. This paper explores how artificial intelligence (AI) can play a pivotal role in not only preserving but also revitalizing these ephemeral cultural artifacts. By harnessing advanced technologies such as natural language processing (NLP), speech recognition, and machine learning, AI offers innovative methods to digitize oral narratives. These technologies enable the creation of digital archives that enhance accessibility and ensure the longevity of oral traditions for future generations. Central to this exploration are the ethical and cultural considerations inherent in the digitization of oral traditions. Questions around the authenticity of AI- generated translations and the rights of indigenous communities over their cultural data are paramount. Addressing these concerns is crucial for ensuring that AI-driven preservation efforts respect and uphold the integrity of cultural narratives. Through interdisciplinary research, this paper aims to highlight AI's transformative potential in cultural preservation.

By proposing frameworks to navigate the ethical complexities associated with AI technologies, it advocates for responsible and inclusive approaches to safeguarding diverse cultural heritages. Ultimately, by integrating AI into the preservation of oral traditions, this study envisions a future where these rich and diverse narratives continue to thrive and resonate across global communities.

Keywords : AI, oral traditions, cultural preservation, natural language processing, speech recognition, machine learning, indigenous rights, ethical AI.

Introduction

Oral traditions are the bedrock of cultural heritage, serving as the primary medium through which communities convey their histories, values, and collective identities. These traditions encompass a wide range of expressions, including storytelling, folklore, songs, and rituals, which are passed down through generations via spoken word. The preservation of oral traditions is crucial for maintaining the diversity and richness of global cultures. However, the transient nature of oral traditions makes them susceptible to loss, especially in the face of modernization and globalization.

Artificial intelligence (AI) offers innovative solutions for preserving these ephemeral cultural artifacts. By leveraging technologies such as natural language processing (NLP),

Neenu Suresh is an Assistant Professor Department of English, Government Arts and Science College Uduma

speech recognition, and machine learning, AI can digitize, analyze, and enhance the accessibility of oral traditions. This paper explores the role of AI in the preservation of oral traditions, examining its potential benefits and addressing the ethical and cultural challenges involved. Through case studies and examples, we will illustrate how AI is being used to safeguard cultural heritage and propose frameworks to ensure ethical and effective implementation.

The Role of AI in Digitizing Oral Traditions

The digitization of oral traditions involves converting spoken word into digital formats that can be stored, analyzed, and shared. AI technologies, particularly NLP and speech recognition, play a pivotal role in this process. NLP allows computers to understand, interpret, and generate human language, while speech recognition technology converts spoken language into text. One prominent example is the "Living Tongues Institute for Endangered Languages," which uses AI to document and revitalize endangered languages. The institute employs AI-powered tools to record and transcribe oral traditions, creating digital archives that are accessible to researchers and community members. These tools can handle multiple dialects and accents, making them highly effective for capturing the nuances of oral traditions.

Case Study: The Hawaiian Language The Hawaiian language, once on the brink of extinction, has seen a resurgence thanks to AI and digital technologies. Initiatives like the "Hawaiian Language Web" project have utilized AI to develop speech recognition and NLP tools tailored to the Hawaiian language. These tools assist in the transcription and translation of oral traditions, ensuring that they are preserved and accessible for future generations. By creating digital archives and educational resources, AI has helped revitalize the Hawaiian language. Schools and community programs now incorporate these AI tools into their curricula, allowing students to learn and engage with their cultural heritage in a meaningful way. This case study demonstrates the potential of AI to not only preserve oral traditions but also to foster language revitalization efforts.

AI and Cultural Preservation: Opportunities and Benefits

AI technologies offer several opportunities and benefits for the preservation of oral traditions:

1. **Enhanced Accessibility**: AI can make oral traditions more accessible by creating digital archives that can be easily shared and accessed online. This democratizes access to cultural heritage, allowing people worldwide to learn about and engage with diverse traditions.
2. **Efficient Documentation**: AI-powered tools can efficiently document large volumes of oral traditions, including dialects and variations that might otherwise be overlooked. This comprehensive documentation ensures that the richness and diversity of oral traditions are preserved.

3. **Interactive Learning**: AI can create interactive learning experiences, such as virtual reality (VR) environments and chatbots, that immerse users in oral traditions. These experiences can enhance cultural education and engagement, particularly among younger generations.
4. **Linguistic Analysis**: AI enables detailed linguistic analysis of oral traditions, helping researchers understand language structures, usage patterns, and historical developments. This analysis can provide valuable insights into the evolution of languages and cultures.
5. **Preservation of Dialects and Variants**: Many languages have multiple dialects, and oral traditions often vary significantly across regions. AI can help document and preserve these variations, ensuring that the full spectrum of a language's oral traditions is captured.
6. **Support for Language Learners**: AI-driven language learning apps and tools can provide support for individuals interested in learning about specific oral traditions. These tools can offer interactive lessons, pronunciation guides, and cultural context, making the learning process more engaging and effective.

Ethical and Cultural Considerations

While AI offers significant potential for preserving oral traditions, it also raises important ethical and cultural considerations:

1. **Authenticity and Accuracy**: Ensuring the authenticity and accuracy of AI-generated transcriptions and translations is crucial. Misinterpretations or inaccuracies can distort the original meaning and cultural significance of oral traditions.
2. **Community Consent and Ownership**: It is essential to obtain consent from communities before documenting their oral traditions. Communities should retain ownership and control over their cultural data, ensuring that it is used and shared in ways that respect their values and traditions.
3. **Cultural Sensitivity**: AI developers must be culturally sensitive and aware of the nuances and contexts of oral traditions. Collaborating with cultural experts and community members can help ensure that AI tools are developed and used in culturally appropriate ways.
4. **Digital Divide**: Access to AI technologies and digital archives may be limited in some communities, exacerbating existing inequalities. Efforts should be made to ensure that all communities can benefit from AI-driven preservation initiatives.
5. **Intellectual Property Rights**: The issue of intellectual property rights is particularly pertinent in the context of AI and oral traditions. It is important to ensure that the rights of the communities who own these traditions are protected

and that they receive recognition and benefits from any use of their cultural heritage.

Case Study: Indigenous Languages of North America

The "First Peoples' Cultural Council" in Canada has partnered with AI developers to create tools for documenting and revitalizing indigenous languages. One such tool is the "FirstVoices" platform, which uses AI to record, transcribe, and translate oral traditions in various indigenous languages. The First Peoples' Cultural Council (FPCC) is a BritishColumbia-based First Nations-run organization dedicated to preserving, revitalizing, and promoting the languages, arts, and cultures of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Recognizing the critical state of many Indigenous languages facing extinction, the FPCC launched the "FirstVoices" initiative in collaboration with AI developers. This platform also provides language learning resources and interactive tools to engage younger generations. However, the project has faced challenges related to community consent and data ownership. Ensuring that indigenous communities have control over their cultural data has been a priority, and the project has implemented policies to protect the rights and interests of these communities. This case study highlights the importance of ethical considerations in AI-driven preservation efforts.

AI-Driven Innovations in Oral Tradition Preservation Voice Cloning and Synthesis

Voice cloning and synthesis technologies have advanced significantly in recent years, enabling the creation of digital replicas of human voices. These technologies can be used to preserve the vocal characteristics of storytellers and performers, allowing future generations to experience oral traditions as they were originally conveyed. For instance, the "Voice Preservation Project" uses AI to clone the voices of elders from indigenous communities, creating digital archives that capture the unique vocal qualities and intonations of these oral traditions. These voice clones can be used in educational programs, virtual reality experiences, and interactive exhibits, providing an immersive way to engage with cultural heritage.

Machine Translation

Machine translation tools have become increasingly sophisticated, capable of translating between a wide range of languages with a high degree of accuracy. These tools can be particularly useful for documenting and preserving oral traditions in multilingual contexts. Projects like "Translatotron" by Google have demonstrated the potential of end-to-end speech translation, which can directly translate spoken language without the need for intermediate text. This technology can be used to create multilingual archives of oral traditions, making them accessible to a global audience.

AI-Enhanced Storytelling

AI can also be used to enhance storytelling by creating interactive and dynamic narratives. Using techniques like generative storytelling, AI can generate new stories

based on traditional themes and motifs, ensuring that oral traditions continue to evolve and remain relevant. For example, the "AI Storyteller" project combines machine learning with traditional storytelling techniques to create interactive narratives that can adapt to the preferences and inputs of the audience. This approach can help keep oral traditions alive in the digital age, providing new ways for people to engage with their cultural heritage.

Challenges and Limitations

While AI offers many promising solutions for preserving oral traditions, it also faces several challenges and limitations:

1. **Technical Limitations**: Despite advances in AI, current technologies still struggle with accurately capturing the nuances of human speech, especially in less-studied languages and dialects. Issues like background noise, accent variation, and context- specific meanings can pose significant challenges.
2. **Resource Constraints**: Developing and implementing AI technologies for cultural preservation requires significant resources, including funding, technical expertise, and infrastructure. Many communities, particularly those in developing regions, may lack the necessary resources to adopt these technologies.
3. **Bias and Representation**: AI systems are only as good as the data they are trained on. If the training data is biased or unrepresentative, the resulting AI models may perpetuate these biases. Ensuring that AI systems are trained on diverse and representative data is crucial for accurate and fair preservation of oral traditions.
4. **Sustainability**: Maintaining and updating digital archives and AI tools requires ongoing investment and effort. Ensuring the long-term sustainability of these projects is a critical challenge that needs to be addressed.

Future Directions and Recommendations

To maximize the potential of AI in preserving oral traditions, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Community Collaboration**: AI developers should collaborate closely with cultural experts and community members to ensure that tools are developed and used in ways that respect and preserve the cultural significance of oral traditions.
2. **Ethical Frameworks**: Establishing ethical frameworks and guidelines for the use of AI in cultural preservation is crucial. These frameworks should address issues of consent, ownership, authenticity, and cultural sensitivity.

3. **Capacity Building**: Investing in capacity-building initiatives can help communities develop the skills and resources needed to use AI tools effectively. This includes providing training and support for community members to document and preserve their oral traditions.
4. **Inclusive Access**: Efforts should be made to ensure that all communities have access to AI technologies and digital archives. This may involve addressing infrastructure challenges and providing affordable or free access to AI tools.
5. **Ongoing Research**: Continued research into the application of AI in cultural preservation is needed to address emerging challenges and opportunities. This includes exploring new AI technologies and methodologies for documenting and analyzing oral traditions.
6. **Interdisciplinary Approaches**: Leveraging interdisciplinary approaches that combine AI with anthropology, linguistics, and cultural studies can enhance the effectiveness and cultural sensitivity of preservation efforts. Collaborations across disciplines can lead to more holistic and informed solutions.
7. **Public Awareness and Engagement**: Raising public awareness about the importance of preserving oral traditions and the role of AI in this process can garner support and foster community involvement. Educational programs, public exhibitions, and media campaigns can help highlight the value of cultural heritage and the innovative methods being used to preserve it.

Conclusion

The preservation of oral traditions is essential for maintaining cultural heritage and diversity. AI technologies offer innovative solutions for capturing, preserving, and revitalizing these ephemeral cultural artifacts. By leveraging NLP, speech recognition, and machine learning, AI can enhance the accessibility and sustainability of oral traditions, ensuring that they are passed down to future generations.However, the use of AI in cultural preservation also raises important ethical and cultural considerations. Ensuring authenticity, obtaining community consent, and addressing issues of ownership and access are crucial for the responsible use of AI in this context. Through collaborative and culturally sensitive approaches, AI can play a transformative role in preserving the rich tapestry of global oral traditions.

By addressing these challenges and leveraging the opportunities offered by AI, we can ensure that the voices and stories of diverse cultures continue to resonate for generations to come.

The integration of AI in the preservation of oral traditions is not just a technological endeavor but a cultural mission to safeguard our shared human heritage.

In conclusion, the marriage of AI and cultural preservation holds immense potential

for protecting and revitalizing oral traditions worldwide. Through careful consideration of ethical, cultural, and technical challenges, we can harness the power of AI to create a sustainable and inclusive future for our global cultural heritage.

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Dr. Sakshi Wason

Re-Visiting 1984 through the Mythical and the Fabular Arpana Caur and Manjit Bawa : The Graphic Documentation of 1984

Abstract

My paper will look at the Anti-Sikh riots of 1984 (in India) through graphic documentation by Manjit Bawa and Arpana Kaur. In their paintings, they delve into the mythical, the fantastical, the fabular and the mystical in order to provide another perspective on the violence against a particular religious community of the nation.

My paper will bring out several intersecting points (which will be developed) such as: reference to a composite, non-violent, secular culture which acquires deeper significance due to the fact that Sikhism is a syncretic religion, composed by strands from the Bhakti and Sufi movements (with conventional associations to the Hindu and Muslim religions respectively); an appropriation of a unique kind of symbolism and abstraction, borrowed from the Western cubist tradition but infused with the fabular and the mythical; an attempt towards a conscious alleviation of the tragedy and the trauma; the articulation of an aesthetic response to state-sponsored violence around an event mired in the mobilisation of the state and its deterioration into arson.

Keywords : Anti-Sikh riots, fantasy, myth, paintings

I remember the first painting I did had a heap of corpses (discussed in detail later) with a shadow-like woman waving her arms in despair. But it was very heavy on my heart, that painting. But painting has to uplift you no matter how tragic. Even in *Guernica*, there's a screaming horse, but at the bottom, there's a child holding a flower. There has to be some redeeming element, even in the darkest of times. So I started painting human tragedy in the backdrop of nature. And I would take those natural elements from the miniatures, you know the curved horizon line of the Basohli miniatures, the way the trees are painted, the water is painted and the figure is drowning, and the others are just looking away, or looking on, and unable to reach out to that person in her suffering[1]. (Arpana Caur)

Poverty, religious intolerance and ethnic violence are a constant source of anguish to me. I often relive the nightmarish hours of the Delhi riots in 1984 when innocent Sikhs were brutally butchered for no fault of their own. That was a time when I became very busy trying in my own small way to bring a split city together again, a time when my interest in and belief in Sufism deepened and became one of the central tenets of my being. The cause of ahimsa and peaceful co-existence of all beings finds itself reflected in my work. Though I have always reacted practically to crises rather than run to my easel

Dr. Sakshi Wason is an Assistant Professor in English, Zakir Husain Delhi College, University of Delhi

[1]Nair, Uma. "Tracing Dualities Over Four Decades". Millennium Post. 16: 2 (2017): n.p. Web. 5 November 2018.

Picasso's *Guernica* is to me the last word in protest – no armed riots can ever achieve what this astonishing painting has done[2]. (Manjit Bawa)

I place the above quotes by both the artists in a manner of succession because they bring out several intersecting pointssuch as: reference to a composite, non-violent, secular culture which acquires deeper significance due to the fact that Sikhism is a syncretic religion, composed by strands from the Bhakti and Sufi movements (with conventional associations to the Hindu and Muslim religions respectively); an appropriation of a unique kind of symbolism and abstraction, borrowed from the Western cubist tradition but infused with the fabular and the mythical; an attempt towards a conscious alleviation of the tragedy and the trauma; the articulation of an aesthetic response to state-sponsored violence around an event mired in the mobilisation of the state and its deterioration into arson.

Caur's initial aesthetic response to the violence of 1984 is portrayed in the series – *World Goes On* (contextually, the very title becomes an interesting comment on the disregard and the indifference of the state and the people who inhabit it, towards the traumatic suffering of a particular community/religion). "...painting came completely at (sic) a standstill because human lives were at stake. And out of that pain came this series *World Goes On*..." In an untitled painting from the series *World Goes On*, Caur depicts a heap of corpses and the dark silhouette of a woman flailing her arms (such was Caur's immediate response to the violence of 1984, as mentioned earlier), against a red background, which foregrounds the bloodshed during the violence. There is also a bent tree and two other human figures in anguish. Several of Caur's paintings do not have titles. This refusal to title becomes a unique response to violence. It raises the possibility of multiple interpretations (Bawa also employs the same strategy).

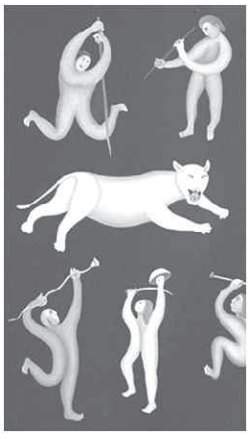
Caur's 1984 series titled *World Goes On*, begins with images of tortured bodies, heaps of corpses (oil-on-canvas), inconsolable widows and exhausts itself in a stark comment: people unaffected by the violence around them. This attitude of selfish self-absorption becomes a recurring image in the series.It becomes Caur's attempt to forge a connection between modern literary aestheticism and the contemporary world's indifference to

[2]Puri, Ina. *Black and White*. Penguin: Delhi, 2006. Print. 34.

violence. Caur's first paintings around the 1984 riots paint a world unaffected by the sufferings of fellow human beings. But this response undergoes a transformation as folkloric myths and legends make an entry into the artist's thought processes and shape the aesthetic responses.

In another untitled painting from the same series, Caur uses deep resonant colours to define the sky, the earth and water. This divides her painting at three levels and displays her skilful use of colour tones and variations. In the painting, the woman is drowning in the water and the two male figures are quite unconcerned, they do not even look at her, let alone help her. Central to much of Caur's work is the woman figure. It is like her alter ego inhabiting a parallel world-the canvas.

The series *World Goes On lays emphasis on death and is also an affirmation of life. Death is portrayed through the use of water.* Although water is conventionally regarded as life-giving, Caur inverts this meaning and deploys it instead to portray death. The refusal to title the painting assists Caur in doing away with traditional justifications and explanations attached to representations of conventional symbols such as water, fire etc. She uses water because for her, there was no way to paint death. Water also becomes a means for Caur to hold on to her characters and to her world of death and allegory.



Bawa's earliest aesthetic responses to the 1984 violence, however, come two decades after the actual tragedy:

> This painting captures my immeasurable pain over the anti-Sikh violence of 1984. The time is right, I don't believe in cashing in on recent tragedies. When wounds are fresh then it is wrong to throw even one straw into the fire. There's so much violence in this world. I have to say something. After all, I'm not just an artist, I'm a human being too. When we kill anyone, it's like killing our own children. Every act of violence has repercussions elsewhere. You kill Muslims in Gujarat, they will kill Hindus elsewhere, and it goes on and on and on[3].

In one of his paintings (image 3, Appendix), Bawa depicts five warrior-like figures attacking a lion. The lion stands in for the Sikhs. Bawa portrays the Sikhs in an interesting manner – the lion's roar is clearly 'visible' – whereas, in reality, during 1984, the voice and the agency of the Sikhs were silenced and crushed (as was evident through the popular sloganeering - such as 'Police hamare saath hai' (The police is with us), 'Sikhon do mar do aur loot lo' (Kill the Sikhs and rob them) and the doctored FIRs - Veena Das, in her book *Life and Words: Violence and Descent into the Ordinary*, presents a detailed and topographically specific description of the kind of FIR documentation that was offered to the survivors, in the police stations: "some survivors in Mangolpuri and Sultanpuri who had been moved to relief camps in the city gathered enough courage to go to the police station to register criminal cases against those who had looted their property or killed someone in their family."[4] This was done to obtain official proof that these grievous events had, indeed, occurred and that they had been affected by these events. This wasn't done in the hope that the perpetrators would be caught or punished, because the survivors were well aware of the complicity of the police in the riots. The policeman on duty at the police station "insisted on dictating the framing sentences of the FIR."[5] The standard framing sentences of the FIR ran as follows: "On date 31.10.1984, due to the fact that the Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, was cruelly murdered by her two security guards, the people in Delhi, the capital of India, being enraged, engaged in illegal activities of arson, looting, and mass killing. Several *gurudwaras,* Sikh families, and their shops were looted."[6]

How is it, then, that the framing sentences of the FIR used language that attributed a certain subjectivity to the crowds claiming that *they had been so maddened by anger* that they attacked people and property? After all, the victims were well aware of the fact that the crowds had been led by local politicians and were under the command of the local Station House Officer.

[3]Puri, Ina. *Black and White*. Penguin: Delhi, 2006. Print. 37.
[4]Ibid., 67.
[5]Ibid., 67.
[6]Ibid., 67.

What is haunting in this case is that these very FIRs, which encoded what one might call the lie of the state and surveillance by the state, were under the command of the local Station House Officer. Another response to the fact of the silencing of the Sikhs is presented through the portrayal of a fierce lion in the fearless act of jumping through a ring of fire: it seems to be reminiscent of the way in which hapless Sikhs were slaughtered by putting a tyre around their necks and setting them afire, as their friends, relatives and neighbours looked on. It was 'illegal' to 'protect' or 'safeguard' the Sikhs. Often, when a Sikh was set on fire, and the dying person would call out for water, the policemen would shout that if anyone dared to come out and interfere with the law ('kanoon ke khilaf kisi ne hath uthaya' – literally, raise their hand against the law), he would be shot dead. The "voice of the policeman evoking the authority of the 'law' when the 'law' was clearly dead was what announced the spectral, surveillant presence of the state."[7] The painting hence encodes an act of surveillance. Another powerful metaphor that the painting evokes is that of the circus – the circus, by its very definition, is a performance-space, where the moves of the participants are already choreographed and well-structured. This works as an interesting analogy for the way in which the general public (that is, people not belonging to the Sikh community) acted, their moves were well-orchestrated, the police officials provided them with the list and details of targets – i.e. the members of the Sikh community.

Both the artists' initial responses foreground the primacy of colour – which becomes their point of departure from a Western mediation of violence in monochromes of grey, white and black. The movement from the representation of an event as a metaphor is punctuated by the translation of the violent, traumatic reality to oil and water-colour. Besides colour, the departure continues in the visual, spatial arrangement of the figures portrayed in the paintings, in the background[8] (composed of vibrant pastels) which flows into the foreground, in the depiction of bodies (whether animal or human), experimentation with limbs and the elements of the natural world – such as trees, rivers etc. The point of continuity lies in the improvised appropriation of symbolism

> The quaintly rounded, inflated creatures suggest a creature form but are shaped simply and constituted only with rudimentary limbs and compressed torsos – they have for their total environment only a flat, barely differentiated field of colour in which they appear fixed as well as in extreme slow motion. The field helps to focus attention on the often solitary image changing its very slightly contoured form with an energy which is as near to being neutral as possible[9].

[7]Ibid., 69.

[8]Bawa's backgrounds are quite distinct: "Colour needs a space", he insists, when asked why his dream-figures have always operated in a luminous void unmarked by a sense of place. "I dislike the idea of too many elements cluttering the picture space". This is why, although he loves the Rajput and Pahari paintings which he lists amongst his sources of stylistic influence, he does not wish to be seen as their uncritical heir. "I enjoy the delicious greens of the Kangra miniaturists, but I will pick just that green and not necessarily replicate the marvellous Kangra trees with their thousands of precisely delineated leaves", he adds. Ibid., 196.

[9]Ibid., 112.

Additionally, the use of vibrant colours to define aesthetic response and expression forms an integral part of Caur and Bawa's paintings. This is also a consequence of their adherence to the miniature traditions – the Pahari miniature tradition for Caur and the Basohli miniature tradition for Bawa. What does this play with colours signify? Caur uses deep resonant colours to define the sky, the earth and water. Bawa employs bright and radiant shades, which are often a repetitive feature of his paintings. Both found the dull greys and whites inadequate for their aesthetic vocabulary. For instance, Bawa points out–

> The prevalent use of dull, fashionably 'European' colors – blue, grey, beige – are foreign to my imagination or vocabulary. Childhood impressions of fleeting russet sunsets remain forever inside my mind's eye: like the vibrant pinks, greens, yellows, purples and other colours that paint our Indian landscape in bold shades. I seek to make them an integral part of my language... Basically I have created my own rules. I was the first to use colours like violet, shocking pink, bright yellow and green on large spaces. I used flat colours. On the canvas I put emblematic images. I was criticised a lot but stuck to my intuitive and innate sense of form[10].

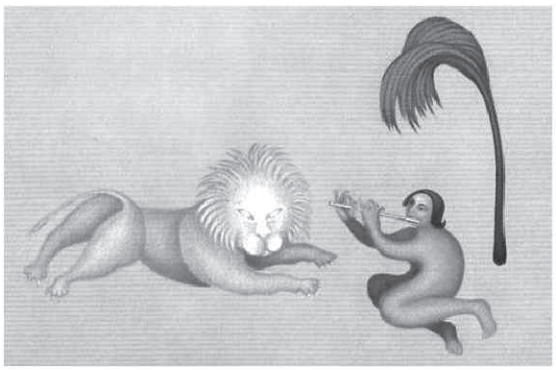
But the journey of both the artists has been very different in some respects – Bawa worked for a long time as a screen printer in London whereas Caur gave up her fellowship at the St.Martin School of Art in London and returned to India. Both then, were exposed to the curriculum of Western art. The curriculum serves as one of the several means by which the state directs its surveillance onto the individual. There exists a sort of double assertion of this surveillance on Caur – during her graduation, she acquired training in the Western literary tradition. Hers is the instance of the individual looking back to and at the (colonial) state – through strategies such as portraying the Fates cutting the chord in her paintings (which will be discussed in detail further in the presentation). Bawa rejects the Western surveillant gaze by infusing his art works with colour and exploiting mystical Sufi themes of secularism to great effect[11]. Other strategies that both artists employ are – a

[10]Ibid., 60.

[11]In order to drive home the point about the artists' departure from the Western painterly tradition, it is essential to place their work in context. J.Swaminathan offers a brief summary – "Historians and critics date the modern Indian movement to the advent of Raja Ravi Varma on the scene. Most urban painters since, reared in the myopia of the art schools set up by the erstwhile colonial rulers were practising wither a species of English academic realism or later, with the opening up of the European scene, various brands of expressionistic figuration. The departure of the Bengal school may be noted more for its feeble atavism than for any vitality or vigour. The lyricism and poetic realism of the pre-colonial traditions were replaced by mawkish sentimentality and the Bengal school effort, after spreading like an epidemic, retreated into the nooks and corners of backwater aestheticism to breathe its tubercular last. If Amrita Shergill broke new ground and her work was aspiring to a true synthesis, her career was that of a comet cut short in its flight. The Jamini Roy tangent ended up as a straight jacketing of the free-flowing power of the Kalighat *pattachitra*. The figure in search of form seemed to be wandering like a waif knocking at inhospitable doors. It acquired its majesty and magic with the appearance of Husain on the scene. Later, with Tyeb Mehta, the figure came into its own again. After his romance with expressionistic brush strokes was over, Tyeb, in one courageous leap, took to flat areas of colour and an austere staccato line: the figure got congealed into a state of puppet-like inscrutability. It is in this background that the emergence of Manjit is to be encountered." Ibid., 48.

recourse to myths, topical fables and legends. Ashok Vajpei observes that though Bawa is deeply interested in legends, he:

> …hardly ever paints a legend – he creates through his work an almost personally pieced together painterly legend. A legendary space where his intense and unfailing lyricism reaches out to epic dimensions. The lyrical glows, as it were, with an epical luminosity. Ultimately, it is a legend of imagination itself. Entrenched as he is in the Punjabi folk epics, he plays around with legendary realities rather than engaging with historical facts. He imagines the legendary almost to the exclusion of the historical and yet gives his art a dream-like quality; something which pulsates with energy on the borders of the ordinary and the fantastic.[12]



Another painting which depicts Bawa's response to the 1984 violence is *Krishna with the Lion*. The lion stares blankly at the purple/indigo-bodied figure,[13] playing the flute. The human figure appears to be in a very vulnerable position. But there is no panic, fear or apprehension on the face. He is unperturbed; serenely playing the flute. Bawa's repetitive use of the flute, in the hands of women and Lord Krishna, brings forth his love for Sufi music and points towards a secular, composite culture. Bawa repeatedly uses the figure of the lion despite the historical insistence (in the context of 1984) on suppression (and also victimisation) of the voice of an entire religious community. It also motions towards Sikhism being a syncretic religion, borrowing from mystic Sufi thought. The juxtaposition of two religions[14] – Sikhism through the lion and Hinduism through Lord Krishna – is a depiction of Bawa's attempt at imagining and portraying (as he mentions in his journalistic pieces) unity amongst the religions. There also exists a sense of harmony

[12]Ibid., 45.

[13]"In Bawa, the colour purple signifies Vishnu-Krishna, the world-preserver and universal beloved. In this context, the lion becomes a protector of the weak…It is in this coherence of opposites that order and harmony are celebrated". Ibid., 53.

[14]"While he may have been born a Sikh, Bawa, like the faith itself, is a man of too many hues and nuances to be typecast as a 'Sikh artist'. In his works, Hindu myths, Sufi legends, street performers, animals, saints and fa[rmers,] family and friends all make their appearances as if in cameo roles", notes S.Kalidas.Ibid., 45.

in the curved lines which make up the figures of the lion, the deity and the tree, thereby establishing a sense of continuity. Yet, there is also a sense of discontinuity because the bodies seem to be made up of fragmented parts. This play between wholeness of being and fragmentation points towards the traumatic consequences of violence. It also portrays the artist's attempts at translating this trauma and violence into visual surveillance through painting.

Based loosely on mythic tales, his characters evolve to become the artist's very own stylised forms, belonging to his imaginary world – gambolling lions, skittish goats, bulls, cats and tigers resonate with the spirit's joyous celebration. Alone or in the company of celestial beings, they speak of peaceful existence between the meek and the mighty. His colours comprise the brazen yellows, luminous greens, bright crimson, turquoise and indigo[15].

Bawa's forms have gradually crystallised, meaningfully acquiring a special character and identity but steeped in an aura of mystery and fantasy, which is so essential to his personal myth. He himself once remarked: "I want to create a sense of pure aesthetics, so simple that even a child can respond to the image."[16]

Bawa has himself commented on his use of folkloric myths and legends:

> Personally my day-to-day life revolves around these elements, to label is to limit. They remain to me basically icons – as Durga, Kali, Shiva, Krishna or even Heer-Ranjha, Mirza-Sahiba or Sohni-Mahiwal. In my world of imagination, they are very real. I have known them from childhood tales, MYTHS and fables narrated to me by my father. As I grew up, I met them again in literature, music, poetry and art. What else can I paint?[17]

Within this question that Bawa poses about the content, form and style of painting, lies his aesthetic response.

In *Betrayed By the State*, Jyoti Grewal examines the events of 1984, especially the rationale behind making Sikhs the focus of communal hatred and points out that Hindu-Sikh tensions have existed for at least as long as they have both been around as clearly defined religious categories, which places them somewhere in the later part of the nineteenth century. Popular facile comments regarding Hindu-Sikh togetherness abound; communal harmony between the two; Hindu-Sikh 'bhai-bhai', where the masculine connotation is interesting in and of itself; Sikhs as 'protectors' of Hindus; and Sikhs as only a sub-sect of Hindus, to name a few themes of these popular rhetorical repetitions. Such rhetoric which is based on certain beliefs and organising principles of life serves a purpose in comforting us, bringing ease in interpersonal relationships and in keeping

[15]Ibid., 98.

[16]Ibid., 165.

[17]Ibid., 123.

groups who recognise their differences from annihilating one another.

Re-locating to the aesthetic response now, it is interesting to note how Bawa moved from Realistic Studies to Abstraction, working for a while with floating fragmented forms which he then joined to make a figure: "My own idiom has evolved further. Increasingly, I avoid clutter and paint in a style that is minimalistic, austere. Indic mythology, the epic mythic as well as impressions of life, people and animals inevitably find their way to my canvas and have become my dramatis personae."[18] He reiterates the Italian painter Giorgio Morandi's belief that "nothing can be more abstract, more unreal, than what we already see. We know that... the objective world... never really exists as we see and understand it... has no intrinsic meaning of its own, such as the meanings that we attach to it."[19]

Both the artists re-appropriate the fabular and the mythical in myriad ways. As a point of entry into this aspect of their paintings, it will be useful to observe the way in which both of them play around with the Sohni-Mahiwal myth.

In the 1984 pogrom, the main targets were Sikh men – recognisable by their turbans and the five K's, which served as visible symbols of their identity. (Though there was violence against women, but it was not on a very large scale). It was this very identity that the government was willing to obliterate..

For the Sikh women, it changed their entire relationship with society, with families, with livelihood and their very status within the state. Interestingly, Caur portrays mostly women in her paintings, there are hardly any representations of men except in the Sohni-Mahiwal paintings.

Caur relies heavily on the allegorical mode of representation – in response to historical trauma – this begs the question - to what extent is allegory a useful vehicle to take forward the discussion on trauma (of individuals, collectively)? She (like Bawa) repeatedly plays around with the Sohni-Mahiwal myth in her paintings. Sohni and Mahiwal are characters from one of the four popular tragic love stories of Punjab (the other three being – Sassi-Punnu, Mirza-Sahiba and Heer-Ranjha). Hence, they are characters restricted in a particular, rural locale. It becomes an exercise in visual fabulism – that is – visualising imaginatively "beyond the known, beyond the accepted, beyond belief."[20] Although it is discontinuous with the "empirically available material world" (the world which can be observed, mapped, surveyed and measured), remarks S. Ramaswamy, but it opens up a channel for re-interpreting and re-ordering reality.

"Sohni was a real person 500 years ago, but for me any person irrespective of gender is 'Sohni' who can dare to jump in the water. Those who can take risks are Sohni. Those who know how to struggle in life and reach the pinnacle are Sohni. I think every person is a pot

[18]Puri, Ina. *Black and White.* Delhi: Penguin, 2006. Print. 145.
[19]Ibid., 146.
[20]Ramaswamy, Sumathi. *Beyond Appearances? Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India*. Michigan: Sage, 2003. Print. 12.

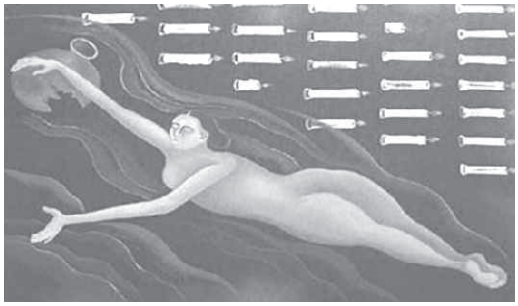
and the world is clay. In the end we all have to merge ourselves in that mud,"[21] writes Caur. Caur's depiction of the various aspects of the legend of Sohni the lover offers an insight into the psyche of women.

In the painting titled *Chenab 2* (1996, *Shamiana Series*), Caur depicts Sohni in a vertical position, with a red earthen pot (as legend has it, Sohni would meet her beloved Mahiwal across the river, in the night when everyone would be asleep, swimming with the help of a baked earthen pot so as to keep afloat; when her nightly wanderings are discovered, the women of the family decide not to tell her husband but deal with her on their own – they replace the baked pot with an unbaked one, which dissolves in the water and she drowns. Mahiwal, in an attempt to save her, jumps into the river and he too, drowns). The earthen pot becomes an extremely poignant and important symbol (Caur deploys this object to great effect in her paintings). The title – *Chenab* – is interesting because it is one of the rivers that flow through Punjab (the land of five rivers), one of the markers of its identity. It is a life-giving, vital element but Caur employs it to depict death. In this painting, Sohni's body is painted red, but its form is diminutive. Red is conventionally considered to be the colour of passion. The river is infested with dangerous creatures – crocodiles, snakes etc. The river also becomes a loaded metaphor – in Bhakti and Sufi thought (Sikhism draws heavily from the Bhakti and Sufi traditions), the river is synonymous with the trials and tribulations of human life, which one needs to transcend in order to become one with the Divine soul. By making the female figure small in size, perhaps Caur desires to shift the attention away from her diminutive figure and instead wants us to focus on the plethora of problems, by making the river water and the creatures occupy the entire canvas. But this does not mean that Caur is gesturing towards an easy dismissal of the woman.

In another Sohni-Mahiwal painting, Caur has delineated the figures quite carefully – as is evident in Mahiwal's traditional curvy 'jutti' (traditional footwear) and his outfit, especially the turban. The multiple earthen pots (one of them broken) separating the two lovers, along with the river, lend a folkloric quality to the painting. Yet, the division of the

[21] Sinha, Gayatri. *Expressions and Evocations: Contemporary Women Artists of India*. India: Marg, 1997. Web. N.pag.

painting into two parts and also the diagonal division of the second part of the painting by an electric plug lends a contemporary, modern quality to the painting. Perhaps it is Caur's gesture to bring together the old and the new, the primitive and the modern, thereby reinforcing the fact that the mythical and the legendary are still relevant in the present-day world can be meaningfully re-appropriated to depict larger concerns.



In *Sohni in the Night* , Sohni's body is spread across the entire panel, diagonally, with a broken earthen pot. 'Night' is suggestive of the time when she would, clandestinely, go to meet her beloved Mahiwal. The waves of water appear sinister because the pot which helped her cross the river has broken and she is about to die. The candles placed horizontally lend an air of abstraction to the painting. The linearity of the candles builds visual tension with a rounded pot and body. The expression of Sohni enhances the pathos in the painting by reflecting at her impending death. Also, one of the candle has gone off, symbolising the end of Sohni's life.

Bawa's paintings depict and dramatise silence – when the blue water surges around Sohni desperately making her way to Mahiwal, it is as if the world is hushed, watching. Sohni's face in the following painting is turned away, as if in an act of defiance and indifference to the spectator. The face and hair appear cosmetic, as do the limbs, joined at unusual angles, borrowing from the appearance of a fish's fins, offering a different perspective, a different regard. In Caur's painting, the sea creatures apparently threatened to overwhelm the frail Sohni whereas in Bawa's painting, Sohni has become one with those creatures, but she still possesses a unique subjectivity.

Like Caur, Bawa too re-appropriates the mythical and the fabular. Bawa's fabulism bends the world through the prism of the depicted character's subjectivity. He begins with the self in the social and historical context and re-works that world to explore the inscrutable outside of the spectator and between the spectator and the work of art. "Fabular and mythical[22] roots always held the promise of redemption for Bawa – they were his solace during the traumatic time in 1984 when he worked tirelessly at rescuing and rehabilitating the victims in Delhi."[23] In "My Punjab", Bawa writes:

> …the government-orchestrated murders which followed later (i.e. after Indira Gandhi's assassination) killed the feeling for the greatness of the state. It is widely accepted now that extremism in the state had been born then…One thing was clear to me – the rage was directed at the government, never at the Hindus. That feeling remains the same even today It would be foolish to blame the Hindus because no Hindu did it. Did your father go out to kill? Your brother? Do you know anyone who did it? No, you don't because they were no one's brothers, fathers or friends. They were goondas let loose by the government. But in Punjab they will not fall prey to talk of revenge. If they (the Hindus) are mad, we certainly are not. That is not said in a tone of superiority but of resignation. There is a great deal of apprehension in the minds of the Hindus. Or was, in the aftermath of the 1984 massacre. They had thought of moving and some of them had indeed moved to neighbouring Haryana. But nothing seemed right. "Our roots are here. Our businesses are here. It is difficult to build contacts elsewhere. Here, after years of bribing and cajoling, we have a friendly excise man and inspector. Elsewhere they demand too much. How could we survive?[24]

Bawa's appropriation of the legend of Ranjha also works in fashion similar to the Sohni myth. For instance, above, the painter calls the figure with the flute – Ranjha – not Krishna. Additionally, there seems to be a very interesting frame around the figure.

However, popular iconography (the blue-skin, the flute) suggests that the figure is Lord Krishna. Bawa's aesthetic response in this regard is remarkable:

[22]"The myth is that a world can exist in which its creatures belong simultaneously to earth and air and that their life is one of unending play and a pursuit of pleasant preoccupations. Hence we see all manner of creature activity. These images surprise us but they also satisfy. They contain and convey a palpable sensation". Ibid., n.pag.

[23]Puri, Ina. *Black and White*. Delhi: Penguin, 2006. Print. 47.

[24]Ibid., 87.

> Even if it is Krishna, it doesn't matter-Ranja is also a flute player, and Ranja was a divine lover, more than Krishna, because Ranja gave everything for love. Krishna never gave everything for love. Krishna was in love with Radha, and he left Mathura and went to his kingdom. So if it were Krishna in my painting, he should have a [peacock] feather on his head. The dog is anti Hindu and anti-Muslim both. Showing the dog is anti-religion. When critics ask how I could make this painting insulting Krishna, I say it's not Krishna, it's Ranjha. In Bawa's paintings, the blindfolded woman is both an impassive Justice and Gandhari, the queen grieving for her hundred sons killed in the Mahabharata war; the purple cowherd is at once Krishna as pastoral musician and Ranjha as doomed romantic hero, both dedicated to forbidden loves and composing art in the shadow to tyranny.[25]

It is ironic that Bawa identified Ranjha as the protagonist in this painting. Nevertheless, like Krishna, Ranja was a cowherd with a flute who serenaded his beloved Heer. Heer was forced to marry her cousin when her romance with Ranjha was discovered; when she rebelled, her family poisoned her, and Ranjha died of heartbreak on her grave.

> Though Ranjha is a regional folk hero, the story is well known all over northern India. It has been popularized by Punjabi Sufi poets, such as Waris Shah, Bulle Shah, and Sheikh Ahmed - whose verses Bawa quotes intermittently. While painting, he rediscovered these poets, whose simple Sufi lyrics held out assurance that some meaning would emerge from the madness. Night after night Bawa the mystic sang out those songs of hope and wisdom on a battered harmonium in the Jangpura home of friend, comrade-in-arms, Sufi scholar and Delhi University academic, Madangopal. A couplet that served as the inspiration for this painting reads, “Nobody would listen to my flute; I'll play for the dogs.[26]

Bawa articulates his aesthetic response as follows: “Art to me is an intensely emotional personal experience, because it comes from deep within my being. Here there is no intellectual pretension, no need to conform to social norms, instead only heartfelt honesty, an expression of truth, as I feel it, see it and know it.”[27]

Like Bawa, Caur also often explores the syncretic, composite, secular character of human existence in her paintings. “Why always depict something so tragic? We have to move ahead. Guru Nanak, Kabir and Buddha are who the world should look up to,”[28] she

[25]Ibid., 59.
[26]Ibid., 59.
[27]Ibid., 117.
[28]Sinha, Gayatri. *Expressions and Evocations: Contemporary Women Artists of India*. India: Marg, 1997. Web. N.pag.

says. Caur's portrayal of the founder of the Sikh religion is different from the portrayal of other commonly drawn Gods and Godesses – such as those which abound in Indian Calendar Art. Additionally, Caur was fascinated by Nanak's iconoclasm. He embodied the true spirit of Sikhism and the *Guru Granth Sahib* (which is composed of the work of 36 poets from all castes and classes – 7 Sikh poets and the rest Hindu and Muslim poets, including Kabir and Farid). "Communal violence and secularism are opposite forces. If they balance each other out, it might bring solace to the wounded,"[29] she adds.

In one of her paintings reproduced above, Guru Nanak's robe (drawn in the form of a toga) is stained with the blood of those slaughtered in the 1984 riots. Interestingly, it is only Nanak that she portrays in such a manner.

Bawa's art encapsulates his political responses to the social fabric torn apart by the '84 riots. He is a self-aware painter who realises his responsibility towards his paintings and his audience. The use of allegory and fable through the figures of Krishna, Ranjha and Hiranyakashyap display Bawa's understanding of the relationship between art, violence and the fabular. This mythical and fabular recall is "only a trigger to a wholly new experience."[30]

> background or prop themselves up against the wide horizon of the world, rather they manifest themselves suddenly, like apparitions, in a field that could well be an aura.[31]

In order to attempt establish further common ground with regards to graphic documentation in the works of Arpana Caur and Manjit Bawa, I would like to dwell for a moment on both the artists' reference to Picasso's *Guernica*. Painted in 1937, the *Guernica* belongs to the genre of 'history painting', painted in the abstract Cubist style.

The intersecting points stated at the beginning of this chapter, in reference to Picasso's *Guernica*, find resonance in Picasso's own stance on his painting - "In the panel on which I am working, which I call *Guernica*, I clearly express my abhorrence of the military caste which has sunk Spain into an ocean of pain and death."[32]

[29]Ibid., n.pag.
[30]Ibid., 178.
[31]Puri, Ina. *Black and White*. Delhi: Penguin, 2006. Print. 147.
[32]From the website: https://www.pablopicasso.org/guernica.jsp. 14 November 2017

At this point, a brief history around the painting is worth going into – the town of Guernica is situated in the Basque Country in the North of Spain. Hitler had helped General Francisco Franco (a Nationalist) to win the Spanish Civil War and become the head of Spain. To return this favour, Franco allowed Hitler to bomb Guernica, as the latter wanted to try out some new weaponry and some military strategies. Guernica burned due to the bombing. This caught Picasso's attention and provoked his ire. He was working on a painting for the Paris Exhibition of 1937, on the request of the Spanish government. He abandoned his earlier ideas and began working on Guernica. Though it received little attention at the Exhibition, as it began touring the world, it described the reality of the Spanish Civil War to the international community. The painting employs human and animal imagery in frenetic action to portray suffering – a terrified horse about to die, a gored bull, flames, a dead soldier with a mutilated arm, a woman with a dead child, another woman trapped in the window of a burning house. It is a graphic condemnation of the crimes committed by Franco against hundreds of civilians. Two interesting points of concern consequently emerge from Picasso's painting– the first is the manner in which he articulates his response to the gory historical event of the state-sponsored destruction of Guernica and the fact that it was a work which was commissioned by the Spanish government, as a means to portray Spain to the global community.

The precise significance of the imagery in the *Guernica* remains ambiguous. When asked to explain his symbolism, Picasso replied that the painter does not owe it to the viewers/spectators to explain his symbolism. Done in monochrome black, white and grey, the painting is Picasso's response to a horrific fact of history. The visual kinetic energy expressed through jagged figuration creates the impression of newsprint, documentary reportage and photographic representation. But there is a sense of visual order in the painting – Picasso balances the composition by organising the figures into three vertical groups moving left to right, while at the centre, the figures are stabilised within a large triangle of light.

Dismissed initially as a random painting of messy animal and human body parts, *Guernica* rose to become one of the most powerful indictments of a government's unparalleled atrocities against its citizens. The painting travelled the globe. Picasso had vowed that it would only be restored to Spain (an instance of a state with war against its own people and the painter directing his surveillant gaze at the state) when its people would enjoy public liberties and democratic institutions (which happened in 1981). The painting hence becomes an instance of graphic documentation through which the artist directs his gaze towards state surveillance (of a particular community in a particular geographical setting), state sponsored violence and holds the state accountable for its actions. It makes an apt point for contextualising and locating a discussion on Arpana Caur and Manjit Bawa's work.

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Dr. Sambhu R.

Unravelling Gastrofeminism : A Postmodern Feminist Reading of Aimee Bender's *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*

Abstract

Aimee Bender's The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cakeundertakes a postmodern analysis of the patriarchal notions of female identity that have come to nucleate around food and culinary practices. The novel, which is written in a magic realist fashion that echoes the literary heritage of Gabriel García Márquez, revolves around Rose Edelstein and the members of her family who undergo a series of bizarre experiences ranging from her brother Joseph's acquisition of the uncanny ability to make parts of his body disappear to her father's undiscovered yet purportedly unbearable sensitivity to one or the other sense experience. The novel presents Rose as a precocious girl who realises that she has inherited the psychic ability that runs in the family in the form of a predilection to taste other people's emotions through the food they cook— a realisation that occurs in the wake of her sensing unhappiness to be the main ingredient in the lemon cake that her mother Lane bakes on the occasion of her ninth birthday. Following this visceral episode, Rose becomes unable to consume the food that is cooked in her family and falls back upon processed foods, being overwhelmed by the poignant insights she has gained from probing the intricate dynamics between female emotions and gastronomic rituals. The present study takes Rose's psychic ability as a critique of patriarchal assumptions regarding food to reveal the complex interplay between the pendulous swing of female moods and the culinary expectations foisted upon women by a male-dominated gustatory order. In doing so, it attempts to supplant the idea of a petrified female identity indexed to the kitchen conceived of as a site of domestic imprisonment with that of a fluid female identity that seeks emancipation through recuperating cooking within an alternative feminist domain.

Keywords : gastronomy, mood, gastrofeminism, postmodernism, magic realism

Aimee Bender is an American novelist who is known for her innovative incorporation of fairy-tale elements into her works. Unlike her predecessors like Angela Carter and Margaret Atwood whose subversive and parodic reworking of fairy tales foreground a radical feminist politics, Bender is more interested in appropriating fairy-tale motifs to understand the complex interactions between human beings and the hostile and incomprehensible worlds they inhabit. *The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake* (2010) is

Dr. Sambhu R. is an Assistant Professor, Department of English, N.S.S. College, Pandalam, Kerala

one such novel in which Bender employs an admixture of realist and magical elements to narrate a story that explores the nuanced relationship betweenthe feelings of female characters and the food they prepare.Bender creates a collage of female moods in this novel through the deft handling of postmodern techniques inflected with a feminist liberatory praxis. The narrative nudges binary oppositions beyond the paradigm of hierarchization through the employment of textual strategies like pastiche, mimicry, and deconstruction to volatilise the secure foundations on which patriarchal presuppositions of femininity rest.

Bender's novel follows in the footsteps of the magic realist tradition that originated in the 1940s in the West with the works of Spanish American writers like Miguel Angel Asturias and Alejo Carpentier who used indigenous aspects like folklore, local geography, and cultural beliefs alongside clear-sighted political commentaries to present reality through the optic of a magical sensibility. Coined by the German art critic Franz Roh in 1925, the term "magic realism"refers to a style of writing that presents surreal happenings in mundane settings. The term, which was originally used in opposition to the Expressionist way of perceiving the world, has since formed part of postmodern as well as postcolonial studies. Roh believed that Expressionism was obsessed with purveying a "fantastic dreamscape" and that it was characterised by "an exaggerated preference for fantastic, extraterrestrial, remote objects" (Roh 16-17). Roh's contention that Expressionism's projection of inner reality onto the external world produces hyperbolic landscapes is countered by Magic Realism's commitment to the production of a spacewhere "our real world re-emerges before our eyes" (Roh 17). This re-emergence isfacilitated by innovative techniques of representation that marka return to empirical reality. However, this return to empirical reality is realised through an unravelling of the deepest spiritual realityof the phenomenal world. For Roh, Magic Realism struck a balance between the oneiric world and the realm of tangible reality whereas Expressionism sought to mystify experiential reality.

Bender departs from the conventions of the culinary novelby employing magical realist elements even while narrating ordinary events. Her technique allows the reader to discover an alternative world of intensified reality nestled in the midst of the most humdrum happenings. Whereas a typical culinary novel carries with it certain presuppositions by way of women accepting their roles as consummate cooks within the domestic sphere, Bender's novel deconstructs the associations between female self-fulfilment and cooking. It is noteworthy that magical realist elements of the novel are portrayed through an interaction between various food items and the mood of the women who cook them. Whereas food is generally taken for granted as the product of female household labour in most works of fiction, food becomes an active arbitrator of female emancipation in Bender's work. Commenting on contemporary fiction's tendency to employ magical realism to revitalise feminist discourses, Wendy B. Faris claims that "Magical realism has affinities with and exemplifies certain aspects of the experience of

women that have been delineated by certain strains of feminist thought" (170).Bender captures these affinities by giving thwarted and oppressed female emotions a materiality in the form of food. The instantiation of mood as food shatters the structures of invisibility that circumscribe the psychological states of women toiling silently away in culinary spaces and makes their subdued voices of protest instantly palatable.

The novel focuses specifically on the adolescent experiencesof the protagonist Rose who has a preternatural ability to taste the feelings of whoever cooks her food. In a way, Rose is reminiscent of Laura Esquivel's Tita who has the ability to add her emotional states to the food she cooks. A reversal of the scenario presented in *Like Water for Chocolate,* Rose's ability, which makes it difficult for her to have a normal adolescent life, marks her out as the "other." She must learn to adapt to a world pedestalled on the foundations of make-believe and hypocrisy. But her acute gustatory powers hamper her attempts to integrate herself into a social order that ostracises her on account of her unique ability. The sudden appearance of the element of magic in her life on her ninth birthday is an event that Rose is hard put to deal with, with the effect that her new-found abilities initially start complicating her life, creating in her a belief that a normal and happy adolescence is unachievable. Although she starts searching outside the home environment for self-validation, she discovers that any attempt to run away from herself by seeking refuge in the transient solidarity offered by peer groups, only brings her into too deep a realisation of the discontents of family life. The novel also addresses the perils of adolescent trauma which has remained unaddressed in mainstream literature for several years despite mounting real-life statistics in favour of treating it as a pertinent concern.Although the trauma undergone by the protagonist is in no way similar to that which is portrayed in war or holocaust novels, it is also not one that can be conveniently swept under the carpet with the complacent assurance that it will gradually disappear as one grows into an adult. It is in its treatment of adolescent trauma with empathy and pragmatism that Bender's novel makes its distinctiveness felt. Her use of magical realism to present Roses's traumatic experiences within the framework of gender and age so as to throw into relief the need for the narrativization of adolescent female experiences in a manner that shuns the usual modes of exoticisation as well as normalisation also adds to its versatility.

The present paper attempts to analyse the interplay of food and mood in Bender's novel from a postmodern feminist perspective. It can be seen that the developmental trajectories of postmodernism and feminism have often overlapped, with the interesting consequence that they have benefitted from each other's theoretical postulations. The most important link connecting feminism and postmodernism is their mutual repudiation of "the status quo, of dominant systems and in general of the epistemology of the Enlightenment and the anthropocentric definition of the concept of knowledge, logocentrism." (Vidal83). Despite the many disharmonies that characterise their relationship, both fervently reject the legitimacy of established knowledge with man with

a capital 'M' at its centre. Both question the authenticity of binary oppositions that cause watertight compartments to be built around conceptions of gender and argue instead in favour of polyphony and fluidity. The paper also explores the nascent scholarly interest in food and cooking, which like postmodern feminist studies has also assumed interdisciplinary dimensions. The act of preparing and serving food, right from the stage of planning which ingredients to use, is a practice that highlights the contrasts between the social conceptions of gender. Although there has always existed a number of discourses on food, a gendered perspective is a rather recent development. It is one that is indebted to postmodern feminist studies for its critique of the traditional view that domesticity and cooking could only be approached as markers of patriarchal oppression. Feminist food studies replaces such conventional assumptions and sweeping generalizations with the idea of female autonomy, according to which a woman can choose when and for whom to cook.A field that encompasses a multitude of diverse disciplines like philosophy, anthropology, psychology, politics, sociology, history, and cultural studies, feminist food studiesbroadens our conceptions surrounding food, making it serve "as a substitute to compensate our emotional, psychological, and social desires, imperfections and ambitions" (Varghese434).

*The Particular Sadness of Lemon Cake*is divided into four parts and is forty-seven chapters long. The noveldeals with the extraordinary ability of Rose Edelstein, who at nine years of age, comes to realise that she can sense the emotions of a person by tasting the food he/she cooks. The novel describes Rose's ability as genetic since her brother Joseph, her father Paul, and even her grandfather had a similar form of psychic ability. When Rose's mother Lane makes her a lemon cake on her birthday, Rose discovers, to her chagrin, that the cake tastes nothing like a lemon cake should, but of unhappiness. It is with a lot of deliberation that Laneselects the ingredients for her daughter's cake. Speaking of the care that went into the making of the cake, Rose says, "We'd looked through several cookbooks together to find just the right one, and the smell in the kitchen was overpoweringly pleasant" (Bender9). However, when the cake is finally made and Rose takes her first bite, "The goodness of the ingredients—the fine chocolate, the freshest lemons—[seems] like a cover over something larger and darker" (Bender9). Tasting an overpowering flavour of emotional vacuity in the cake, she first checks the list of ingredients to ascertain what went wrong and is startled to discover that the lemon and the chocolate which were supposed to mingle in her mouth in an explosion of alternating sourness and sweetness, were only insubstantial coatings around a depressing hollowness. From this she deduces that the hollowness she tasted was the result of her mother's unhappiness. She reasons: "My mother's able hands had made the cake, and her mind had known how to balance the ingredients, but she was not there, in it" (Bender10).

Rose understands that the blandness of the cake which reflects her mother's emotional state is occasioned by two factors. The first is that Lane is unhappy with her mechanical job as an office administrator which requires her to work with computers and copy

machines. The second is that her marriage has broken down as a result of the dearth of healthy communication with her husband, which in turn has led to a stultified atmosphere in the family setup, with her interpersonal relations with the children too becoming warped by her general uncommunicativeness. Rose says "It was true: our dinners, always at the table, framed by floral-print kitchen curtains and the rising steam off casserole dishes, were almost always silent in those days…" (Bender93). Rose realises that her mother, despite being vexed by conflicting thoughts about her career ambitions and family life, suffers from a grave inability to articulate her apprehensions. She has become reticent not because her emotional life is destitute, but because she lacks the conviction to voice her concerns. It is interesting that the peak of Lane's emotional turmoil coincides with the onset of Rose's ability to taste psychological states and dissect them for the proportionality of positive and negative emotions. Rose, however, does not confide in her mother about the changes happening to her, and continues to put on an act of normalcy. Unbeknownst to Lane, Rose becomes her greatest confidante although these gastronomic revelations are much too difficult for a young girl of her age to digest. Thanks to Rose's ability, food thus becomes a compensatory mechanism for Lane's verbal infelicity. But Rose has the revolting feeling of spying upon her mother since Lane's cooking gives her a startling peek into a veiled mind bursting with hidden emotions, unsavoury secrets, desires, and fears.

Lane emerges in the novel as the example of a woman who is on the path to self-empowerment. She has quit her unrewarding job and turned to the kitchen to transcend the emotional vacuity that is eating away at her existence. More than a daily chore, cooking is, for Lane, a passionate activity that brings her closer to herself. She experiments with new recipes and serves the meals she has assiduously cooked with a great show of enthusiasm. But she is unaware of the fact that Rose is able to trace the provenance of every hidden emotion of hers back to the murkiest corners of her psyche through the act of degustation. Consequently, Rose is not only able to taste hollowness but also several allied emotions like sadness, guilt, and so on. Rose's second epiphany relating to her mother happens when she is twelve years old. Tasting another dish cooked by her mother, she understands that Lane is having a dalliance with another man. The food communicates to her Lane's mix of guilt and love which plunges her into an abyss of self-doubt. Rose states after tasting her mother's cooking that she got "such a wallop of guilt and romance in my first mouthful that I knew, instantly, that she'd met someone else" (Bender92).

The series of discoveries that Rose has about her mother culminates in her decision to avoid eating the meal prepared by Lane. Rose feels embarrassed to peek voyeuristically into her mother's mental world and falls back upon processed food as an alternative. Lane comes to look upon her ability as a curse rather than a blessing now since it has caused her to recalibrate some of the fundamental understandings she had about her mother. George, who is the friend of Rose's brother, George, comes to know about her extraordinary ability

before all the others. He tries to find out whether Rose is only sensitive to food cooked by her mother or whether her abilities are more wide-ranging. The two of them proceed to do some experiments with chocolate chips. When the experiment concludes, Rose tells George that "Thechocolate chips were from a factory, so they had that same slight metallic, absent taste to them, and the butter had been pulled from cows in pens, so the richness was not as full" (Bender 61). She proceeds to enlighten him about the emotional state of the baker who, when he formed the dough, was feeling a gush of indignation. Rose now decides to work at a cafe where the professional ambience affords her a satisfying experience.One day, she tastes different kinds of food including eggs, butter, and nutmeg at the café and traces each ingredient back to its geographical provenance. She says:"The eggs are from Michigan...The butter is French butter...Not pasteurized...The parsley is from San Diego" (Bender271-272). Rose's ability, which is the basis of the magical realist vein of the novel, reinforces the dynamic relationship between food and mood, and in doing so, provides an intelligent critique of culinary spaces as inert. Her ability to taste emotions taps into the unexplored niches of the kitchen where seemingly uneventful happenings like baking a cake or making a pie are freighted with deeper personal significance. Rose, who utters the most clinching statement in the whole novel when she says"I ate an enormous range of food, and mood" (Bender243), deconstructs the idea of food as something impersonal and passive.

Once Rose accepts the onus that comes with her rare ability, she decides to have a more positive outlook on life. She starts spending more time with her mother now to overcome the gaps in their communication. She realises that her ability is the only portal through which she can access the innermost recesses of her mother's heart, and that rather than being flooded with feelings of shame and embarrassment, she must listen to her mother patiently by relishing the food she cooks. Bent on effecting a reconciliation with her mother, Rose starts engaging in culinary tasks in Lane's company. Although it still proves difficult for her to have intimate knowledge of her mother's world, she copes with the realisations her ability accords her. She thus takes an important step in the direction of bridging the yawning divide that has opened up in their mother-daughter relationship.

It can be seen that the act of cooking serves as a conduit for stifled female voices to be heard in the novel. Lane is torn between the two poles of motherhood and womanhood. Cooking becomes for her a way of reconciling her inner differences and of finding peace and happiness. Bender subverts the traditional notion of the kitchen as a repressive space by turning it into an intimately personal sphere that allows silenced and unarticulated female voices to be heard. Rose's ability to taste emotions becomes thenecessary corollary to Lane's reticence regarding her true emotions. Lane's cooking and Rose's acute gustatory powers work in tandem to repair the broken links of mother-daughter communication, and by extension, to amelioratethe tenuous atmosphere that pervades the family environment. Thus, it can be seen that the novel, through the connections it forges between food and mood, "[helps] us to understand how women reproduce, resist, and

rebel against gender constructions as they are practiced and contested in various sites, as well as illuminate the contexts in which these struggles are located" (Avakian and Haber 2).

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Sameema Sabini P. P.

Case Study : The Impact of Flipped Classrooms on Learning Basics of Psychological Research

Abstract

Flipped learning is an innovative pedagogical technique that brings traditional homework tasks into the classroom and provides educational content online, allowing students to study at their own pace. This method facilitates interactive, student-centered activities during class time, enhancing engagement and promoting higher-order thinking skills. This article explores the implementation of flipped learning in the "Basics of Psychological Research" module for third-semester psychology students. The module covers fundamental concepts and procedures in psychology research, such as research methodologies, data collection, and statistical analysis. By flipping this module, students engage with pre-recorded lectures and online materials outside of class, enabling more interactive and practical in-class activities. The flipped approach encourages deeper understanding, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. However, challenges such as student adaptation to self-directed learning and maintaining motivation were identified. Recommendations for successful implementation include providing support for time management, enhancing motivation, and offering continuous evaluation and feedback. The flipped learning model, despite its challenges, demonstrates significant benefits in preparing students for advanced academic and professional endeavors in psychology.

Keywords : Flipped Learning, Psychological Research, Student Engagement,Self - directed Learning

Flipped learning is an innovative pedagogical technique that upends the traditional classroom paradigm by bringing tasks that would often be considered homework into the classroom and providing educational information online. Making the most of class time for interesting, student-centered activities like discussions, group projects, and problem-solving is the aim of this approach. Flipped learning basically involves assigning students independent reading, work with multimedia information, or recorded video lectures to watch before class. Now that they may access the curriculum at any time and from any location, students can study at their own pace. After that, teachers may focus on helping students understand concepts more thoroughly and providing them with tailored support in the classroom by using activities that develop higher-order thinking skills.

Increased student participation is one of the advantages of flipped learning as it frequently permits more interactive and hands-on activities during class time.

Sameema Sabini P P is Head, Department of Psychology , Malabar College of Advanced Studies, Vengara.

Additionally, it offers opportunity for differentiation as teachers can alter in-class activities depending on students' various requirements and learning preferences. Flipped learning can also help students take more responsibility for their education and build their capacity for independent study. But in order to properly apply flipped learning and make sure that it fits with learning objectives and all students' requirements, careful planning, efficient use of technology, and continuous assessment and reflection are needed. Teachers must also consider equality, digital literacy, and access to technology outside of the classroom when designing flipped learning experiences. In order to support deeper learning objectives, flipped learning emphasizes technology integration, student-centered learning, and active participation. As such, it represents a substantial shift from traditional teaching approaches.

In their comprehensive review, Lage, Platt, and Treglia (2000) highlighted the benefits of flipped learning, stating, “Flipped learning allows for more active engagement and interaction during class time, promoting deeper understanding and higher-order thinking skills.” Smith et al. (2013) explored student perceptions of flipped learning and found that “Students appreciated the flexibility of accessing lecture materials outside of class and valued the opportunity for more interactive activities during class time.” In a meta-analysis of studies on flipped learning in STEM education, Hamdan et al. (2013) concluded that “Flipped learning was associated with significant improvements in student achievement and attitudes towards learning in STEM subjects.” Bergmann and Sams (2012) discussed challenges and considerations in implementing flipped learning, noting, “Effective implementation of flipped learning requires careful planning, ongoing support for teachers, and addressing issues related to access to technology and equity.” In a qualitative study, Tucker (2012) explored the impact of flipped learning on teacher practice and reported, “Teachers experienced a shift from being the 'sage on the stage' to becoming facilitators of learning, promoting greater student engagement and autonomy.” These studies provide valuable insights into the effectiveness, perceptions, challenges, and impacts of flipped learning across various educational contexts.

The last module, "Basics of psychological research," in the 3rd semester subject "Psychological Measurement in Testing," was selected for flipping. There were number of strong reasons for selecting this module for flipping, including the fact that its content addresses fundamental ideas and procedures in psychology research, such as the kinds of research, the research process, data collection methods, statistical analysis, and creating research reports. It might be difficult for students to understand these subjects through standard lectures alone since they are dense. Students are introduced to the basic procedures and techniques used in psychology research in this subject. The basic concepts of psychology research, such as the scientific method, research ethics, and the significance of evidence-based practice, are taught to students in this module, which often includes subjects like introduction to psychological research. Also exploring several study strategies, including correlational, experimental, and observational ones, is

beneficial. Students are able to choose the best design for a variety of research questions. Students also learn about variables and the accuracy of measuring them. This also covers related topics like as reliability, measure validity, and operationalization. This module including a variety of data collection techniques like surveys, questionnaires, interviews, and observational studies. Students get knowledge on how to select the best research methodology. An introduction to fundamental statistical ideas and methods, covering topics like inferential statistics, hypothesis testing, and descriptive statistics.

Students can actively interact with the material outside of class by flipping this module. In order to support self-directed learning and accommodate a variety of learning styles, they may read materials, watch lectures that have already been recorded, and do online tests or exercises at their own leisure. More interactive and practical learning activities might take up crucial class time when content delivery is moved outside of the classroom. Practical exercises, group projects, debates, and the application of research topics through case studies or real-world examples can all be included in in-class activities. By flipping this module, teachers may encourage students to arrive to class prepared, allowing them to go deeper into difficult subjects and lead conversations that promote knowledge synthesis, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Flipping this subject will better prepare students for their future research activities, whether in academia, applied settings, or graduate studies, because it focuses more on research methods and report writing. Flipped learning's interactive and practical components provide students the abilities they require to carry out and they present research with more effectively. So there are many advantages to flipping the "Basics of Psychological Research" module for both teachers and students alike. These advantages include increased learning and engagement as well as greater preparation for future academic and professional endeavors in the field of psychology.

The decision to flip the "Basics of Psychological Research" module to third-semester psychology students is in line with a number of strategic considerations. For example, since I teach the major psychology paper for these students, picking this particular group of students guarantees that the flipped module will be seamlessly integrated with the entire curriculum. Students gain from a coherent and integrated learning experience when the content of the flipped module is in line with the primary ideas presented in the psychology paper. Understanding and performing well on the primary psychology paper need an in-depth understanding of the research principles covered in this module. The fundamental building blocks of more advanced psychology courses include research methodologies, data collecting strategies, and statistical analysis. Early curriculum flipping of this module guarantees that students have a thorough understanding of these foundational ideas and it will help them for success in their future coursework. Students who grasp the basics of psychological research in their third semester will be better prepared to take on advanced topics and research projects in subsequent semesters. Early research-oriented attitude and skill development helps students to address psychological

topics and problems with evidence-based reasoning, which fosters analytical and critical thinking abilities. Through flipped learning, students become more proficient in conducting research and data analysis, which boosts their confidence in their potential to make significant contributions to psychology. Their confidence helps students do better academically and makes them ready for professional careers in psychology as well as future research pursuits.

To ensure the proper implementation of the "Basics of Psychological Research" module flip, careful planning and consideration of numerous important factors were required. First and foremost, it was essential to create excellent online resources, such as recorded lectures covering the module's main points, and to make them easily accessible to students via platforms like YouTube. This involved setting due dates for watching lectures and completing associated readings. Subsequently, there were check-up exercises in class, such as mini-quizzes, to test comprehension and ensure everyone had viewed the video. Follow-up sessions included interactive discussions, case studies, group projects, and practical exercises aimed at helping students apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios. Additionally, students received continuous assistance and feedback during the flipped learning process, with routine check-ins and opportunities for individual assistance to address any queries or issues. Finally, evaluation procedures were aligned with the flipped learning approach, assessing students' comprehension of major ideas, their application of research methodology, and their critical thinking abilities rather than just fact memorization.

After the implementation of flipped learning in the module “Basics of Psychological Research", many of important takeaways were reached. Due to their increased participation in the learning process, students were more engaged in flipped learning. By accessing pre-recorded lectures and online materials outside of class were more equipped to engage in group projects, debates, and practical exercises when they were in class. Students' understanding of the basics of psychological research enhanced through flipped learning. Students were able to more successfully understand difficult topics like research methodology, data collection techniques, and statistical analysis by interacting with the material at their own pace and going over concepts again when they needed. Through discussions and the application of research methodologies, students gained the critical thinking abilities necessary for assessing psychological research. Through group projects and peer discussions during in-class periods, students engaged in collaborative learning through flipped learning. So students were able to share information, analyze critically, and discuss different points of view in this collaborative setting. Students were encouraged to take more responsible for their education and learned how to efficiently manage their time through flipped learning. Students' ability to access and interact with this module content by using digital tools, multimedias resources, and online platforms has enhanced as a result of flipped learning. Overall, the “Basics of Psychological Research" module's flipped learning strategy received positive feedback from students.

There were a number of challenges in implementing flipped learning for the module "Basics of Psychological Research". Firstly, many students found it unfamiliar because flipped learning demanded them to take on more responsibility for their own education due to its self-directed nature. Some students found it difficult to manage their time effectively and follow up with pre-recorded lectures and readings, which led to rushed or inadequate preparation for classwork. Moreover, it was challenging to help students who were falling behind during independent study time due to the lack of direct supervision. Some students were not motivated to interact with the materials outside of class in the absence of the structure and accountability of traditional lectures, which resulted in their lower participation and learning outcomes.

For the module "Basics of Psychological Research," flipped learning requires careful planning, execution, and continuous evaluation. Here are a few recommendations for implementing and optimising flipped learning for this module, such as provide support and guidance for students to adapt to the self-directed nature of flipped learning. Additionally, Offer resources and strategies to help students manage their time effectively. Implement measures to support students who are falling behind during independent study time. Explore methods to enhance student motivation and engagement with course materials outside of class. By following these recommendations and actively utilizing the flipped learning approach, educators can effectively address challenges and enhance student engagement and outcomes in the “Basics of Psychological Research” module.

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Dr. Shamlal A Latheef

Deterritorialising the Homeland : Analysing the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict in *The Lady from Tel Aviv*

Abstract

The notion of "homeland" is what binds one to his or her nation, culturally and socially. Confronting the harsh realities of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict begins with the Jewish claim to their homeland in Palestine, which began with the first Zionist convention in 1897 and the 1917 Balfour Declaration. It all started with Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which sparked a nationalist movement among Jews and Arabs seeking regional autonomy. The rising demand for a Jewish state in Palestine culminated in the creation of Palestinian nationalism, which marked the start of the establishment of a national home for Palestinian Arabs. Rabai Al Madhoun's The Lady from Tel Avivdelineates Walid Dahman's journey back to his "homeland" after thirty-eight years in order to reunite with his beloved mother and the people and places he once left behind. Walid's life converges with that of Dana, an Israeli actress, on her way back to Tel Aviv, exposing the wide schism between them in their perceptions of their homeland. Walid's concept of "homeland" identifies with the traumatic existence of the Palestinian people, their existential quest, identity crisis, harrowing experiences of the past, and sufferings of the present. The paper attempts to analyse the harsh realities of Palestine-Israel conflict as reflected in the fictional world of Rabai Al Madhoun. Furthermore, it may invite discussions on the crucial issues pertaining to deterritorialising the homeland.

Keywords : Homeland, deterritorialization, Palestine-Israel conflict

Rabai al-Madhoun, a distinguished Palestinian journalist, writer, and renowned novelist, was born in the province of Ashkelon, a part of British Mandatory Palestine, in 1945. Following the events surrounding the 1948 exodus, his family, like many Palestinians, experienceddisplacement and subsequently resettled in the Gaza Strip. The formative years of al-Madhoun's life unfolded within the milieu of the Khan Younis refugee camp, located in the Gaza Strip. He pursued higher education at Alexandria University, ultimately forging a career in journalism in 1973. Al-Madhoun played an active role in the Palestinian liberation movement throughout the tumultuous 1970s; nevertheless, in 1980, he deliberately chose to disengage from political involvements, redirecting his unwavering dedication exclusively towards the domain of literature and writing.

Homeland is the native place or ancestral land that belongs to a particular group of

Dr. Shamlal A Latheef is Assistant Professor in English, M.E.S. College Nedumkandam, Idukki.

people. A homeland is often associated with a sense of deep attachment and emotional connection, as it is closely tied to notions of identity, belonging, and cultural heritage.Deterritorialising the homeland refers to the process of disrupting or reshaping the very notion of homeland as an exclusive territorial space.Deterritorialization of the homeland emanates from the competing or overlapping claims of different groups over the same land, leading to tensions and conflicts.As in the case of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, it is intertwined with the complex realities of proclaiming their possessionof the same land. While Israelis emphasize their historical and religious ties to the land of Israel, Palestinians assert their own rights and aspirations for self-determination and sovereignty over the same territory.

Walid Dahman returns to his homeland after thirty-eight years to meet his mother, Amina (Umm Walid). He is a journalist in a leading Arabic daily in England and also a novelist working on his latest novel, *Homeland of Shadows.* His mother, Umm Walid is staying at Nasrite Building with his nephew Nasreddine Dahman. Despite the relief that Umm Walid feels at Nazrite Building she is "still a prisoner to feelings of exile and uprootedness" (16). She has lost her house four times. Her first house was razed by Sharon's tanks in 1970. An Israeli shell fell on her second house during the Sharon era. Within six months, an Apache helicopter fired a rocket into her third house. She says:

> This was the fourth time that my house was destroyed by Sharon. God damn Sharon and everything to do with him–does he think my house is a military post, a training camp? Every time I build a new house he blows it up–does he think that Hamas leaders follow me around each time I move? (19)

Language and identity are decisive in shaping one's sense of belonging to a homeland. Walid recalls an encounter on a train in London, where he finds himself seated beside a fellow passenger deeply engrossed in a book. Curious about Walid's identity, the man inquired if he had Jewish heritage. In response, Walid eloquently communicated in proficient Hebrew that he was Palestinian. The Jewish gentleman expressed his fondness for Palestinians by stating that "he loved Palestinians and hated war" (63).

In his discussion with the actor Dana Newman concerning her lover Ehud, Walid arrived at the realization that Ehud, as a Jewish individual, held"*the 'right of return' the right all Palestinian refugees have been denied since the Nakba in 1948"* (78).This insight led Walid to reflect on his own existential consciousness. He contemplated the paradox of his status as"*a citizen in a land that never belonged to him or to his ancestors, I add silently; while I, who do belong to that land, have remained a refugee for decades*" (80). Walid experiences genuine apprehension about disclosing his Palestinian identity. He contemplates,

> I could pick any other nationality– anything but Palestinian. I am afraid someone might overhear and shout out: 'Palestinian! This man's a Palestinian!' What if someone got up and made a public announcement, 'Ladies and gentlemen: please be advised that there is a Palestinian on board!" (83)

Nevertheless, he ultimately affirms his identity by stating, "I'm Palestinian. I have British citizenship, but I am Palestinian" (83).Walid is keenly aware of the fact that his return to his homeland has been impeded by the prevailing political turmoil. However, he currently perceives a viable opportunity to visit Tel Aviv, where his mother resides, primarily due to the acquisition of his new British passport, a crucial document without which such a journey might have remained unattainable.

Dana Newman perceives the conflict between Israel and Palestine as primarily political, and she expresses her aspiration for a peaceful resolution: "there can be peace between us and the Palestinians. We're all fatigued by the ongoing situation. The issue, I believe, lies not with the people but with the politicians—both ours and yours. Sharon does not appear to seek peace, and neither does Arafat" (86).

Walid delves into the ramifications of Jewish immigration on the issue of Palestinian refugeeism, accentuating his perspective that "[f]or every Jewish immigrant to Israel, a dozen Palestinians are driven out" (85). His formative yearstranspired within the confines of the Khan Yunis refugee camps, shaping his early life during childhood and adolescence.Even subsequent to the completion of his education at Cairo University, Walid's existence remained unmistakably imprinted with the enduring features of a refugee. He adeptly conveyed his experiences with the assertion,"After graduating, I wandered the world, a refugee standing on his own two feet—though one was made of an exodus without end, and the other a journey without a destination" (85).Walid contemplates the injustices endured by the Palestinian people, reflecting on the historical narrative in the Arab world. He discerns an inherent bias in the evaluation of their existence, as he eloquently expresses, "I watch history in our part of the world and notice that it weighs our existence on a broken scale… 'If it seems lopsided, it's because the scale that measures has never been balanced" (85).

Deterritorialization exerts a very intense influence on the identity of individuals who experience it. Walid expresses his trauma of identity crisis by reflecting, "We used to belong to this place before they did. We belonged to the place and its history, the past and the present story and fact light and shadow. Is it really still our home?" (103) Furthermore, despite holding British citizenship, Walid recounts an instance of enduring scrutiny during a rigorous airport security check. He encapsulates his sentiment with the statement, "Even if I held the citizenship of every country in the world I will never stop being Palestinian" (107).

Palestine has great human tradition that encompasses diverse cultures, religions, and ethnicities. Most importantly, Palestine is a land of sacred sites revered by various religious groups, with Jerusalem occupying a paramount symbol of holiness for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. Amidst significant adversities throughout history, including conflicts, wars, and forced displacements, Palestinians exhibit unwavering determination in preserving their cultural heritage and traditions, maintaining a deep and enduring connection to their homeland. As Walid astutely asserts, "[B]ursting with history and languages and war, magic and facts and fables, prophets and saints and liars and sinners. And together, all these things have created a great human tradition"(94).

With the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Palestinians indeed began to experience a significant loss of possession over their homeland. The creation of the state of Israel resulted in the displacement of a substantial Palestinian population and the ever thinning of Palestinian territory. As Walid elucidated,"Lod was lost and Ramleh was lost and so was the mosque. Some died and some were killed. Some went somewhere else and others emigrated and never came back. Some weren't able to take anything with them at all when they went . . . some Palestinians managed to stay put in Ramleh. They held on to what they had, then Palestinian refugees from elsewhere moved there too" (116).This displacement of Palestinians, often referred to as the Nakba or "catastrophe" in Arabic, marked a painful and traumatic period for the Palestinian people. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip following the 1967 Six-Day War further deepened this loss, as settlements were established on Palestinian territories, leading to the gradual encroachment upon their lands. Walid engages in a discussion with Dana regarding the Jewish assertion of their entitlement to the promised land:

> [I]f this land was promised to the Jewish people by your God, as lots of Jewish people say and even believe, what about the Arabs' God? If God exists, He must belong to everyone. He must be just and fair and wise. There is no way God would take the land away from one people in order to give it to another. No God ever do that. No God would ever don the uniform of a settler and send armies out to kill and oppress. (98)

Throughout the decades, Palestinians have confronted an array of formidable challenges, including the loss of lives and loved ones due to ongoing violence and conflict. This historical testimony, as articulated by Walid, encapsulates the collective experience of Palestinians as they grapple with the multifaceted dimensions of loss in Palestine:

> For fifty seven years we have been counting our losses, sinking further and further into the distance. 1956: the War of Tripartite Aggression, the massacre of Khan Yunis. 1967: the setback, and the loss of the remaining silver of Palestine. 1973: the 6 of October war in which Sadat triumphed over himself. 1982: the invasion of Lebanon and the expulsion of the

> PLO. Losses and endings giving birth to even more losses and endings. Then the Oslo Accords. The beginning of another string of losses and endings. (118)

The inexplicable closure of the main entrance to access the Palestinian Province raises grave concerns regarding the fundamental issues of freedom of movement and opportunities accessible to ordinary Palestinian residents. It is noteworthy that Walid, holding a British passport, possesses the privilege to access the VIP entrance upon its opening, underscoring the differential treatment extended to non-natives. This glaring disparity accentuates the alarming reality that "[n]o ordinary Palestinian could ever hope to attain— and according to the terms of the Accords, ordinary Palestinians are simply ordinary, which is to say neither important nor very important" (122).

Nevertheless, the British citizenship held by Walid appears paradoxical in the context at hand, wherein he finds himself treated akin to a refugee at the threshold of his own homeland. The callous dismissal of his British passport, along with the act of shooing him away, left an indelible mark upon his psyche, evokingintensefeelings of disappointment and disillusionment. As he withdrew from the counter, a tide of emotions surged within him, compelling him to come to confront the stark reality of his Palestinian identity- the burden of his cultural legacy, the adversities confronted by his compatriots, and the numerous barriers encountered in their quest for a peaceful existence.

Out of resentment,Walid positions Hamas as a formidable militant force that recruits individuals, including innocent victims of Israeli attacks. He offers a critical perspective on Hamas and its recruitment practices:"When the Israelis kill someone, those jerks run around everywhere making such a racket about it. And then they try to give money to the poor victim's family… they are buying people, that's what they're trying to do" (187).In fact, Hamas stands as a significant political entity in the Palestinian territories, operates as both a militant movement and a major political party. With its jurisdiction extending over a population surpassing two million Palestinians residing in the Gaza Strip, Hamas functions both as a governing authority and a contentious participant in regional dynamics. While Hamas engages in political activities, it has garnered global attention primarily due to its active involvement in armed resistance against Israel. This militant aspect of Hamas has contributed to its reputation and has been a focal point of international discussions surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.**Steven A. Cook** in his 2021 article, "Your Fix for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Won't Work" writes,"Israeli officials like to tell everyone who will listen that Palestinians in Gaza are victims of Hamas. That is true, but I suspect that first and foremost they feel victimized by Israel. And thus, even for those Palestinians who do not support Hamas and Islamic Jihad, what they are doing amounts to legitimate resistance."

In contrast, its rival counterpart, Fatah, exerts its influence over the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and maintains control over the West Bank, having chosen

to disavow violence as a means of pursuing its objectives. This dichotomy in the Palestinian leadership, underscored by Hamas's unyielding antagonism towards Israel, has cast a shadow over the prospects for stability in the Gaza Strip. Recognizing this imperative, Hamas, along with Fatah and other key Palestinian factions, took a significant stride in July 2023 by establishing a reconciliation committee. This notable development occurred against the backdrop of escalating Israeli-Palestinian hostilities, underscoring the urgency and gravity of the situation. Participating the meeting to form Palestinian reconciliation committee, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas states that"[w]e must return to a single state, a single system, a single law and a single legitimate army" ("Palestinian").

The fact is that during the first Intifada, there existed a remarkable sense of unity and camaraderie between Palestinians and Jews in certain communities. Abu Faruq, Walid's friend, shares his real friendship with Sha'ul, though he is a Jew: "Back during the first Intifada, the Jews used to come to visit us. They used to come to our weddings and bring their children with them … Second Intifada that ruined everything. All the dying, the shooting and suicide bombs" (226). They shared celebrations and interactions that served as a testament to the potential for coexistence and understanding between the two communities, fostering a spirit of togetherness that transcended the political tensions of the time. However, the outbreak of the Second Intifada marked a tragic turning point, shattering the harmony that had once prevailed.

The First Intifada (1987–1993) was a widespread Palestinian uprising characterised by mass protests, civil disobedience, and acts of resistance against Israeli military rule and occupation. The Second Intifada (2000–2005) was a rather more violent uprising triggered by a visit by then-Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon to the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. In fact, the Intifadas are deeply integral to the Palestinian resistance movement as a vital force in the ongoing struggle for self-determination and justice. Israel's imposition of food scarcity, restricted movements, and controls on the passage of travelers from one village or town to another through roadblocks and checkpointsin Palestinian territories has not only infringed upon the fundamental rights and freedoms of Palestinians but has also contributed to the deep-seated grievances and frustrations that have fueled cycles of conflict and resistance in the region.

Walid's remarks on Ariel Sharon's intentions with Gaza reflect a deeply cynical perspective on the situation. It suggests that Sharon wants to "get rid of Gaza—not because he gives a damn about the people who live here but so that he can hold all the keys himself and slam the door shut whenever he wants to" (229).Ariel Sharon's unilateral disengagement plan in 2005 involved the unilateral withdrawal of Israeli forces and the dismantling of Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip and a small number of settlements in the northern West Bank. The unilateral disengagement plan initially received praise for its courageous approach to ending the Israeli occupation and paving the way for the eventual establishment of a Palestinian state. Rather than a genuine commitment to a two-state

solution, the plan was driven by a desire to consolidate Israeli control over key areas while relinquishing less strategically valuable ones. The parallel move left Palestinians divided into three separate territories, with the Palestinian Authority in nominal control of the West Bank, Hamas ruling Gaza, and East Jerusalem facing challenges under Israeli administration. The late Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling coined the term "politicide" to describe Sharon's policy, which, in his perspective, aimed to "lower Palestinian expectations, crush their resistance, isolate them, make them submit to any arrangement suggested by the Israelis, and eventually cause their 'voluntary' mass emigration from the land" (211). The disengagement plan was, in essence, a calculated move to reconfigure the occupation, maintaining security dominance while reducing international pressure.Mikhael Warschawski, a founder of the joint Israeli-Palestinian advocacy group, the Alternative Information Centre said, "Sharon finally accepted that the Palestinians could not be made to disappear. He wanted a Greater Israel but understood that he could not expel the Palestinians to achieve it"(qtd in Cook). Following the implementation of the plan, the Gaza Strip and the evacuated areas in the northern West Bank came under the control of the Palestinian Authority. However, the situation in Gaza remained complex, with ongoing conflicts between Palestinian factions and the Israeli forces, which culminated in the massive death toll of millions of innocent people including children.

Having acclimated himself to the persistent danger and violence that surrounds him, Walid has grown desensitized to the ever-present threats of stray bullets and unanticipated deaths, thus highlighting the tragic reality experienced by Palestinians. Walid effectively conveys the harsh and precarious reality faced by Palestinians in conflict-ridden areas:

> It is as if Gazans live in a permanent condition of randomness. Death wanders about as a stray, and each time it chooses its victim, it does so at random. There is the kind of death that is predictable and planned, and those who want that kind of end know how to find it. There is the unpredictable kind of death that happens according to the shifting balance of power between the various militias. One and a half million Palestinians crowded together living in the most unpredictable way this unpredictable form of life, living for a death that comes and goes. (242)

Walid aspires to articulate a solution to the issue of Israeli occupation in Palestine by invoking the words of Mahmoud Darwish, who advocates for a specific course of action: "get out. Leave our lands. Evacuate our territories and quit our sea. Get out of our wheat, our salt, our wounds. Leave the vocabulary of our memory. Then—and only then— can you take care of your extremists while we take care of ours" (86).

Despite the profound deterritorialization of Palestinian lives resulting from the Israeli occupation of Palestine, Walid remains optimistic about a more peaceful future and the

resolution of conflicts between Palestine and Israel. He envisions a situation devoid of violence and strife, as he articulates, "No assassinations and no suicide bombers, no soldiers and no militants, no Zionism and no Palestinian national liberation, no Intifadas and no settlements, no Sharons and Arafats, no Abu Mazens and no Shaul Mofazes, no warlords, no settlers, no Apache helicopters, no F- 16s and no car bombs" (87).

Deterritorialization in the context of Palestine-Israel conflict is a contentious issue in which it is observed as the direct result of the establishment and expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Golan Heights. The presence and growth of settlements contribute to the physical and demographic transformation of these territories, leading to the deterritorialization of Palestinian land. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and the ongoing displacement contributes to the deterritorialization of Palestinian communities and their loss of control over their historical territories.

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Sreekala K.
Najeeb P. M.

Reclaiming Territorial Sovereignty Through Heterotopia : Reading Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home : Stories From A War Zone*

Abstract

When political imaginaries of nation states in post-colonial situation validated territorial markers for creating bounded spaces, forces of globalization have introduced virtual interconnectedness, cutting across borders. Any nation can claim sovereignty within a bounded space through its political institutions and organizations. Since dismantling of social cohesion challenges political legitimacy of a nation, it resorts to integrate disparate social and cultural idioms into the national body. In post-colonial India, the redrawing of political map of Northeast India as part of the process of decolonization needs to be contextualized in the geopolitical influences of colonialism. In Nagaland, distinct and diverse Naga communities resisted the assimilative policies of Indian government. As they have distinct identity and unique culture, they combat attempts of nation-state to integrate them for relocating in territorially bounded spaces. They operate from their underground hide-outs, fighting against the Indian army, calling them illegal occupiers of sovereign Naga territories. These 'other spaces' or heterotopia as Michel Foucault defines them are constructed as sites of resistance. This article examines how the "underground army " in Temsula Ao's short story collection These Hills Called Home : Stories from A War Zone can be approached as a heterotopic site or 'other space' and analyzes how such spaces, constitutive of society, regulate and negotiate spaces of quotidian life.

Keywords : Territorial sovereignty, Nagas, underground army, Foucault, *heterotopia,* 'other spaces'.

The concept of territoriality as a matter of bounded space has occupied an unprecedentedly debatable position in political discourses. On the one hand, there is the machinery of globalization, which has activated a network of connectivity across border but on the other, boundaries and issues related to territorial sovereignty loom large in the political agenda of nation states. As Jean Gottman (1973) suggests, " It would seem indeed that sovereignty needs territory on which it is to be exercised, and a territory would appear useless for all practical purposes unless it was under some recognized sovereignty"(p. 3).Meanwhile, for a nation – state to emerge as a political entity and to maintain sovereignty, secure borders and boundaries are indispensable. Also, boundaries created arbitrarily as part of political homogenization challenges sovereignty claims of

Sreekala K is Assistant Professor in English, Government College, Chittur, Palakkad, University of Calicut, Kerala
Najeeb P.M is Associate Professor in English, Government Victoria College, Palakkad, University of Calicut, Kerala

nation state as it fails to contain social and cultural heterogeneity. Any nation can assert sovereignty within a bounded space through political institutions and organizations. But nation – state's attempts to invoke 'nationness' by assimilating its disparate socio-cultural idioms into the national body is met with discontent and violence. In such cases, nation - state has to resort to its historical narratives and cultural discourses that reflect ethos of unity, since dismantling of social cohesion of a nation invariably puts the political legitimacy and authority of the nation in crisis. It is quite clear that the creation of a territorial framework or bounded national territories requires considerable struggle.

This article attempts to examine the creation and functioning of heterotopia in the short story of Temsula Ao titled *These Hills Called Home : Stories from a War zone.*The concept heterotopia elaborated by Foucault describes places functioning in non-hegemonic conditions-a physical approximation of an imaginary Utopia.(1986). In Ao's stories there is 'underground army' fighting against Indian army for freedom from the Nation. In this article such transgressional heterotopias existing outside of all places but in contestation with the living space, are examined: their functioning as spaces of change and resistance. Hence first part of this essay is a discussion on Foucault's concept of heterotopia. The second part of this article examines how the "underground army " in Ao's*These Hills Called Home : Stories From A War Zone*(2006) stories can be approached as a heterotopic site or "other spaces" and analyses how such spaces, constitutive of society, regulate and negotiate spaces of quotidian life. Here, underground army functions as a kind of subterranean defensive tactic aimed at obtaining freedom from the nation. Nevertheless these spaces are in sharp contrast to everyday spaces as they are created to house other people. Hence they are autonomous spaces where social actors organize collectively against their oppressors. As such they have a paradoxical existence since they challenge and resist nation-state's claim to territorial sovereignty. It is the space where social actors find power, refuge and agency. Heterotopia in Ao's stories is an ideological space where the community's political imaginaries and territorial authority are worked out. Here also Foucault's (1986) notions on space suggests that " … certain ideological conflicts animating present day polemics oppose the pious descendants of time and the determined inhabitants of space" (p, 1).In colonial India, strategies of empire - building entailed mapping of territories and creation of bounded spaces. During colonial era the process of territorialization in India's Northeast started by drawing artificial and arbitrary boundaries which triggered ethnic conflict and issues of territorial sovereignty. Colonial border lines and boundaries have challenged territorial norms and indigenous practices since cartographic practices basically imagined as a political discourse, did not take into account pre-colonial traditions and ethnic configurations. Colonial mapping tactics only delineated political spaces of India. Nagaland, before becoming a full –fledged state in post-colonial India was a colonized space, colonial civilizational projects like proselytisation and technological advancements like road building mediated interrelations between social actors and territory. Furthermore, transition of Nagaland

from colonized space to nationalized space, issue of political settlement was revitalized and conceptualizing nation as political entity generated issues of identity and belonging. Nagas aspired for political independence, "to liberate their homeland from 'foreign' rule' (Ao, 2006). Colonial spatial expansion was the springboard for materializing cartographically defined territorial authority. During colonial period, the hill tracts surrounding the north, south and east of Brahmaputra valley , inhabited by fierce tribal communities remained inaccessible and for a long time those communities did not come under modern territorial regime. Historical documents show the tremendous social, political and cultural transformations of the Naga tribes after colonial encounter. Political manipulations of colonial rulers classified and categorized distinct and various Naga communities. Geographical markers of spaces and political institutions extended to post-colonial situation, only created faultlines in the social structures and cultural practices of Nagas.

Historically, The Treaty of Yandabo (1826) wrapped up Burmese control in the Northeast (Gait 1906 p 283) Nevertheless, British domination over Nagas was a gradual process based on a policy of annexation and empire building tactics. For total subjugation of Naga tribes and administrative expediency colonial rule categorized Naga Hills as: a) administered area b) politically controlled areas c) unadministered area. Geographical partitioning of Naga inhabited areas as part of colonial rule confined Nagas, scattered across the present states of Manipur, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Burma within bounded spaces. In pre-colonial period, Chieftainship was a decisive part of Naga administrative scheme. Every village was an independent, absolutely sovereign unit, under the control of village chief. Initially British rule did not introduce significant changes in Naga administrative pattern. Majority Naga tribes were left to govern themselves and colonial interference in Naga political sphere was negligible. Nevertheless, for consolidating power in Naga inhabited areas the British integrated native system of administration within their framework of governance. Prior to British political intervention, Naga tribes were not subject to a common or uniform pattern of ruling based on territoriality but administration was indigenous and independent(Srikanth & Thomas, 2018, p 100).But common subordination to British paramountcy generated political consciousness and a feeling of oneness among dispersed Naga tribes and territorial politics was introduced in Naga administrative system.

In post-colonial India, the redrawing of political map of Northeast India as part of the process of decolonization needs to be contextualized in the geopolitical influences of colonialism. Post-colonial nation has exerted political control through and across space regardless of spatially organized social and cultural patterns. In Nagaland distinct and diverse Naga communities inhabiting hill tracts of North, East and Southern parts of Assam and Brahmaputra Valley resisted the assimilative policies of Indian government. As they have distinct identity and unique culture and history they combat attempts of nation state to integrate them for relocating in territorially bounded spaces. For asserting

right to self-governance and reclaim territorial sovereignty Nagas resort to insurgence. The insurgents are social actors demanding for an independent Nagaland, engaging themselves in an eternal conflict with the political hegemony of nation-state. This new group of nationalists swept by a wave of dissidence and open rebellion, operate from their underground hide-outs, fighting against the Indian army, calling them illegal occupiers of sovereign Naga territories. They organize against their oppressors by creating clandestine spaces or 'other spaces'. These 'other spaces 'or heterotopias as Michel Foucault defines them are constructed as sites of resistance.

The term heterotopia is borrowed from anatomy, refers to parts of body which are out of place, missing, extra or alien. Foucault clearly refers to this term in the introduction to *The Order of Things.* Henceforth he uses the term in a lecture given to students of architecture in 1967 which was later published and translated into English as "*Of Other Spaces*". Foucault (1986) defines heterotopias as follows: "There are also probably in every culture, in every civilization, real places- places that are formed in the very foundation of society- which are something like counter sites, a kind of effectively enacted Utopia in which the real sites, all the other sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them by way of contrast to Utopias, heterotopias" (p, 24). Foucault identifies spaces "which are linked with all the others, which however contradict all the other sites.."(p,24) He distinguishes between two types of heterotopias – heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviation. Heterotopias of crisis, found in primitive societies, sheltered individuals, adolescents, pregnant or menstruating women and the like who live in society but are in a state of transition or crisis like. Such heterotopias were replaced by heterotopias of deviation designed to house individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to normative order. The third principle signifies privileges of heterotopias in placing together several incompatible spaces in a single real site as in a theatre or garden. Apart from these there are heterotopias linked to slices of time or heterochronies like museum, library or fairgrounds. In his *Of Other Spaces,* Foucault outlines heterotopias of illusion and heterotopias of compensation. Heterotopias of illusion are sites where anyone can enter but that entry itself is an illusion explicitly intended to hide certain exclusions. Foucault cites brothels as an example of heterotopias of illusion. Such sites reckon a system of opening and closing which set them apart from public places. Entry to such sites is either compulsory or requires certain permission.

Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home": Stories from a war –zone* is a collection of ten stories entwining strands of Naga culture and history. She has archived the lives of ordinary people existing in the borderlines of violence and amity; struggle and order; of tradition and modernity; of ethnicity and nationality; of life and death. The author in the

preface " Lest We Forget" remarks, " Many of the stories in this collection have their genesis in the turbulent years of bloodshed and tears that make up the history of Nagas from the early fifties of the last century, and their demand for independence from the Indian State. "(Ao, p,x). Besides there are stories recording the traditional Naga way of life. To a large extent Ao unsettles the attempts of essentializing mainstream discourses on Northeastern states as a hotbed of terror and violence or as an eerie fantasy land. *These Hills Called Home* highlights the existence of nation – state as a context in the political imaginaries and social ethos of Naga communities. Their attempts to find safe spaces in the midst of terror are vividly portrayed in these stories. "The Jungle Major", the first in the collection relates the story of Punaba and Khatila, a mismatched couple, leading a normal life in a village, to be soon engulfed in conflict between the rebels and the government forces. Almost all the stories with an exception of two, narrates the struggle between underground army and Indian army. "Soaba "is the story of a boy, a town orphan named Imtimoa or referred to as Soaba, meaning idiot in Ao language, who lived on people's charity. Quite accidentally,he reached Imlichuba or Boss' house. Boss representing unquestioned authority of nation, was a dreaded figure. Villagers involved in subversive activities and agents of underground outfits were arrested and brought before him for interrogation. In this story Ao describes how everyday lives of villagers were impacted by the ongoing conflict between Indian army and rebels. "Words like convoy, grouping curfew and 'situation' began to acquire sinister dimensions as a result of the conflict taking place between the government and underground armies."(Ao,2006 ,p 10). Even a simple word 'situation', in the context of underground movement referred to the fall-out of the struggle between the conflicting parties. Thus it is clear how 'other' spaces impinge upon normal lived spaces.

"The Last Song" is the story of Apenyo, 'the singing beauty' of the village. In this story also her village gets involved in the independence movement either directly by joining the underground army or by paying 'taxes' to the underground 'government' (Ao,2006, p, 26). The curfew man Satemba in the story "The Curfew Man" was formerly a constable in Assam Police but physical disability prompted him to quit job and later he pursues a shady career as a government informer. Another story named 'Shadows" details the story of Imli, 'a last minute entrant into the group' of underground soldiers. This story pictures the process of selecting soldiers to underground army and their journey to training camp to get training in guerilla warfare and in the use of sophiscated weaponry. Those who displayed extraordinary courage while combating Indian army were enlisted along with a consideration on adequate tribal representation.

The underground army is a typical heterotopic site, representing a space that is isolated and penetrable but not freely accessible like a public space. As we find in " The Jungle Major" the underground outfit is supplied with information, food and arms . Other stories included in this collection, "The Curfew Man ", "Soaba", "The Last Song" "Shadows"

also mention the functioning of underground army as a heterotopia ' the other space ' in society. There are the band of sympathizers like government officials, doctors, teachers and housewives helping the underground army to procure essential supplies, medicines and information about troop movements. Even villagers supporting the rebel cause by paying 'taxes', not being members ,were brutally punished by government forces. (Ao, 2006, p,26). Thus we find the underground army as an isolated space existing within society and major social actors are conduits for procuring arms and information. The subject of independence was a public talk,the villages to which the underground leaders belonged were punished and the names of the leaders were spoken only in whispers.

Though there is flexibility in entering such space, entry itself denotes a kind of exclusion. After joining the underground army, Punaba, in "The Jungle Major" made quiet, irregular visits to his village and his wife Khatila also lead an unsociable life. In "Soaba " Ao writes about this exclusion, as a form of punishment, when the whole village having members in underground outfit ,would be dislodged from their ancestral sites, "by forcibly uprooting them from the soil of their origin and being, and confining them in an alien environment, denying them access to their fields , restricting them from their routine activities and demonstrating them that the 'freedom ' they enjoyed could so easily be robbed at gun point by the 'invading ' army.(2006). Hence underground army exists as an isolated 'other space', outside of normative social order. In fact, to get into it one must have permission. People inducted into the underground army of freedom fighters were the group of nationalists aspiring for sovereignty of their territory, who wished for an independent Nagaland, a free nation in the world. The members were also ' outsiders' in their own territories, "For example, a town like Mokokchung would obviously have more Aos than Angamis or Semas because the town is in the Ao territory. Such towns also had many 'outsiders': Assamese or Bengali doctors or teachers, Marwari and Bihari traders, Nepali settlers,whose forefathers had fought with the British army and were given land to settle down. Slowly but steadily, a new environment was emerging and overtaking the old ways, and youngsters growing up in such places began to think of themselves as the new generation " Ao,(2006, p,10). Such dissident young people caught in the crossroads of Naga history incited separatism and they abandoned family, career and jobs to join the band of nationalists to free their homeland from forces representing nation–state. They aspired for Nagaland to be counted as a free nation of the world. Besides there was a method of conscription based on clans and many rural and urban adults were enrolled in underground army. Social outcasts caused by geographical factors as well as heterogenous demography created rebellious group of separatists.

Those entering the heterotopias are excluded and closely monitored by the forces of the nation. In “The JungleMajor", while Punaba was in his village, soldiers from Indian army approached the village looking for him and searches were carried out simultaneously in different sectors of the village. It was a routine to patrol the outskirts of

all suspect villages. " Soaba " also mentions massive deployment of army personnel at various strategic areas. In "The Last Song" the front porch of the new church is the base for Indian army's strategically planned surveillance mission. Underground hideouts were often raided by soldiers of Indian army and records of payment of money to rebels were seized .The army would go to that village and arrest the leaders for supporting rebels and betraying the government. In this story, it was the day when the new church building was being dedicated, the army conceived a vile plot to attack the villagers in retaliation. Another story " The Curfew Man " mentions stories of villagers subjected to humiliation and threats or killed by the patrolling parties of Indian army. In “Shadows” the number of trainee groups had to be reduced since the routes of underground army were constantly patrolled by Indian army.

Here, in Temsula Ao's stories, the underground army can be analyzed as a heterotopic site: the other space in society. The function of this space is to create a space of illusion – a heterotopia of illusion- insurrectionary in essence devised to destabilize political structure of nation – state. As such this space challenges and ruptures the dominant discourse of power imposed by the nation. Consequently this heterotopia is constituted as a site of resistance to nation's political hegemony and claims of absolute territorial sovereignty. It is constructed as an autonomous space and uses violence, force and militarization to recreate structures of power. Underground army as a heterotopias is the space where a new way of political ordering emerges, that is in contrast to the hegemonic political discourse of nation state as it offers a temporary passage away from power imposed upon. But this other space favors a transparently hierarchical way of working. As in "Shadows",Imli being the son of second –in- command of the underground army, his inclusion was departure from the norm. Again Punaba's leadership qualities elevated him in rank and he was made captain in rebel army. Nation on the other hand adopts the strategy of militarization to contain the explosive potential of such spaces.

In the Northeast, people are identified by the clan to which they belong and their territory defined in terms of social groupings and social relations. Territorial divisions were based on spatial configurations of social collectivities and societal identities were normative pattern of territoriality. Nation state, on the contrary, attempts to identify people in a pre-defined bounded space. It produces citizens with in a definite space by effacing societal identities. It seeks to construct identity for people in a defined space-that of a citizen- to maintain sovereignty within that limited space. Hence heterotopias in post-colonial nation unsettle imperialistic cartography which has carved politically homogenized space and challenges sovereignty claims of nation. The physical space of a nation, marked by arbitrarily marked boundaries, key determinant of territoriality, are invariably problematized by heterotopias. As heterotopias exist as autonomous space they are in contrast to the hegemonic political discourse of nation state. Though " heterotopias are not quite spaces of transition- but they are space of deferral, space where

ideas and practices that represent the good life can come into being, from nowhere even if they never actually achieve what they set out to achieve- social order or control and freedom."(Hetherington,1997, p, ix). To sum up, in India's Northeast, as Sankara Krishna (1994) rightly suggests, "… the ubiquity of cartographic metaphor, the production of inside and outside along the borders of the country reveals both the epistemic and physical violence that accompanies the enterprise of nation –building. (p, 508). He further states in the article, "The encounters between the state and the people along frontiers is suggestive of the contested and tortured production of sovereign identity." (p,508). As such in Ao's stories the underground army can be analyzed as a heterotopic site: the other space in society offering a temporary passage away from power. The function of this space is to create a space of illusion –a heterotopia of illusion is a subversive space intended to destabilize the governing principles of nation state. Moreover, the members of this space have the will to protest against normalization by interrogating and challenging dominant power structures of nation.

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Vaheeda. S.

Fantasizing the Possibilities of Existence : A Comparative Reading of the Movie *Everything Everywhere All at Once and The Library of Babel*

Abstract

Everything Everywhere All At Once is a 2022 science fiction movie directed by Daniel Scheinert and Daniel Kwan. It is about a Chinese immigrant in America who connects different versions of herself from across parallel universes in order to stop someone from destroying the multiverse.

'The Library of Babel' is a 1941 short story written by the Latin American writer Jorge Louis Borges. The story portrays the universe in the form of an infinite library containing every book that ever was or ever could be written.

In both the movie as well as the short story, the fantasizing of the infinite number of possibilities of existence can be seen. In the movie, the protagonist connects with different versions of herself. Each of the versions that were spread across the multiverse was formed due to the slightest change in the decisions of the protagonist. Similarly, 'The Library of Babel' contains every possibilities in the form ofbooks.

In the movie, characters navigate through various realities, making choices that shape their identities and destinies. This theme of personal responsibility and the consequences of individual actions resonates with existentialist notions of creating one's own essence through decisions. The film's exploration of identity, choices, and the interconnectedness of different realities could be seen as touching existentialist ideas, albeit within the context of a complex and fantastical narrative.

In the story, the library is an infinite expanse containing every possible book of a certain length, comprising all knowledge and nonsense. This mirrors existentialist concerns about the vastness and seeming chaos of existence. The characters in the story grapple with the futility of finding meaning in such a vast array of information, reflecting existentialist ideas about the challenge of creating meaning in an apparently indifferent universe.

Thus, this paper delves into the study of how these two literary works fantasize the infinite number of possibilities of existence through the lens of existentialism.

Keywords : Fantasy, Existentialism, Science fiction, Multiverse, Infinity

Vaheeda S is a Student, MA English, School of Letters, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam

Introduction

Fantasy is a genre that immerses audiences in imaginative worlds filled with magic, mythical creatures, and epic adventures. It often explores themes of heroism, good versus evil, and the triumph of the human spirit over adversity. At its core, fantasy offers an escape from reality, allowing audiences to experience wonder and awe through fantastical settings and extraordinary characters.

In cinema, fantasy is brought to life through visually stunning landscapes, fantastical creatures, and larger-than-life narratives. Films like "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy (2001-2003) directed by Peter Jackson and "Harry Potter" series (2001-2011) based on J.K. Rowling's novels transport viewers to enchanting realms where ordinary individuals discover extraordinary destinies. These movies captivate audiences by blending elements of myth, magic, and adventure, offering a sense of wonder and inspiration as they explore themes of courage, friendship, and the enduring power of imagination. Through their imaginative storytelling and visual spectacle, fantasy films continue to enchant and entertain audiences of all ages.

Existentialism is a philosophical movement that emphasizes individual existence, freedom, and choice. It posits that humans define their own meaning in life through their actions and experiences, rather than relying on pre-existing structures or authorities. Existentialists often explore themes of isolation, anxiety, and the absurdity of life in their works, questioning traditional notions of morality and truth.

In movies, existentialist themes are often depicted through characters grappling with the meaninglessness of existence, the burden of freedom, and the search for personal authenticity. Films like *The Seventh Seal* (1957) by Ingmar Bergman and *Taxi Driver* (1976) directed by Martin Scorsese explore existential crises through their protagonists, who confront alienation, despair, and moral ambiguity in their quests for purpose. These films illustrate how existentialism resonates in cinema by delving into the inner turmoil and existential angst of their characters, reflecting broader philosophical inquiries about human existence and the quest for meaning in a chaotic world.

Fantasy and existentialism may seem like contrasting concepts at first glance—one rooted in imaginative escapism, the other in philosophical introspection. However, they can intersect in thought-provoking ways. Fantasy often provides a metaphorical landscape where existential questions can be explored through allegory and symbolism. Characters in fantastical worlds may confront existential dilemmas such as the search for identity, the meaning of life, or the struggle against overwhelming forces, all within the framework of magical realms and mythical quests.

Furthermore, fantasy allows for the exploration of existential themes through the lens of supernatural or extraordinary circumstances, highlighting universal human concerns in ways that resonate deeply with audiences. Whether it's through the hero's journey,

confronting existential crises in the face of mythical adversaries, or grappling with the consequences of profound choices, fantasy provides a canvas where existential questions can be vividly portrayed and contemplated in imaginative and allegorical ways.

Everything Everywhere All at Once follows Evelyn Wang, a Chinese immigrant in America, who discovers the ability to connect with multiple versions of herself across parallel universes. This newfound ability is crucial in her mission to stop a powerful antagonist from destroying the multiverse. The film's narrative structure allows for an exploration of various alternate realities, each shaped by different decisions Evelyn makes throughout her life.

Jorge Luis Borges' *The Library of Babel* presents a universe in the form of an infinite library containing every possible book of a certain length. This library, with its vast and seemingly chaotic array of information, serves as a metaphor for the universe and the human condition. The story's narrator describes the futile search for meaning and order within the library, reflecting on the existential challenges of navigating an indifferent and incomprehensible cosmos.

Everything Everywhere All At Once

"Everything Everywhere All at Once," directed by Daniel Scheinert and Daniel Kwan, is a 2022 science fiction film that explores profound existential themes through the fantastical concept of the multiverse. The film follows Evelyn Wang, a Chinese immigrant in America, who discovers her ability to connect with multiple versions of herself across parallel universes. Each version of Evelyn represents a different path her life could have taken, underscoring the film's meditation on identity, purpose, and the interconnectedness of all things.

The film's depiction of the multiverse is a physical manifestation of existentialist ideas. Evelyn's journey highlights the weight of individual choices and the creation of one's essence through actions. The protagonist's ability to navigate different realities symbolizes the existential notion of freedom and responsibility.

Existential Reading of the Movie

Existentialism emphasizes individual freedom and the accompanying responsibility. Evelyn's journey through the multiverse illustrates the existential idea that individuals create their own essence through their actions. Each version of Evelyn represents a different path her life could have taken, based on her choices. This narrative structure underscores the existentialist belief that freedom is inherent to human existence, but it comes with the responsibility to shape one's destiny.

Evelyn's exploration of alternate realities symbolizes the human quest for meaning in an apparently indifferent universe. Existential philosophers like Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus argue that life has no inherent meaning, and it is up to individuals to create

their own purpose. The film reflects this idea as Evelyn navigates through various realities, confronting the consequences of her actions and seeking a deeper understanding of her existence.

Albert Camus' concept of the absurd—the conflict between humans' desire for meaning and the silent, indifferent universe—is evident in Evelyn's journey. The film portrays the absurdity of existence through the chaotic and unpredictable nature of the multiverse. Evelyn's acceptance of the absurd is illustrated when she embraces the interconnectedness of all realities and finds peace in the present moment, despite the chaos around her. This acceptance echoes Camus' idea that individuals must live with the absurd and find joy in their personal experiences.

The film's exploration of identity is central to its narrative. Evelyn's ability to connect with her alternate selves forces her to confront different facets of her identity. Each version of Evelyn embodies different choices and possibilities, highlighting the fluid and dynamic nature of identity. The theme of transformation is evident as Evelyn evolves through her experiences, gaining a deeper understanding of herself and her potential.

The film delves into the complexities of family and relationships, particularly through Evelyn's interactions with her husband, Waymond, and her daughter, Joy. The multiverse serves as a backdrop for exploring familial bonds and the impact of individual actions on loved ones. The film emphasizes the importance of empathy, understanding, and communication in maintaining healthy relationships. Evelyn's journey ultimately leads to a reconciliation with her family, symbolizing the possibility of healing and connection amidst chaos.

Everything Everywhere All At Once presents the multiverse as a metaphor for the interconnectedness of all things. The film suggests that every action, no matter how small, has far-reaching consequences across different realities. This theme is reflected in the Buddhist philosophy of interdependence, where all beings and phenomena are interconnected and influence each other. The film's portrayal of interconnectedness encourages viewers to recognize the impact of their actions and the value of compassion and solidarity.

The multiverse is a central symbol in the film, representing the infinite possibilities of existence. Each universe serves as a metaphor for the different paths one's life can take based on their choices. The multiverse also symbolizes the existential idea of freedom and the responsibility that comes with it. By navigating through various realities, Evelyn confronts the vastness of existence and the challenge of creating meaning in a boundless universe.

The third eye, often associated with spiritual awakening and higher consciousness, appears in the film as a symbol of Evelyn's enlightenment. When Evelyn connects with her alternate selves, she gains a broader perspective on life and her place in the

multiverse. The third eye symbolizes her journey toward self-awareness and acceptance of the absurd. It represents the existential idea that true understanding comes from embracing the complexity and unpredictability of existence.

Fantasizing Possibilities in Everything Everywhere All At Once

Everything Everywhere All At Once presents the multiverse as a metaphor for the limitless potential paths a person's life can take. Each universe represents a different outcome based on the protagonist Evelyn Wang's decisions. This fantastical element allows the film to explore the idea that every choice creates a new reality, expanding the possibilities of existence infinitely.

The film's narrative structure highlights the significance of individual choices and their impact on different versions of oneself. By connecting with her alternate selves, Evelyn experiences the consequences of various decisions she could have made. This exploration underscores the existential belief that humans shape their identities and destinies through their actions. The film suggests that our lives are a tapestry of endless possibilities, each thread representing a different choice and its outcomes.

Evelyn's journey through the multiverse symbolizes the fluidity of identity. Each alternate version of her reflects different aspects of her personality and potential. This multiplicity of identities illustrates the concept that the self is not fixed but is continually shaped by experiences and choices. The film's portrayal of infinite identities invites viewers to consider the myriad possibilities of who they can become, emphasizing the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of existence.

The "Everything Bagel" is a pivotal symbol in the film, created by the antagonist, JobuTupaki (an alternate version of Evelyn's daughter, Joy). The bagel, which contains everything in the universe, represents the overwhelming abundance of information and the existential dread of meaninglessness. It serves as a visual representation of the absurd, highlighting the conflict between the human desire for order and the chaotic nature of the universe. The bagel's black hole-like appearance also symbolizes the nihilistic void, suggesting the potential for self-destruction when one is consumed by the search for meaning.

The Library of Babel

Borges' story grapples with themes of meaning, knowledge, and the search for truth. The infinite library represents the overwhelming abundance of possibilities and the difficulty of finding purpose in a universe that offers no clear answers. This mirrors existentialist concerns about the inherent meaninglessness of existence and the human endeavour to create significance amidst the chaos.

Jorge Luis Borges' short story "The Library of Babel," written in 1941, is a profound exploration of existential themes through the metaphor of an infinite library. The story

portrays a universe in the form of a vast library containing every possible book, representing the totality of human knowledge and the endless quest for meaning. This paper delves into the existential and thematic analysis of "The Library of Babel," highlighting its symbolic representations and their significance.

Existential Reading of the Book

"The Library of Babel" epitomizes the existential quest for meaning in a seemingly indifferent and chaotic universe. The library, with its infinite number of books, symbolizes the vastness of existence and the human endeavor to find purpose within it. The characters in the story, particularly the narrator, grapple with the overwhelming abundance of information and the difficulty of discerning meaningful patterns. This mirrors existentialist concerns about the inherent meaninglessness of life and the individual's struggle to create significance amidst the chaos.

Borges' library is a manifestation of the absurd, a concept central to existential philosophy, particularly in the works of Albert Camus. The absurd arises from the conflict between humans' desire for order and meaning and the indifferent, often chaotic nature of the universe. In the story, the search for a single meaningful book or a comprehensive catalog that makes sense of the library's contents is futile. This reflects the existential idea that the universe does not provide inherent meaning, and the quest for understanding can be an absurd endeavor.

The characters in "The Library of Babel" experience profound isolation and despair, common themes in existential literature. The vast, labyrinthine nature of the library and the seemingly infinite number of meaningless books create a sense of existential loneliness. The narrator's descriptions of the searchers—those who wander the library in hope of finding a meaningful book—highlight the isolation and despair inherent in the human condition. This isolation underscores the existentialist view of the individual as fundamentally alone in the search for meaning.

A central theme in "The Library of Babel" is the concept of infinity and its implications for knowledge. The library's infinite nature symbolizes the boundless possibilities of existence and the limitless potential for knowledge. However, this infinity also presents a paradox: while it contains all possible knowledge, the sheer volume of information makes it nearlyimpossible to find anything meaningful. This theme reflects the existential dilemma of seeking knowledge and understanding in an overwhelmingly vast universe.

The interplay between order and chaos is a recurring theme in the story. The library's structure, with its uniform layout and systematic organization, represents an attempt to impose order on the chaos of infinite information. However, the randomness of the book contents and the lack of a comprehensible catalogue highlight the underlying chaos. This tension between order and chaos mirrors existentialist concerns about the human effort to

create meaning in a universe that often defies understanding.

The library itself is the central symbol in Borges' story, representing the universe and the totality of human knowledge. Its infinite nature symbolizes the boundless possibilities of existence and the human quest for understanding. The library's structure, with its identical hexagonal rooms and systematic arrangement, represents the human desire to impose order on the chaos of the universe. However, the overwhelming number of meaningless books highlights the futility of this endeavour, reflecting the existential tension between order and chaos.

The books in the library symbolize the vast array of human knowledge and the infinite possibilities of existence. Each book represents a potential reality, a different combination of letters and symbols that could convey meaning or nonsense. The search for a meaningful book mirrors the existential quest for purpose and understanding in a seemingly indifferent universe. The books' random contents highlight the challenges of finding significance amidst the overwhelming abundance of information.

Fantasizing Possibilities in "The Library of Babel"

Borges' "The Library of Babel" imagines the universe as an infinite library containing every possible book of a certain length. This library is a metaphor for the boundless possibilities of existence and the totality of human knowledge. The infinite nature of the library represents the idea that every conceivable reality is contained within its walls, each book a different permutation of letters and symbols.

The characters in the story are engaged in a futile search for a single meaningful book or a comprehensive catalog that can make sense of the library's contents. This quest mirrors the human endeavor to find meaning in an indifferent and often incomprehensible universe. The infinite possibilities represented by the library's books highlight the existential dilemma of creating significance amidst an overwhelming abundance of information.

Each book in the library symbolizes a different possibility of existence, containing every conceivable combination of letters and symbols. The randomness of the books' contents illustrates the chaotic nature of the universe and the difficulty of discerning meaning. The books represent the infinite potential realities, suggesting that within the vast expanse of possibilities, both profound knowledge and utter nonsense coexist.

The searchers in the library, who wander in hope of finding a meaningful book, embody the existential quest for purpose. Their endless search reflects the existential belief that life has no inherent meaning and that individuals must create their own significance. The searchers' despair highlights the challenges of this endeavour, emphasizing the isolation and frustration inherent in the human condition.

Conclusion

Both *Everything Everywhere All At Once* and "The Library of Babel" use the concept of infinity to explore the possibilities of existence. The multiverse and the infinite library serve as metaphors for the boundless potential paths one's life can take and the vast array of human knowledge, respectively. These settings challenge the characters to confront the enormity of existence and the implications of infinite possibilities.

The exploration of identity through choices is a central theme in both works. In *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, Evelyn's alternate selves represent different versions of her identity shaped by various decisions. Similarly, the characters in "The Library of Babel" are faced with the existential challenge of finding meaning within an infinite array of possibilities. Both narratives emphasize the importance of personal responsibility and the active creation of one's essence.

The search for meaning is a key existential theme in both works. Evelyn's journey through the multiverse and the searchers' quest in the library highlight the human desire to find purpose in an indifferent universe. Both works reflect existentialist ideas about the inherent meaninglessness of life and the individual's struggle to create significance amidst chaos.

The symbolic representations in both works enhance their thematic depth. The everything bagel in *Everything Everywhere All At Once* symbolizes the overwhelming potential and existential dread of infinite possibilities. In "The Library of Babel," the infinite library and its books represent the boundless potential realities and the challenges of finding meaning within them. These symbols invite readers and viewers to reflect on the vastness of existence and the perpetual quest for understanding.

Everything Everywhere All At Once intricately weaves the multiverse concept into a narrative that explores profound existential themes and personal identity. Through visually and narratively complex portrayals of diverse parallel universes, the film showcases the infinite possibilities of existence, ranging from subtle variations to wildly divergent realities. Evelyn's interdimensional travels underscore the film's exploration of choice and consequence, revealing how seemingly random actions can have significant impacts across realities. The establishment of multiverse rules adds a playful yet profound layer, linking seemingly insignificant actions to broader existential questions. Symbolically, the "Everything Bagel" represents existential dread and the burden of infinite possibilities, while Evelyn's encounters with alternate selves symbolize the fluidity of identity and the role of personal agency in shaping one's existence. Ultimately, the film delves into themes of self-discovery, acceptance of life's complexities, and the search for meaning amidst cosmic chaos.

Both works use their fantastical settings to explore the infinite possibilities of existence. The multiverse in *Everything Everywhere All At Once* and the infinite library in

"The Library of Babel" serve as metaphors for the boundless potential paths one's life can take and the vast array of human knowledge, respectively. These settings challenge the characters to confront the enormity of existence and the implications of infinite possibilities.

The fantasy elements in both works highlight the importance of individual choices in shaping identity. In *Everything Everywhere All at Once* Evelyn's alternate selves represent different versions of her identity shaped by various decisions. Similarly, in "The Library of Babel," the endless search for meaning within the infinite library underscores the role of personal agency in creating significance.

The fantastical settings of both works enhance their exploration of the search for meaning. Evelyn's journey through the multiverse and the searchers' quest in the library highlight the human desire to find purpose in an indifferent universe. The fantasy elements in both stories serve as powerful metaphors for the existential struggle to create meaning amidst chaos.

The symbolic representations in both works deepen their thematic impact. The everything bagel in *Everything Everywhere All At Once* symbolizes the overwhelming potential and existential dread of infinite possibilities. In "The Library of Babel," the infinite library and its books represent the boundless potential realities and the challenges of finding meaning within them. These symbols invite readers and viewers to reflect on the vastness of existence and the perpetual quest for understanding.

Everything Everywhere All At Once and "The Library of Babel" masterfully use fantasy elements to explore the infinite possibilities of existence and the complexities of the human condition. The fantasy elements in both works serve as the foundation for exploring deep philosophical and existential themes. The multiverse and the infinite library serve as rich metaphors for the boundless potential paths one's life can take and the vast array of human knowledge. Through their imaginative settings and symbolic representations, these works invite audiences to ponder the profound questions of identity, choice, and the search for meaning. By blending fantasy with existential themes, both narratives offer unique and thought-provoking perspectives on the nature of existence.

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Vishal Rathod

'Going back to the Roots' : Exploring the Fantasy of Return to Origins

Abstract

The yearning to return to one's roots in contemporary times is intertwined with the profound concept of fantasy. The idea of fantasy often conjures images of escapism or unreal scenarios, yet it extends beyond mere imagination. It acts as a vehicle that propels us towards desires and aspirations we deem unattainable in reality. When we contemplate a return to our origins, this desire embodies a fantastical longing, weaving dreams of a utopian existence where we reconnect with our past, whether steeped in philosophical introspection, psychological introspection, or the pursuit of material-physical origins. This very urge to revisit our foundations embodies a utopian ideal. Fantasy serves as a lens through which we explore the realms of what might be considered impractical or unfeasible. In the context of returning to our roots, it transforms into a powerful force, steering our collective consciousness towards a cherished ideal of rediscovery. It empowers us to envision a world where we reconcile our contemporary lives with a romanticized past, evoking emotions of nostalgia and yearning for a simpler, more authentic existence. By scrutinizing and defining the concept of fantasy, it endeavors to illuminate the practicality of this desire and identify the precise nature of the fantasy that captivates our imaginations in the modern context of existence. The Primary Methodology employed in the development of this paper emphasizes on a comprehensive literature review. This enables a proper understanding of the topic and offers insightful outcomes. In conclusion, fantasies of reconnecting with our roots allow us to navigate our present reality, offering a beacon of hope, a framework to understand ourselves better, and a way to deal with the complexities of modern existence.

Keywords : Return to the Roots; Fantasy; Utopia; Existence

The concept of fantasy, within the realm of literature and art, embodies a versatile genre capable of transcending boundaries and defying conventional norms. Defined in the dictionary as a "fanciful mental image," fantasy often serves as a dwelling place for conscious or unconscious desires, encompassing elements that reflect human aspirations, fears, and longings. (Chapin) Its essence lies in the boundless nature of imagination and the brilliant sense of discovery it offers. As articulated by Brandon Sanderson, a renowned fantasy author, this genre provides an avenue to envision a world where possibilities are limitless, thereby fostering a sense of hope for a better world. (Sanderson) At its core, fantasy stands as a realm where it operates beyond the boundaries

Vishal Rathod is a Post-graduate Student, HSS, IIT Gandhinagar

of tangible existence and constraints of reality, allowing the creation of utopian landscapes such as Ladyland, Barbieland and wonderland realms that exist solely within the imagination. Engaging with fantasy is a journey that breaks the rules and moulds the envisioned landscapes manifesting a profound sense of awe and wonder that leads to fantasy.

The contemporary discourse surrounding the concept of "Going back to the roots" has garnered substantial significance, stemming from an innate desire to reconnect with one's origins. Central to this exploration is the intrinsic fantasy of seeking an ideal utopian world—a narrative that forms the fundamental premise of this academic study. This paper aims to capture and elucidate pivotal aspects inherent within this concept.

The essence of "Going back to the roots" can be comprehensively explored through two distinct lenses—those of spatial (physical space) and temporal dimensions. The spatial aspect revolves around the notion of a physical return to one's place of origin, encompassing multifaceted perspectives such as the birthplace or resonated with childhood memories, locales that hold profound personal associations, the organic setting of familial connections, or the once-familiar geographical terrain antecedent to migration. This spatial dimension embodies a profound urge to traverse towards a place distinct from the current position, thereby reflecting a longing intertwined with not only geographical but also emotional and cultural attachments. Conversely, the temporal side encapsulates a journey from the present to the past—a mental and emotional odyssey. At its core, this dimension involves a nostalgic trajectory—a journey encompassing sentiments, memories, and elements woven within individual and societal histories. This concept, often regarded as a fantasy, encompasses a romanticized vision of reconnecting with ancestral heritage, traditional values, or a perceived golden era—a yearning for an imagined past that symbolizes a harmonious and authentic way of life. It manifests as a quest for identity and a thread that ties them to their individual and collective identities to integrate elements into the contemporary narrative. In this way, the idealized notion of returning to one's origins, commonly known as the utopia of "Going back to the roots", refers to a multifaceted concept encompassing the act of returning to one's origins or fundamental sources. This notion spans multiple dimensions, including revisiting ancestral heritage, reconnecting with cultural foundations, rediscovering personal origins, or embracing fundamental values and traditions that define an individual's or a community's core identity.

At its essence, "going back to the roots" involves a reflective journey aimed at reconnecting with foundational elements that shape one's sense of self, cultural belonging, or philosophical underpinnings. This concept isn't merely a physical return to a geographic place but often encompasses an introspective exploration, embracing historical, cultural, or familial legacies. It might involve rekindling forgotten traditions, exploring ancestral homelands, rediscovering familial histories, or reconnecting with

values and principles that have shaped individual or communal identities over time. This paper endeavors to dissect, analyze, and contextualize these layers within the overarching framework of contemporary discussions concerning the inherent human desire for the return to the origins and reconnection.

Fantasy as a Social-Political Instrument

Fantasy, often perceived solely as a realm of mythical and magical elements, holds a far-reaching relevance within contemporary social contexts, transcending its traditional boundaries. Embedded within the narratives of fantasy lies an intrinsically woven web of social and political allegories, serving as a vehicle for intelligent commentary on prevalent discussions. Through these metaphorical landscapes, authors and creators deftly weave social and political themes, subtextually critiquing power structures, societal hierarchies, cultural norms, and systemic injustices. A prime example lies within George Orwell's seminal work, "Animal Farm," where anthropomorphized animals inhabit an allegorical setting mirroring the socio-political landscape of Stalinist Russia. Through this clever allegory, Orwell articulates scathing commentary on totalitarianism, political corruption, and the perils of unchecked power, delivering a profound societal critique under the guise of a seemingly simplistic fable. In J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Lord of the Rings," the conflict between Ents (tree-like beings) and humans symbolizes the struggle of nature against industrialization's harmful effects. The Ents' resistance represents the clash between preserving nature and human-driven exploitation, serving as a cautionary tale with the help of fantasy on the impact of industrialization on the delicate balance of the environment. Similarly, J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" series subtly addresses prejudice, discrimination, and the abuse of authority within a magical setting, drawing pertinent connections to prevalent societal issues.

This social and political undercurrent within fantasy narratives not only offers readers an immersive escape into imaginative realms but also functions as a reflective mirror, stimulating critical discourse and contemplation on contemporary societal dilemmas. Consequently, the potency of fantasy as a genre lies not solely in its fantastical elements but in its adeptness at encapsulating and elucidating profound social and political commentary.

Source of Inspiration

Fantasy, often perceived as an escape from present existence, offers a glimmer of hope and respite from the complexities of reality. While some view it as a diversion from the mundane, it serves a crucial role in providing avenues for exploration, creativity, and imagination. This hopeful aspect of fantasy lies in its capacity to offer alternative worlds, possibilities, and dreams, becoming a source of solace and aspiration for individuals amidst the challenges of everyday life. If one goes to today's social media, most of the reels are about people who are tired of today's fast-paced life and want to live a simple life in a small wooden cabin in the forest, in the mountains, in the fields.

The shift in societal values, the rise of consumerism, and the allure of modern urban life have drawn rural dwellers towards cities in pursuit of employment opportunities. This migration, predominantly comprising farmers, laborers, and landless individuals, led to the emergence of a neo-middle class among urban settlers, while others found themselves in slum settlements. As a response, initiatives for smart cities were conceived. However, the realization of these smart city aspirations fell short, prompting calls from environmentalists and urban planners to prioritize the creation of 'livable cities' over the smart city narrative. The shortcomings of smart cities became evident in their inability to cater adequately to the expanding urban population, resource scarcity, administrative pressures, law enforcement challenges, and broader societal issues stemming from the influx of individuals from rural to urban areas. Consequently, amidst the complexity of social, cultural, and developmental problems spurred by this migration trend, a notable reversal of migration has been observed, notably accelerated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This reverse migration back to rural origins appears to offer a viable resolution to the challenges faced in urban settings, constituting a focal point for individuals seeking to reconnect with their roots. Moreover, the trajectory of pollution, originating from the Industrial Revolution, has culminated in severe environmental degradation in the 21st century. The contamination of air, water, and land has reached alarming levels, where any improvement in air quality becomes newsworthy. Urban life is increasingly suffocating due to environmental concerns, exemplified by the significant decline in urban tree numbers and the rampant pollution of natural resources. This escalating environmental crisis has prompted serious introspection on the legacy we leave for future generations. Consequently, a global imperative for a "sustainable lifestyle" has emerged, emphasizing a return to nature, self-development, minimalism, and a simpler way of life. This burgeoning awareness towards sustainable living stands as a significant driving force behind the phenomenon of reverse migration, wherein individuals seek to reconnect with nature, reduce their ecological footprint, and embrace a more harmonious existence with the environment (Srivastava).

The evocative song "Husna" by Piyush Mishra from Coke Studio resonates deeply with a sense of nostalgia and longing for a bygone era, particularly the pre-partition world of Lahore. The lyrical portrayal of that historical setting, its narrow streets, and the sentimental imagery of a tree nestled in the lane conjures a poignant reflection on the memories intertwined within those landscapes. Despite the passage of time and the subsequent migration of people to India following the 1947 Partition, individuals today, particularly in Old Delhi or Amritsar, find themselves immersed in the quietude of an afternoon, consumed by reveries of their childhood. However, this introspective journey down memory lane is often tinged with tears, highlighting the bittersweet nature of nostalgia, romanticism, and a dream-like yearning for an era long gone (Mishra). Importantly, this emotional connection to the past emerges as a significant motivational factor for individuals contemplating or undertaking return migration. In J.R.R. Tolkien's

sagas, "The Lord of the Rings" and "The Hobbit," the motifs of return migration to ancestral homelands serve as poignant manifestations of the fantasy genre. Frodo and Sam's profound longing to return to the Shire in "The Lord of the Rings" resonates with a yearning for their roots—a desire to re-embrace the simplicity and familiarity of their homeland after their arduous quest. Simultaneously, Thorin's longing to return to the kingdom of the dwarves in "The Hobbit" reflects a similar sentiment—an innate pull towards the ancestral home, symbolizing a quest for identity and belonging.

The yearning for a utopian existence where cultural legacy can be authentically lived embodies a profound aspiration within communities. It signifies a longing to transcend mere nostalgia, delving into a transformative pursuit for a meaningful existence rooted in tradition. This yearning fuels efforts to authentically resurrect cultural heritage, not as a relic of the past, but as a living testament, breathing life into traditions and customs that were on the brink of disappearance. An embodiment of utopian ideals fueled by fantasy. These endeavors weren't just nostalgic wanderings; they are tangible pursuits to bridge the gap between contemporary lives and romanticized pasts. Beyond its conventional portrayal, fantasy fuels a commitment to revive nearly extinct rituals, languages, and art forms. This rekindling passed down from elders to younger generations, marks a transformative quest—a collective endeavor not only to return to cultural roots but to actively reclaim and rejuvenate a fading heritage. Each step on ancestral soil or each revival of a fading tradition brought a sense of belonging and understanding, evoking emotions deeply intertwined with the fantasy of return. These narratives of cultural reclamation and genealogical exploration embody the fantastical yearning to revisit origins. They illustrate how fantasy isn't merely an escape into imagination but a catalyst for tangible actions—actions that shape identity and foster belonging. In the quest to reconcile this longing, individuals embark on a philosophical and mental journey to rediscover their roots. This journey involves introspection, exploring historical narratives, and seeking connections with ancestral traditions to anchor a sense of belonging and identity within the contemporary milieu. The societal reflection of this yearning is evident in the resurgence of traditional values, cultural renaissances, and the portrayal of historical narratives in films and media, attempting to recreate a connection with the past.

These narratives ingeniously encapsulate the fantasy trope of return migration, infusing it with emotional depth and symbolic significance. The characters' intense yearning to return to their roots mirrors a universal human aspiration for a sense of belonging and a connection to one's origins. This thematic element operates as a powerful vehicle within the fantasy genre, weaving together themes of nostalgia, identity, and the allure of returning to a simpler, more familiar existence.

Here comes Utopia, which is not, as its Greek etymological roots suggest, a “no-place”. The name may derive from Thomas More's classic 16th-century fictional work,

Utopia, but it is not confined to literature depicting distant or fantastical ideal worlds. Some argue that More was satirizing the world with a civilization that could not possibly exist, mocking the extreme compartmentalizations required of the "perfect society." However, others claim the conviction with which he makes the claims within his writings suggests a deep commitment to the pursuit of this "perfect society." (More) Utopianism is a philosophy that encompasses a variety of ways of thinking about or attempting to create a better society. It begins with the seemingly simple yet powerful declaration that the present is inadequate and that things can be otherwise. Present in communities, social movements, and political discourse, it critiques society and creatively projects futures free of the strangleholds of the time. Put simply, it embodies a longstanding human impulse towards self-improvement (Alberro). This paper generally deals with its fantastical elements.

However, this utopian ideal is fraught with complexities and contradictions. While it embodies a profound desire for a nostalgic return to origins, it overlooks the practical barriers in the face of modern-day complexities, social changes, and global interconnectedness.

The allure of returning to villages or one's roots, often depicted as a fantasy, encounters multifaceted obstacles amidst contemporary societal dynamics. The systemic burdens inherent in urban living, constituting the first impediment, encompass factors such as congestion, environmental degradation, and social complexities, posing a formidable deterrent to the idyllic vision of rural life. Moreover, the perception of limited opportunities for self-development and progress within rural settings forms a substantial hurdle. The prevailing societal emphasis on monetary gain and career-centric ideologies, constituting the third barrier, fosters a belief that urban environments offer better prospects for success and financial stability, thereby dissuading individuals from contemplating a return to rural life. Lastly, the fourth impediment manifests as the ease of living and comfort associated with urban settings, contrasting with perceived challenges in basic amenities and infrastructure in rural areas. These factors collectively erect a substantial barrier, casting a shadow on the romanticized fantasy of returning to villages or one's roots, impeding the realization of this longing in the face of pragmatic challenges entrenched within modern societal frameworks. Additionally, the phenomenon of reverse migration often introduces a complex challenge: the acceptance issue from local communities. When individuals have been detached from their roots, returning to their ancestral or native lands may encounter resistance or difficulty in reintegration within the local milieu. This struggle for acceptance and reattachment is notably depicted in instances like the Arunachal Pradesh-based film "Crossing Bridges."

The glorification of the past can sometimes lead to an idealized version, fostering an unrealistic standard and contributing to an identity crisis when confronted with the complexities of the present. Amidst this struggle, individuals often seek idols or historical

figures as symbols of an idealized past, attempting to emulate their virtues or teachings as a guide for navigating the contemporary world. This longing to return to an idealized past often neglects the complexities of contemporary realities, societal advancements, and the multifaceted nature of cultural evolution.

While nostalgia embedded within the fantasy of returning to one's roots holds sentimental value and a yearning for a familiar past, it becomes imperative to acknowledge that nostalgia alone might not suffice to facilitate a seamless return. The emotional pull towards an idyllic past may overlook the practical complexities and social realities that have evolved during one's absence. The process of reattachment to ancestral or native settings demands more than mere nostalgia. It necessitates an understanding of contemporary shifts societal changes, and a willingness to adapt to the current cultural and social landscape. Moreover, bridging the gap between personal nostalgia and community acceptance requires active efforts to reestablish connections, rebuild relationships, and assimilate into the local fabric.

Conclusion

Therefore, the yearning to return to one's roots remains a deeply entrenched desire for many individuals despite the practical limitations that often make this return unattainable for the majority. This longing serves as a driving force behind the concept of fantasy—a realm where aspirations, desires, and dreams find solace and expression. Fantasy offers a refuge for these unfulfilled yearnings. It serves as a conduit for individuals to explore, imagine, and immerse themselves in the realms of possibilities that may not be feasible in reality. The inability to physically return to one's roots fosters a fantastical escape into a world where the impossible becomes conceivable, where individuals can revisit, reimagine, and relive their cherished connections to their origins. In this context, the concept of fantasy becomes a sanctuary—an alternate space where individuals can vicariously experience the fulfillment of their longing to return to their roots. Through narratives, art, literature, or other creative outlets, individuals weave a tapestry of imagination, crafting scenarios and worlds that echo the essence of their longing—offering a semblance of the unattainable reality they yearn for.

Therefore, while the practical constraints might hinder the actualization of a return to one's roots for many, the concept of fantasy provides a meaningful outlet—a realm where aspirations and desires find expression, allowing individuals to momentarily immerse themselves in the comfort of nostalgia and the allure of an idealized past.

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Dr. Hashmina Habeeb

Depiction of Women Characters and Rape Victims in Malayalam Cinema : An Overview

Abstract

The prevailing misogyny in the film industry of Kerala and the patriarchal elements that are deep-rooted in the social system of the state; it is difficult for a woman to express herself completely. Hence, the position of women as a participant in the development of the state or any institution is one that can be put to moot. With lesser women coming forward to explore the possibilities of their potential and more cases of physical assault reported against them from various sectors including the film industry is an example of how only few women have tried their luck in the industry. The Malayalam film industry is male dominated with the superstars controlling different entities inside the industry such as production, distribution, exhibition etc. Hence, the content will largely be effected by the majoritarian view point about women and their representation in the state. This paper will analyse selected popular Malayalam cinema for the depiction of rape victims in it.

Keywords : Misogyny, Malayalam Cinema, Rape Victim, Stereotype

Despite Kerala's renowned 100% literacy rate, the state paradoxically reveals a deeply ingrained patriarchal culture. Women in Kerala are overwhelmingly subjected to the male gaze, a burden that is difficult to escape. The culture industry of the state, especially the film sector is found to be catering to the needs of the male spectator both in economic and libidinal terms and thus the Malayalam film industry has become an expression of reified capitalist patriarchy. Analyzing the prevailing misogyny in the film industry of Kerala and the patriarchal elements that are deep-rooted in the social system of the state it is difficult for a woman to express herself completely. Hence , the position of women as a participant in the development of the state or any institution is one that can be put to moot. With lesser women coming forward to explore the possibilities of their potential and more cases of physical assault reported against them from various sectors including the film industry is an example of how only few women have tried their luck in the industry. The Malayalam film industry is male dominated with the superstars controlling different entities inside the industry which includes everything from technical support of the film crew to the makeup of the actors. Hence, the content will largely be effected by the majoritarian view point about women and their representation in the state. The Malayalam film industry which is renowned for the movies it produces every year is yet

Dr. Hashmina Habeeb is Assistant Professor, Postgraduate and Research Department of English Farook College (Autonomous), Calicut

to come up with movies that have strong female characters who are resilient to the atrocities directed against them and emerge as liberated souls. However, the industry caters more to the gaze of the spectator rather than focusing on the content when it comes to the portrayal of characters who have resisted the attack of patriarchy. There are several attempts made to control bold and liberated women from expressing themselves one of which is sexual assault. Hence, it is the need of the hour to look into various Malayalam movies where rape victims are taunted and silenced and sometimes put to death. This paper will look at selected popular Malayalam cinema for the depiction of rape victims in it. It will look at the various levels of discrimination done against the victims denying them their rightful expression and also try to look at the possible changes that have come up in the recent times, especially in the representation of rape victims on the silver screen.

Malayalam cinema has stereotyped the image of rape victims down the years. It is interesting to note that in the Malayalam oeuvre the depiction of rape victim is such that they either end up marrying the person who has assaulted them or commit suicide out of humiliation. However, no character has survived to tell the tale of struggle or the success of having taken revenge. The victim would have a brother, uncle or father who would take revenge while she sits and waits for the message of the assaulter having been killed. The victim is found to take revenge but not in her usual human complete self. She would do so by being a ghost who by the end of the movie would have been exorcised. Cinema being a popular medium arbitrates an array of social meanings, values and structures that enforce certain aspects of social order which posit impressions of women as idealized stereotypes. The Indian cinema at the time of its conception did not have female actors in it. It was not very common for women to go out and perform in public spaces in those days. More often than not the female characters represented on screen were mere eye candiesto the male audience when compared to their male counterparts. In fact they were always depicted as helpless and powerless damsels in distress waiting to be saved. Every movie of the 1980s and '90s had more or less the same style of female representation on screen. Only very rarely did cinema present a strong character, who would not compromise with her situation in the end. It is not very often that she is presented as staying single at the close of the movie, a fact that shows that men in our society are not appreciative of bold and independent women. Numerous critical analyses have arisen concerning the roles of sex and the construction of gender identities. The portrayal of gender roles on the silver screen is a significant issue to consider, as it has considerably influenced the psyche of Indian audiences, who have internalized the norms dictated by the dominant culture and the ideal way of life. In order to break free from these limited perspectives propagated through visual media, a thorough re-evaluation is necessary. The prevailing viewpoints that have been upheld are now being challenged by studies conducted over the past few decades. One of the earliest and notable works in this regard is Margaret Mead who has brought out her thoughts on anthropology through ," Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive societies," which examines the contrasting attitudes of

each gender in new Guinea societies. A contemporary of Mead was Viola Klien, a sociologist who was of the opinion that 'femininity' is constructed rather than given. In her ground-breaking book *The Feminine Character*, subtitled *A History of an Ideology*, she questioned the social ordering of sex-roles and the inequities they produced. She further explores what actually constitutes 'femininity' and goes on to say that:

> there are almost as many opinions as there are minds, and it is hard to find even two essential characteristics on which the common man [sic] or the majority of experts would agree (163).

She suggests that feminine traits are sociologically given rather than being biological and decisive factor that she puts forth is the 'domestic responsibility' which takes up 'a preponderating part of women's energy'(181). Having been aware of the stress women were going through, Mirra Komarovsky in her study on college youth, *Dilemmas of Masculinity: A Study of College Youth,* tried to explore the tension between the pursuits of educational success and the demands of sexually desirable femininity. However, the women she met and talked to admitted how they were side lined by their male counterparts and explained things they already understood better than what the young men had celebrated in exhibiting their intellectual superiority. However, these women had done this to flatter the male ego and preserve their femininity. The second wave feminism which showed up in the late 1960s and early 1970s emphasises more on the inequalities of men and women and the term ' sex roles' came to be replaced with what is called 'gender' and 'patriarchy'. One of the major influences was that of the French philosopher and writer, Simon de Beauvoir, who came up with her deliberations on gender from a feminist's perspective in her work *The Second Sex*, first published in 1949.*The Second Sex* looks at the socially defined characteristics of being a woman, as opposed to the biological fact of being female. The oft quoted words 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' is an example. According to Beauvoir bodily differences between men and women may be 'inescapable' but 'in themselves they have no significance', since they depend for meaning on the 'whole context' in which actual women and men live their lives (66- 7). Thus from all these analyses on gender and sex roles one may come up with the question of what has one gained from the introduction of gender? A very important answer to this may be that it has enabled one to think of masculinity and femininity as a variable entities likely to vary with time and culture than being a fixed one. Furthermore, one can argue that being a man or a woman can vary within any given society provided one considers the class and race system prevalent there. For instance one may say that femininity is that which concerns the white middle classes. This idea prevailed during the nineteenth century when women were described as fragile, meek and incapable of carrying themselves around without the protection of chivalrous virile men which was a privilege of the elite white women. However, this notion was countered by the black ex-slave and suffrage campaigner, Sojourner Truth, in a speech at women's rights convention in Akron, Ohio, in 1852 says:

> That man over there says women need to be helped into carriages and over ditches and to have the best places. No one ever helped me into carriages or over ditches or gave me the best place- ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm… I have ploughed, and I have planted, and gathered into barns and no man could head me- and ain't I woman? I could work as much as any man… and bear the lash as well and ain't I a woman? (Halsalln. pag)

Thus, if gender is social and not natural, then, definitely it is subject to change. Hence, it denotes a hierarchical relationship between men and women and not merely the differences between them. With the second wave feminism, the representation of women in cinema also became a major area of discussion. Although femininity is a cultural construct, the visual media has a very important role in creating impressions regarding gender identities in the minds of the viewers. Douglas Kellner has opined :

> Radio, television , film and other products of media culture provide materials out of which we forget our identities, our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality ;and of "us "and "them". Media images help shape our view of the world and our deepest values: what we consider good or bad, positive or negative, moral or evil. Media stories provide the symbols, myths, and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture. (9)

The depiction of rape and sexual assault in Malayalam cinema can be traced back to the early 70's and 80's where the rape victim was not only abused , punished or sexually assaulted by the male character in the lead role but the female character seemed to be submissive , obedient and reformed after being raped. In fact the rape goes unreported and there are instances portrayed in popular cinema like *Kaanthavalayam (1978)* where the rape victim falls in love as she romanticizes the intimate moments spent with the assaulter. The sad part is not that the victim needs to ultimately fall for the abuser but the man who is depicted as the perpetrator is the hero in the lead role who will definitely be followed by the many fans he has as spectators. Hence, The message that gets across to the audience is not of protecting a woman and her right to choose her life but of a man who can take his anger and lust out on any woman of his choice whom he would later come by. Stranger is the situation of women depicted in movies like *Aa Rathri (1983)* where the victim is forced into committing suicide and is given no other option. In spite of this one may still envisage that the depiction of women on screen is progressing. Another attempt to valorise the position of man in a rape victim's life is portraying him as a hero who avenges the death or the victim or the tragedy that has befallen upon her. In PG Vishwambaran's popular flick *Ee Shabdam Innathe Shabdam (1985)*, the heroine (Shobana) is gang-raped and killed in front of her husband, the sister, however in an

attempt to save herself commits suicide jumping from the terrace. When the law acquits the rapists, the husband (Mammootty) sets out to kill each of the perpetrators. This pattern is still visible in the movie *Puthiya Niyamam (2016)* in which the heroine is raped by a group of young men and she hides the matter from her husband. However, she is helped by her husband secretly in killing them one by one. Thus, it upholds the idea of men adorning the role of protectors or saviours and also affirms that women are incapable of handling their problems on their own without a male counterpart. However, the idea that a woman cannot move about freely unless she is assisted by a male is brought out in the movie but reassuring the fact that it need not always be her husband. S.S. Chakravarty, commenting on realism in Indian films says, "A woman's social and individual identities are therefore both conferred by marriage… while part of this has a dramatic function…the overall traditional attitude to women remains in place…" (46-47). Another movie that repeats this pattern is Joshiy's *Iniyum Kadha Thudarum (1985)*, in which the wife gets raped, commits suicide and husband kills the perpetrators. The purpose of a rape scene in the narrative is what needs to be questioned. The depiction of rape victims of having been exposed physically or at least partially depicted as nude in some cases with vulgarity is to appease the male spectators. Early feminist film theory grappled with the challenges of representing women in a male-dominated industry. While women directors experimented with avant-garde cinema to challenge traditional narratives, their work was often marginalized and dismissed. Film theorists like Mulvey sought to bridge the gap between experimental and mainstream audiences, but the tension between radical critique and accessibility persisted. As the movement evolved, the focus shifted from representation to the pleasure of cinema, prompting debates about how to reconcile feminist values with audience engagement. Theorists proposed a counter-cinema to challenge patriarchal structures, but the fear of alienating viewers remained a concern. Ultimately, feminist film theory aimed to empower women by analyzing cinematic representations, encouraging critical viewing, and advocating for a more equitable film culture. As mentioned by Jill Nelmes: "Mulvey's and Johnston's theories, would be more useful for the development of a feminist film theory than as a guide on how to make feminist films" (273). Feminist film theorists believe that their work should illuminate the marginalization of women within patriarchal society. However, they acknowledge the risk of alienating audiences if they completely disregard the pleasures derived from mainstream cinema. Annette Kuhn and Ann Kaplan were among the feminists who called for a counter-cinema, a deconstructive cinema that could challenge the mainstream cinema. In Teresa de Lauretis' opinion, "Films are one of the great storehouses of society's stereotypes about women" (qtd. in Blewett l2). Through movies one can construct and break stereotypes.

A change that can be seen in the movies directed by women directors is the theme of female bonding through which a new culture has emerged that points at the stifling experiences of women folk residing in a locality or who have met at different stages of their life. They slowly bond through sharing, which helps them to eventually trust each

other and find solace in each other's company. This female bonding is rarely seen in male directed movies or there are probably only brief moments shown where either of the friends would ultimately part ways or find a solution to the problem they have been going through. With women's cinema giving glimpses of the potential women have, there is significant change in the portrayal of women. Actresses no longer shy away from doing bold characters which have helped in redefining and projecting a realistic view of women in the present scenario. In fact the change is occurring at a faster pace and more women oriented movies or women's cinema is paving way for this change. Movies directed by women in which the life and situation of rape victims have been discussed in detail but from the perspective of a woman makes it all the more different as the depiction does not detail on any physical exhibition but on the trauma that has been caused by the instances in the lives of the victims. Movies like *Stand up* By Vidhu Vincent and *B 32 Muthal 44 Vare (2023)* by Shruthi Sharanyam are those that have tried to make a difference. Unlike the movies directed by men where rape is visualised to appease the patriarchy's voyeuristic mind by focusing on bare legs and partially nude women with bleeding lips; here the lives of women who have been assaulted are discussed by not subjecting them to the gaze of the male spectator. Films like *B 32 Muthal 44 Vare* have the potential to raise awareness and such movies are promissory notes that will liberate women and bring about a change in their representation.

The representation of women and rape victims have evolved down the years but through women directed movies. Hence, one may conclude that the representation of women and rape victims will change with efforts put forth by women themselves and an evolved depiction of women will emerge very soon which will be supported by male directors who will interrogate patriarchal modes of representation and dominance . The attempts made by female directors to create such movies show the change that has come about in the last few decades.

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Dimple M. Scaria
Dr. Sheeba K.

Preserving the Flame : *Around the Hearth : Khasi Legends* as a Cultural Artefact

Abstract

Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends is a marvellous literary work that enables the readers to get a handle on the rich cultural arras of Khasi folklore and myths. Splendiferously crafted by Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, an eminent Khasi writer and a cultural upholder from Meghalaya, India, the book is acorpus of legends which signalizes the cultural overtones, rhetorical magic and moral implications of some enthralling ethnic tales and legends. This paper attempts to read how Nongkynrih's literary work turn out to be a cultural artefact encapsulating the spirit of Khasi identity by strengthening their feeling of gratification and kinship. It also explores the ways in which Nongkynrih's narrative has contributed to the admiration and treasuring of Khasi heritage among an expansive audience, stimulating intercultural exchange and indigenous knowledge reception. The analysis is framed within the theoretical paradigm of the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski's Functionalist method.

Keywords : Khasi legends, folklore, culture, mythology, cultural artefact

The fundamentals of the Khasi writing, using the Roman script, came out in 1842, when Thomas Jones, a Welsh Presbyterian missionary, proposed it as a means of written expression for the Khasi folk in North-East India. Nevertheless, even before the missionary scenario, the Khasis had expressed a profound collective discernment over the mundane concerns vis-à-vis agriculture, trade, commerce, and industry. They also had an exceptional flair for story- telling. The ancient Khasi oral tradition endured even without the proper scripts. The Khasi tribe thrived on their ethnic wisdom and insight in confrontation with the brutish power. To them, the pillars of creation were Nature and Humanity. The Khasi had no doubt as to the certitude of their conviction that the divine sagacity could only be attained through the venerable lineage of ancestral tales. These tales of perennial happiness imparting threads of love, empathy, solicitude, absolution, and salvation, continue to define and construe the existence and relevance of the Khasi community even in the present. Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih, the widely known folklorist from the Khasi tribe, makes an exquisite blend of tales and myths typical of his tribe. The moral convictions, beliefs and mundane concerns of the tribe are connected together in the work *Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends*. In the book Nongkynrih deftly garners and curates a broad spectrum of tales, knitting together an array of myths, legends, and adventures that have been transmitted through generations.

Dimple M. Scaria is an Assistant Professor in English, Government College, Chittur, Palakkad, University of Calicut, Kerala
Dr. Sheeba K. is an Associate Professor in English, Government Victoria College, Palakkad, University of Calicut, Kerala

Myths and legends play a vital role in human existence; without them, we would have been adrift without a guiding narrative, losing the invaluable reservoir of cultural richness. Faith Mehmet Berk tries to juxtapose myth and cultural identity in his research article "The Role of Mythology as a Cultural Identity and a Cultural Heritage: The Case of Phrygian Mythology".He observes that "we should have been lost if we don't have myths. Many cultural richness has been narrating from generation to generation through the myths. The fables, myths, legends, folktales are the collective outputs" (68). Bronislaw Malinowski has astutely recognised the profound cultural function and significance of myths. In the book *Myth in Primitive Psychology*, Malinowski employs a functionalist approach to analyse the story-telling traditions among the aboriginal communities. He argues that,"the primitive man has to a very limited extent the purely artistic and scientific interest in nature; there is but little room for symbolism in his ideas and tales; and myth, in fact is not an idle rhapsody, not an aimless outpouring of vain imaginings, but a hardworking, extremely important cultural force" (2). He contended that folklore plays an essential function in shaping the cultural identity and providing guidance for the necessary actions to sustain and advance indigenous social cultures and practices and traditions. From a Functionalist standpoint, the persistence of Khasi oral tradition without written scripts displays an adaptive function, that means, the oral tradition has been adapted to preserve cultural knowledge without relying on literacy. In *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing of the World*, Walter J. Ong highlights the fascinating dynamics of oral communication in a primary oral culture, where words, devoid of any visual forms, pulsate with a potent vitality:

> The fact that oral peoples commonly and in all likelihood universally consider words to have magical potency is clearly tied in, at least unconsciously, with their sense of the word as necessarily spoken, sounded, and hence power-driven. Deeply typographic folk forget to think of words as primarily oral, as events, and hence as necessarily powered: for them, words tend rather to be assimilated to things, 'out there' on a flat surface. Such 'things' are not so readily associated with magic, for they are not actions, but are in a radical sense dead, though subject to dynamic resurrection. (32)

The creation myths have indispensably been explored in the story-telling tradition of Khasis. In the Prelude to the book *Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends*, Nongkynrih enumerates the seven sub tribes of the Khasi- Khynriam, Pnar, Bhoi, War, Maram, Lyngngam and Diko- and speculates on the reason why does all Khasi tales invariably begin in a uniform pattern: "When man and beasts and stones and trees spoke as one…." (viii). This is because of the Khasi world view which perceives the universe as an interconnected entity deriving its exuberance and energy from the divine truth embodied in their God, U Blei. The paramount function of Khasi narratives lies in illuminating the

profundity of Khasi philosophical ideation encompassing the entirety of Khasi heritage, thus ensuring its resonance with the most unassuming individuals. Connecting the Khasi world view and its narrative function with Malinowski's Functionalist approach yields a very insightful framework of analysis. Interconnected universe and divine truth encompass Functionalist ideas of social cohesion and educational function. Their world view serves to unite the Khasi people under a shared cosmology, strengthening community bonds. Moreover, these narratives serve as vehicles for transmitting complex philosophical ideas to all members of society. Consequently, these tales are meticulously fashioned to charm and enthral their recipients, camouflaging their didactic nature and disguising them as mere tales rather than earnest expositions."The Seven Clans", the first segment of the anthology *Khasi Legends* commences as follows:

> In the beginning there was nothing but a vast emptiness on Earth. God had created only two beings- Ramew, the guardian spirit of Earth, and her husband Basa, who later came to be identified with the patron god of villages. The two lived happily enough for a time, but one thing began to plague their minds: they had no children. They wanted children, wanted them intensely, because Ramew and Basa realised life without them would be terribly lonely and monotonous. They prayed to their God, U Blei, to bless them with at least a child-or two-so that their line could continue. (1)

The fervent plea of Ramew led the benevolent deity to grant her wish for proliferating across an inhabitable world. In keeping with the celestial edict, seven out of the sixteen heavenly clans were hand-picked to descend on the earth, shouldering the pivotal roles of farming, reproducing rapidly across the uninhabited wilderness, exerting power, and positioning themselves at the peak of creation.

In the compendium *Around the Hearth* there is a recalling of the hallowed Khasi legend known as "The Lost Manuscript". According to the legend, one of their forefathers faced a terrible misfortune when he irretrievably lost a manuscript of large significance. Constructed with an intensely fragile substance, this manuscript contained the most sagacious and informed moral principles, as well as the script used to conserve and impart these invaluable teachings. The person after an enlightened encounter with God atop a steep mountain peak, could attaina thorough understanding on the annals of their race, and was exposed to some customary rites and spiritual dictums which dealt with every facet of their community life. In a particular situation, a deputy from the plains of Surma joined forces with the divine emissary. Together, they carried smoothly the precious manuscripts, a divine gift, to promulgate the doctrines of God. However, their journey faced an unexpected obstacle- a wide and tumultuous river blocked them up. Undaunted by the obstacle, the Surma native, accustomed to raging waters, skilfully fastened his document to a tuft of hair on his head and deftly swam across. The Khasi companion took

a daring step. Against his better judgement, he held his manuscript between his teeth and ventured into the tumultuous currents. Unfamiliar with swimming in such torrents, the hillman soon found himself gasping amidst the river. In the act of gulping to save himself, he inadvertently swallowed the manuscript reducing it to a pulpy mass. On his return, the hill mandisclosed his traumatic experience to the disappointed people. However, he instantly responded to their apprehensions by assuring them that the divine revelations remained fresh in his memory. He swore to pass on the teachings through the spoken word, commencing a rich tradition of story-telling among the Khasis. From this amazing episode, the legacy of orality among the Khasis was believed to have begun, where the dynamic and spirited texture of their cultural artefacts continue to thrive.

In order to make a precise connection between the legend "The Lost Manuscript" and the Functionalist approach in anthropology, the specific aspects such as social function, cultural continuity, and integration of belief systems are to be reckoned with. The social function seeks to explain how the legend serves to validate the importance of oral traditions in Khasi culture. The significance of oral storytelling in preserving and transmitting cultural knowledge across generations can ensure cultural continuity. Finally, the integration of belief systems search for how the legend might reinforce the potential aspects of Khasi world views or social structures.

The Khasis displayed pride and delight in their role as educators and they imparted wisdom through an effectively enrapturing method. Led by veterans, young Khasis found themselves attracted to an enriching learning experience, one that get unwind around the hearth. After a day of slog, they would flock together, drawn by the enchanting dance of flames, and the brilliant narratives that accompanied them. These legends, however, carried a didactic purpose that extended beyond mere delight. They were the threads that interlaced the cultural fabric, stood the test of time as they carried along orally, from the gifted storytellers of the clan to the ardent young minds in the community. In this symbiotic relationship between wisdom and delight, the Khasis realised the tremendous power of stories to mould, stimulate and connect. The tale "Peacock and the Sun" is a good case in point. With an air of delightful whimsy, the story begins thus:

> It was said that in the beginning, when the world was very young, the Peacock and the Sun lived together in heaven as husband and wife. And theirs was a paradise of warmth and love, a fairyland of never-ending joy- until one clear winter morning when the sun, sovereign of the universe, was alone in the sky, unveiling marvellous scenes and faraway lands. While the Sun was thus busy presiding over the affairs of heaven and earth, distributing warmth, light and vitality to all sorts of beings, the Peacock, her husband, was languidly strolling about his celestial garden, which darkness never touched and where birds sang continuously to ever blooming orchids.(31)

The tale proceeds with Peacock whose heart yearned for a dancing virgin queen he had witnessed on the plains of Earth. Without a moment of thought, he stretched out his dazzling feathers, and graciously set about his descent from the stellar domain. But deluded by the expansiveness of space, the Peacock soon found to his dismay that the dancing virgin queen was nothing but the mustard plants swaying in the wind. With deepest regret, he mourned his impetuous decision to forsake his celestial partner. The story comes to an insightful conclusion where the Peacock is found extremely humbled and craving for paradise he once knew. The moral of the story remains perverse desires and the repercussions of impulsive actions.

The literary as well as the cultural distinction of Khasi legends unfurls in great depth, especially in the tearful tale of Lapalang, the Stag. As the only son of a caring mother, an aged deer, Lapalang's departure fetched great woes that shook her up thoroughly. The way he was trapped and killed can even tug at the heart strings of those mothers who have faced such comfortless phase in their life. At the moment of great grief, the Khasis departed from inarticulate lament and momentary exclamations, instead adopted a mode of bewailing evolved out of the inconsolable agony of a mother. It is within the structure of these funeral songs that the Khasis let out their most poetic and elegiac expressions. Here is an instance of Khasi melody echoing the deepest sentiments:

O Sier Lapalang! Jewel of my heart!
I told you do not go
to Ri Khasi, an alien land.
Let us live in the plains
and feed on the reed.
But you said,
my dearest pledge,
I must look for jangew,
my favourite food.
But now, Jewel of my heart!
Dark are the skies! Dark, too, the earth!
The curved bow
mounts your body,
its rusty arrow
dealing you a death blow.
Man finds his sport,
has his fun,
But for me, there's nothing more
under the sun. (88)

Woven with intense emotional sequence, the verse creates a fusion of desolation and longing that resounds through the ages connecting all in the depth of their shared sorrow. Through the potential power of their elegiac verses, the Khasis try to converse the universal experience of maternal warmth and pain, leaving behind the charm of their oral culture. It touches on the multiple aspects of Khasi society- emotional, cultural, and familial- illustrating the interconnected nature of social institutions, a key tenet of Functionalism.

Khasi legends and tales are not mere fantastical oral transmissions from an exotic ethnic folk. They explore the reciprocity of humanity and wilderness, yielding an enhanced world view vis-à-vis the notions of sanctitude, vice and virtue, social hierarchy, and other cultural aspects. Deeply structured, the Khasi social system get a synthesised reflection in the tales, where pedigree and kinship are of paramount importance. Nongkynrih's compendium of fascinating stories serves a vantage point to the world of Khasi culture and history. The expedition through the Khasi folklore is an insightful reaffirmation of the narratives that have been conveyed through generations after generations, conserving the flames of an indigenous culture. These stories, replete with picturesque descriptions of gods, goddesses, diligent heroes, and other mythical souls, serve as monuments of their inner strength and harmony, highlighting vibrant imagination and moral uprightness. From the woody hills to the thronging fairs and festivals, from the solemn ceremonies to the mirthful celebrations, *Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends*lays out an engrossing narrative that reinvigorate the values, beliefs and convictions treasured by the Khasi kinfolk. From the admonishing tales that promulgate moral lessons to classic exploits that upholds valour, all the legends in this volume evoke universal questions sustaining the unique Khasi crest. To conclude, *Around the Hearth: Khasi Legends* is an amazing cultural monument that not only leaves behind a wonderful reading experience but also serves as a significant aid in comprehending and evaluating the multiple facets of Khasi culture. Nongkynrih's imaginative explorations on the Khasi identity prove to be a creative output in the form of a compendium *Around the Hearth*: *Khasi Legends*which, in turn becomes a cultural artefact capturing the spirt of Khasi and cherishing a deep sense of dignity and contentment.

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Sruthi. S.

Subduing the Gendered Language through Gaze : A Critical Analysis of the Malayalam Movie *Kaathal: The Core*

Abstract:

Film evolved as a strong medium to engross people with mesmerising portrayals of different genres. Since the inception to the postmodern times where the genre has undergone drastic changes. Malayalam films are acclaimed for the realistic portrayal of life and astute representation of this mortal coil that is humans. The viability of such movies are heavily dependent upon the parallelisms that the movie buffs are able to draw, connecting them to the mundane. The same public that applauded the masala movies that blended multiple genres suddenly whimpered and enraptured by the characters in the movies and hooted for them. The fact that the spectators are able to judge and cherry pick the movies according to the shifting changes in their tastes, was the foretoken to the imminent maturing of the malayalam movies and the audacious moves by the writers and the team to remain rooted in the native and to be universal at the same time. In the literal commercial world of background scores, bloodshed, explosion, romance, the malayalam industry depicts pragmatic, hard rooted, realistic portrayals of human essence. Having the legacy of many masterpieces and many veteran contributors the New Wave has blessed the industry with heaps of successful realistic films. The latest one on the list is Kaathal, from the nonpareil director Jeo Baby, from the pen of Adarsh Sukumaran and Paulson Skaria. The characters Mathew Devsssy, Omana, Mathew's Father and Thankan and their dynamics within the backdrop of a very conservative, orthodox Christin community from a remote village in Kerala has garnered many praises. The close knit representation of the religious, political and familial tension that arises from the demeanour of Mathew is like a parallelly gushing effluents that eventually confluence to a slow, meandering river. Earlier malayalam has witnessed a series of Movies that vehemently talks about the homosexuality. Queerness is relatively uncharted as concerning to the malayalam film industry. The dynamics of Queerness is something that is yet to pinpoint in detail.

Keywords : Film Studies, Queerness, Gaze, Language, Dynamics, Representations

Introduction

Film evolved as a strong medium to engross people with mesmerising portrayals of different genres. Since the inception to the postmodern times where the genre has undergone drastic changes. Malayalam films are acclaimed for the realistic portrayal of

Sruthi S., is a Research Scholar, Department of English, Farook College(Autonomous), Calicut,Kerala

life and astute representation of this mortal coil that is humans. The viability of such movies are heavily dependent upon the parallelisms that the movie buffs are able to draw, connecting them to the mundane. The same public that applauded the masala movies that blended multiple genres suddenly whimpered and enraptured by the characters in the movies and hooted for them. The fact that the spectators are able to judge and cherry pick the movies according to the shifting changes in their tastes, was the foretoken to the imminent maturing of the malayalam movies and the audacious moves by the writers and the team to remain rooted in the native and to be universal at the same time. In the literal commercial world of background scores, bloodshed, explosion, romance, the malayalam industry depicts pragmatic, hard rooted, realistic portrayals of human essence. Having the legacy of many masterpieces and many veteran contributors the New Wave has blessed the industry with heaps of successful realistic films. The latest one on the list is Kaathal, from the nonpareil director Jeo Baby, from the pen of Adarsh Sukumaran and Paulson Skaria. The characters Mathew Devsssy, Omana, Mathew's Father and Thankan and their dynamics within the backdrop of a very conservative, orthodox Christin community from a remote village in Kerala has garnered many praises. The close knit representation of the religious, political and familial tension that arises from the demeanour of Mathew is like a parallelly gushing effluents that eventually confluence to a slow, meandering river. Queerness is relatively uncharted as concerning to the malayalam film industry. The dynamics of Queerness is something that is yet to pinpoint in detail. The film revolves around the hard nosed decision made by a typical housewife Omana from a remote village in Kerala against her husband Mathew, who is purportedly a homosexual by filing a divorce petition after twenty years of married life and after having a baby girl. The age old representations of chaotic divorce scenes and the times followed.

Queerness or the Queer theory has to be one of the prominent fields that explore sexuality in its whole without prejudices. As the theory of deconstruction implies, the core idea is to work against what is being tagged as normal, natural or fixed. The journey from being tagged as vague argument to being something that is been widely discussed, the trajectory itself is a complex one. The ways in which the term has been twisted beyond and the extent to which its visibility was restricted to a certain limit might be the possible reason that it might take a long term to find light and recognition among the masses. The quashing of article 377 that criminalized all sexual acts 'against the order of nature', mark to be the harbinger of a considerable change as far as the queer community in India is concerned. Hence the representation of the LGBTQIIA+ remains to be of big importance as far as the new media is concerned. The primary concern is how the topic is being handled by the new media. Holmes and Meyerhoff state that " Linguistic theories are of little help, because even though the unconscious is the very resource of all linguistic analysis (deep structures, preference hierarchies), this unconscious tends to be seen entirely in terms of cognition. It is more of a "non-conscious" than an unconscious. The foundational psychoanalytic concepts of desire, or repression - the "pushing away" of

thoughts from conscious awareness - have not been theorised within linguistics" (119).

Out beyond the recognitions that the film has garnered, the one remarkable point is the way in which the equation between the two male characters are being portrayed. Nowhere in the movie we could see the barter between them. Their tete-a-tete was still a perplexing question in front of the audience. So how well the emotions are being portrayed? It's solely through the high powered gaze, surrounded by despondency. The predicaments following the doubts that arise from the minds of the people regarding the sexuality and relation between Thankan and Mathew squirms both the families to that extent where there is nothing left other than being indisposed to talk. In her pioneering work *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler argues that speakers, or in her words ``culturally intelligible subjects," are the results, rather than the creators, "of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself into the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life" (145). "They are compelled by the syntactic structure and vocabulary available to position themselves only in certain restricted ways with regard to gender, that is, the traditional roles of"men " and"women." They are not free to take up any gender stance they like, for this would not be "culturally intelligible" (149).

For her, it is the gender norms themselves which provide the linchpins keeping "man" and "woman" in their place. She argues that "the loss of gender norms would have the effect of proliferating gender configurations, destabilising substantive identity, depriving the naturalising narratives of compulsory heterosexuality of their cultural protagonists"(146). Once these stabilising norms have been lost, other possibilities become available, moving beyond the hetero normative linchpins "man" and "woman."

The concept of gaze often symbolises the power dynamics. Here, the dominant factor is purely psychological. The characters interact through intense looks through which the audiences are enlightened about the emotions they are going through. Here the major one is despondency. Here, the character Omana, who has been married to Mathews for 20 years, seeks divorce from him due to the paucity of physical bonding. The traditional orthodox setup of the ideal family has restricted Omana for these 20 years and the same somehow has restricted Mathews from speaking his emotions out. The political, social and personal spheres are intertwined so much that the latter is often seen embracing the silence and speaking through the gaze. The guilt of denying the true identity and knowing that he is taking away Omana's rights too. In the quest between legacy and identity, Mathew initially chooses the former. The gaze of shame and guilt later paves the way for determination. The mere realisation of Omana that family cannot be classified as 'good' or 'bad' makes her strong enough to look the society right in the face. The instances where Mathew gazes on the mirror to confront the reality, he washes off the facade with water to cleanse himself after a long time of pretensions. The old father also listens to everything in silence. The character itself embraces silence to tackle over the inability to adhere to a language to confront the others. When Mathew talks to his daughter, he hides his gaze to

cover his lies. Mathew says to his lawyer that he is not a person who talks too much. This gap is a result of the underlying conflict that he had for a long time. The gendered language that fails to give a definition to the psyche of the character is being stressed here. The gaze of Omana is steadfast and strong that screams determination. She often gazes straight into the eyes to speak her heart out. Sara Mills points out in her critique of Virginia Woolf that "As with everything which is labelled masculine/male or feminine/female, these terms have very little to do with biological sex difference, but a great deal to do with assertions of power. In defining the female sentence we are not in fact defining a sentence at all, but defining females; this is just part of an ideological enterprise; we do not define males to anything like the same extent…. Defining the feminine sentence as lacking rationality, coherence, assertiveness and so on is an attempt to set up a particular subject position for females in the real world"(76–77).

The scene where Mathew and Thankan come face to face with each other during incessant rains carries a lot of emotions. The two second gaze that the two exchanges have many realms. The inability to speak the emotions through language, the loss, the guilt everything is presented through the scene. No exchange of words is happening between them.

"Language keeps heteronormative stances in the foreground of daily activity and keeps alternative forms of reference in the background, the margins, and the shadows. Such arrangements ensure that normative assumptions become expectable, reasonable, and acceptable components of the local cultural inventory and that alternative stances remain less familiar, more mysterious, and less desirable. But even while it imposes such limitations on social reference, language-based normativity does not always disrupt the workings of the personal imaginary. Individuals still construct their own sense of sexual/gendered possibilities and apply their own meanings to those constructions, even if they do not find referential support for these imagined constructions within normatively sanctioned sex/gender discourse. Hence the pervasive presence of silence within heteronormative domains, a silence that reflects an absence of articulation but not necessarily an absence of personal voice. And hence the delight in the discovery of labels, even when the points of reference are not intended to be complimentary or to have any positive implications" (Bucholtz et al. 263).

The heteronormative conventions associated with a very rural, orthodox family and its pervasiveness over the generations has made the core of the movie. Kaathal, translated as love, is defined through various ties, like a husband-wife, father-son, father-daughter and predominantly a homosexual slant between two major characters. Some stereotypical descriptions involving descriptions that reinforce gender stereotypes such as referring to women as 'emotional' and mean as rational. This is a huge implication of gendered language.

"While both women and men are subject to constraint in the emotions that they may

express, the constraint on both seems designed to intensify the preexisting power imbalance between the sexes. Until very recently, men were not supposed to cry or express sadness; women were not permitted to express anger, including the use of swear words. But the expression of sorrow is an expression of powerlessness and helplessness; anger, of potency. So although these rules may seem to equalise the sexes, in fact they intensify male power and female powerlessness" (Homes and Mayerhoff 163).

The stereotypical differences are balanced through the concept of gaze here. Omana is obstinate and her unwavering decision to divorce Mathew is a result of prolonged psychological anguish from the paucity of physical and emotional backing from him. When she realised that her wifely prerogatives were not fulfilled, she unobtrusively initiated divorce proceedings. She expresses her power through taciturnity and sustains a powerful gaze, whenever there is a conversation happening. When Mathew hides his gaze from the institutionalised cultural complexities, Omana faces them with confidence. She craves for her and Mathews freedom from the build ups from the expected norms from the society. The moment when Mathews father confronts before the court that it was his pressure that made Mathew marry Omana, the deep rooted heterogeneity that still prevailed in the society and the efforts to yield to it is evident here. Towards the end, the characters vocalise about the emotions trapped inside them and how they feel about it.

"Ideas about what is desirable in language are always "systematically related to other areas of cultural discourse such as the nature of persons, of power, and of a desirable moral order." These insights are highly relevant to any analysis of representations which focus on the relation of language to gender"(Holms and Meyerhoff 449). So when this desirable moral order is in confusion, the gendered language does have certain limitations. "Ideologies of language and gender, then, are specific to their time and place: they vary across cultures and historical periods, and they are inflected by representations of other social characteristics such as class and ethnicity. What is constant is the insistence that in any identifiable social group, women and men are different. Gender differences are frequently represented as complementarities, that is, whatever men's language is, women's language is not' (452).

In non verbal communication, predominantly gaze, this gender difference does not hold any sort of power. Initially the characters were dominated by the dynamics of social norms, later it was converted into that of desire. The psychoanalytic theory stresses on several desires and fears and many internal conflicts. The attributions of Lacanian Imaginary Order, where the subject's sense of self is ignited through images, particularly mirror images or reflections. Mathew often gazes at the mirror, by washing his face, interrogating how he is perceived by others as a perfect man, without realising his lies and how his identity is formed as perceived by the society. The opposites of the idea of the gazes of Mathew and Omana, where the former struggles to hide behind the facade while the latter takes up gaze as an act of manifestation, with a strong desire to be seen. When the

entire society doubts him, he hides behind 'split subjectivity' , the safe place where the real self and the image perceived by others meet. Mathew, whenever confronted, gets anxious and disturbed, failing to meet his real self. Being trapped in the loop of the institutionalised matrix of an orthodox family, he premeditatedly hides behind the codified grid and gives a penitent expression. His sheepish glance ratifies the confusions around him, but till the time he expresses his despair to his wife in the last stretch, he never uses the language for communication.

Queer representation looks at how language affects the power dynamics in relationships and institutions as well as how society views gender. Here the concept of gaze is subverted and appropriated as an agency, a way of expressing the identity, agony, desire and concerns. In order to understand and interpret language, which is based on a concrete symbolic system, requires a higher level of cognitive functions. Gaze's immediate and visceral quality is far more deep and dynamic to convey the nuances and complexities that language may not be able to deliver. Gaze is an agency of power representations, without the limitations of gender based conformities. While the lingering gaze of the society is always covered in scrutiny and vigilance, predominantly due to the adherence to heteronormativity and its predominance, gaze is a medium to challenge gender norms and to break the heteronormative assumptions. Mathew and Thankan do not yield for identity negotiation, even though they do not speak a single word to each other throughout. Gaze here makes the connections more yielding and transmit it by staying rooted in the intricate social and cultural contexts of homosexual experiences.

The Uncommunicativeness of the character Omana sprouts from her years long failed endeavouring to communicate with her counterpart. For her then silence became an authority. She is being seen as the wife who neither complaints nor whimpers. She talks through the glare. “The "silent woman" ideal with which we are now more familiar emerged, with the rise to prominence of the European bourgeoisie. Especially where they espoused puritan religious beliefs, the bourgeois class had different notions of the proper relationship between women and men. Conduct literature written for a bourgeois readership emphasised the subordination of wives to husbands, and the confinement of women to the domestic sphere” (Hawkins and Mayerhoff 451). Here also, for two decades she was ensnared in the sphere. She adorns the silent women tag as an agitation towards the conventions that let her stay in the zone, despite her efforts to come out and futile hope for anything from a partner who hides his orientation. The deep concept of female 'gaze' where the female characters are projected as the subject. The utilisation of this technique is to depict them as multifaceted, complicated individuals, who possess individuality and a strong stand against the injustice shown towards her. She stands as a nonconformist to established conventions. She waited for the quashing of the Section 377 to file the divorce against her husband not only for her liberation but for his emancipation from the distress too.

The stress on how gaze acts a restriction is evident in the portrayal of the father in the movie. The power dynamics of the relationship of the father and the son and the supremacy of the imposition of the gaze by the former upon the latter, might have influenced in the shaping of the son. The profound silence followed by the vulnerable stare often expresses remorse for conforming to societal norms and neglecting the psychological complexities of his sole son. The moment when there was an override of the language over the intricacies of the gaze, he acknowledges the mistake on his part and in the solemn chambers of the family court, he confesses by casting his favour upon his daughter-in-law. The gaze often illustrates how the characters see the world around them and how they perceive them. The depiction of someone's gaze unveil the preconceptions, biases and empathy depending on the point of perception. Towards the end, Thankan gazes at a liberated Mathew through the mirror. The mirror stage itself has substantial implications for the subjective representations and the formation of the identity. It has ramifications for the establishment of the basis for the ego's perception of the self and the subjective interactions with themselves, others and the World.

The gaze, language and their interplay in the movie, have actively served in igniting the thought process of the viewers and are utilised as a way to delve into subjects to mark the contrast between reality and facade, power dynamics, desire and love, responsibilities and passions and the existential inquiries.

The different dimensions of queer theory are yet to be investigated and explored. The lifelike tapestry woven by films has opened a portal to illuminate the tiny particulars of daily living and the multifaceted aspects of human existence.

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Tessa Jose

Stories on *The Road* : Trauma and Survival in Post-Apocalyptic Scenario

Abstract

Trauma studies, a field that expanded rapidly during the past decade developed as an interdisciplinary field of study which today pervades a wide range of disciplines like social sciences, history, psychology and literature. Tracing the psychological detriments following a calamity, trauma studies delves on psychological, social and cultural dimensions too pertaining to the field especially within a literary context. The present study attempts to trace the representation of trauma and related experiences in a post-apocalyptic scenario by undertaking an analysis of Cormac McCarthy's The Road, an American classic and an exemplar of post-apocalyptic and trauma fiction. Through an analysis of The Road as a heart rending tale of trauma, ordeals and survival, the paper attempts to explore multifarious implications of trauma, there by also observing the potential of trauma fiction to move beyond the bleak images and the negative tone often accredited to it by offering positive affirmations.

Keywords : Trauma theory, Post- Apocalypse, Victimisation, Survival

Post-apocalyptic fiction, a sub-genre of science fiction features a world where end has occurred due to some catastrophe and characters struggle to survive the place and situation. The past world is a strong presence in such novels since they occur through the recollections, fantasies or speculations of the characters. The loss or the vacuum left by the lost world is featured in these novels and they often portray the aching loss experienced by the characters once they realise the stark contrast between the present world and the past one. Most of the novels belonging to the category have a dystopian setting, featuring the impacts and aftermaths of the apocalypse. *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy is a classic belonging to the genre which sketches a futuristic world which goes chaotic after an apocalyptic disaster. Set in a post-apocalyptic world, it brilliantly portrays how a cataclysmic event transforms the place into a wasteland with ash and filth spread ubiquitously and with the setting in of a nuclear winter. The present study draws upon trauma theory to effectively analyse the text and tease out the traumatic impacts of an apocalypse on the lives of the characters and their attempts for survival in a post-apocalyptic world.

Trauma theory emerged in the United States in the early 1990s and prominent trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Geoffrey Hartman who were the products of Yale University played a crucial role in contributing significantly to the development of trauma studies. It initially fitted into the frame of psychology and later extended to literary studies through the publications of the prominent trauma theorists.

Tessa Jose is a Ph. D. Scholar, Institute of English, University of Kerala

The term 'trauma theory' was first used by Caruth in her *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) in which she introduced her thoughts and reflections on Freud's ideas on trauma and its nature as stated in*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920)and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). She states ". . . in the medical and psychiatric literature, and most centrally in Freud's text, the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (Caruth 3). She emphasises the findings of Freud that trauma is a wound in the mind and that unlike the wound of the body, the wound of the mind extends beyond peripheral healing mechanisms. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud declares that the experience of a trauma repeats itself in the life of the survivor without him being aware of it, or as against his will. This repeated revisiting which Freud calls "'traumatic neurosis'—emerges as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (Caruth 2). A person who witnesses and survives a calamity develops certain psychological crisis later in life as is illustrated by Freud through an example of train collision. The term coined by Freud was officially acknowledged by American Psychiatric Association in 1980,which later addressed the same as "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" (PTSD). Caruth defines PTSD in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) as "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event . . . [T]he event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly. . . . To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (4-5). The unexpected, sudden occurrence of the event confuses the person and hence his consciousness fails to fully comprehend the event. For the same reason, trauma is not understood or experienced by the victims at the time of occurrence, but rather it returns as haunting nightmares and dreams which imply the inherent trauma residing in the victims.

Freud and Lacan define trauma as 'return of the repressed' and as 'sense of absence' respectively. The theorists put forward an example of a soldier who witnesses violent death around him and who later encounters haunting nightmares as the central image of trauma and related experiences. Caruth points out that trauma arises in a victim of the incident as a result of the ". . . the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" ("Unclaimed" 7).According to Shoshana Felman, one of the pioneers of trauma theory, emergence of psychoanalysis, invention of disastrous weapons which caused havoc and destruction during 20th century and repeated use of instruments of law to cope with the traumatic legacies and collective injuries are among the major influences which contributed to the development of trauma theory (2). Holocaust, 9/11 tragedy, World Wars, terrorisms and various infamous riots observed as major traumatic historical episodes, when recollected through narratives, were/are critically analysed in the light of trauma theory. Felman calls 20th century an "era of historic, trials–was in effect a century of traumas and (concurrently) a century of theories

of trauma" (1). An important point to be noted here is regarding the reliance of all these theorists on literature to theorise trauma due to its potential to accommodate both the comprehensible and the incomprehensible and hence locating it as an appropriate medium which could encompass the obvious and the obscure.This is the reason why Freud looks into the nature of trauma and its impacts on human psyche through the story told by Tasso in his *Gerusalemme Liberata.* Caruth notes that:

> if Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet. ("Unclaimed" 3)

Trauma fiction effectively catalogues the shocks, depression and impacts that a sudden catastrophe has on the people. Hartman points out that trauma fiction problematises its own formal properties, at the levels of reference, subjectivity and narration (547). Michael Rothberg argues that traumatic texts search for a new mode of realism which he calls 'traumatic realism' in order to express or articulate a new form of reality. He argues that writers are faced with 'the demands of extremity' (14)- an idea which suggests the challenge they face in order to communicate the traumatic knowledge which cannot be fully comprehended or figured out.

Apocalypse is one among the major images in literature while studying trauma and its implications. According to Teresa Heffernan, the turn of the millennium saw a major resurgence of apocalyptic narrative in film, literature, science, and politics with "its strange pleasure in the catastrophic cleansing of the world, its reassuring division between the righteous and the damned, and its disturbing comfort in knowing absolute finality and order" (150).Through the framing of traumatic experiences, post-apocalyptic fiction traces the complex states of human mind as well as changing paradigms in society and culture.

Chronicling the end of a world order, *The Road*presents a chilling experience to the readers through its fictional world where the green, lush landscape gives way to burned, ash strewn countryside, and an entire population being replaced by half dead victims and survivors. The American classic traces the journey of a father and a son through burned America where they struggle for survival. The characters are given no names which add to the universal significance of the novel. The protagonist is a father, one among the survivors, who takes his child, heading towards the south, for the coast. *The Road* draws in detail the ravaged landscape, barren bottomlands, dominant darkness, biting coldness, burned down cities and desolate countryside. By switching between the past and the present, McCarthy effortlessly plays with temporal dimensions in the novel. Past life manifests through the dreams, reminiscences and musings of the man. He ruminates

about the past which is in stark contrast to the ghastly, horrifying present. He is seen to be traumatised by the sudden apocalypse which shattered his life and also by the suicide of his wife who rejected herhusband's entreaties. The huge chasm between the past and the present is indicative of the split in the psyche of the victim. The man in the novel is unable to leave behind the traumatic past and hence carries it with him as a burden throughout his journey. He makes many attempts to forget the past and ensuing traumatic memories by convincing himself that he is a survivor who is freed of any tribulations or torments. However, heexperiences intense difficulties while undergoing the process. The recurrent dreams about the bygone world, haunts the man leaving him restless and disturbed. In psychoanalytic terms, Freud's notion of "the return of the repressed" in which traumatic happenings that were unprecedented and too appalling to be confronted at the time, resurface later, often through the subconscious, sometimes as dreams. "What he could bear in the waking world he could not by night and he sat awake for fear the dream would return" (McCarthy 137). In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud concluded that ". . . these dreams are endeavouring to master the [traumatic] stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis" (32). The initial dreams of the man which included the joyous past life, attractively robed wife, paradisiacal Earth, later transforms into terrific ones like dreams of a monstrous creature crawling all over him, his wife dying in a desolate place with no one to care for her and so on. Traumatic impacts on the man are more intense when compared to the boy who does not hold a pre-disaster world in his memories. His knowledge of the past are second hand, acquired through the stories and narratives of his father. Hence, though the child is shocked at various happenings in their journey, is not traumatised inherently, since, for him, reality is only the present. There is no past for him to compare the present world with.

The novel also known for the ecological concerns it raises, illustrates the impact of despoiled and wasted landscape and environment on the human consciousness. In *The Road*, the demise of humans and the seeming demise of the planet happen simultaneously. The man's life and journey through the cold, inhospitable countryside fills in him despair, fears and hopelessness which add to the trauma he experiences. "Burnt forests for miles along the slopes and snow sooner than he would have thought. No tracks in the road, nothing living anywhere. The fire blackened boulders like the shapes of bears on the starkly wooded slopes" (30). One's surroundings exert immense influence on a person and contribute to the physical, mental and spiritual growth. "The notion of 'place' occupies a rich and interesting position in contemporary trauma theory, both through Geoffrey Hartman's writing on landscape and place, and through Pierre Nora's influential formulation of *lieux de meÂmoire* or 'sites of memory'" (Whitehead 48). The ruined surroundings augment distress in the man who attempts to flee the place. The pesky landscape pictured in the novel also symbolises the psyche of the man which is crammed with ruins and ashes of the past memories. "The country was looted, ransacked, ravaged. Rifled of every crumb. The nights were blinding cold and casket black and the long reach

of the morning had a terrible silence to it. Like a dawn before battle" (137). The shadowy land smelling of gloom and murk sheds light into the inner mindscape of the protagonist. "The blackness he woke to on those nights was sightless and impenetrable. A blackness to hurt your ears with listening. Often he had to get up. No sound but the wind in the bare and blackened trees" (14). The road which is one among the major symbols in the novel encompasses the spirit, tone and mood of the novel placing it in the category of trauma fiction. The road filled with ashes, corpses, death and decay is enigmatic as presented in the novel. The road presents man with the stark reality in front of him and constantly reminds him of the traumatic conditions circling him. "From daydreams on the road there was no waking" (17). The journey along the road gifts the man day dreams as well as nightmares. The reality is too gruesome and the man finds it impossible to overlook the grotesque scenes on and along the road. Roads are the only things which remain after the catastrophe. The road offers refuge as well as poses threat to the man and his boy. The psyche of the man which contains memories of past glorious life and repressed traumatic remnants of past and present is appropriately encompassed in the symbol. Journey through the road hence becomes a journey through the mind of the character.

One of the factors which contribute to the success of *The Road* as a trauma fictionis its brilliant employment of symbols and images which serve as appropriate objective correlatives. The pistol which turns out to be an inevitable part of the man, develops into an obligatory accessory without which the existence becomes impossible. The pistol recurs throughout the novel making up a major portion of the story and driving the plot. The man adheres to the pistol, and frequently ensures its presence. It serves dual functions in the novel. Primarily, the pistol stands for all the repressed thoughts and yearnings in the man, and also to the trauma associated with it. The author covertly brings out the connection between the two by suggesting the suicide of the wife using a pistol. Secondly, the pistol is used as a defense mechanism, which hints at how the man depends on his thoughts on a pre-disaster universe to survive the gruesome present. "He would jerk upright out of his sleep and slap about him looking for the pistol" (108). "He sat up reaching about for the pistol" (216). Through the symbol, the author indicates how disastrous traumatic memories can be. The man repeatedly forces the boy to hold the gun even though the boy is reluctant to do so. This exchange of the gun implies the transference of a traumatic 'legacy' from the affected generation to its posterity, and so is emphasised throughout the novel. "Take the gun. I don't want the gun. I didn't ask if you wanted it. Take it" (73). "He took the boy's hand and pushed the revolver into it. Take it, he whispered. Take it. The boy was terrified" (119). During an occasion, the child loses the pistol handed over to him by his father. "Where's the pistol? He said. The boy froze. He looked terrified" (247). The 'accidental' letting go of the revolver points to the reluctance from the part of the succeeding generations to be part of the trauma that fell over their ancestors. The father's advice to his son to put the gun in his mouth and point it up in case of a crisis, points to the life taking, destructive nature of trauma which is passed on to him

as a 'legacy' from which he has no escape. "Theories of trans-generational trauma suggest that affect can leak across generations; that a traumatic event which is experienced by one individual can be passed on so that its effects are replayed in another individual one or more generations later" (Whitehead 14). Till the novel ends, even after the death of his father, the boy is left with no other option than holding the gun with him.

According to Saussure, signifiers do not exist once signifieds die away. In *The Road,* one witnesses an ebbing away of language, abstractions and conceptions which too turn out to be of utmost importance while delving on the concept of trauma in the novel.

> The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colors. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought. How much was gone already? The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality. Drawing down like something trying to preserve heat. In time to wink out forever. (93)

Memory and language finds correspondence in the novel. "Sometimes the child would ask him questions about the world that for him was not even a memory. He thought hard how to answer. There is no past" (55). The erasure of numerous names and words from the memory of the character signifies end of language itself, through which McCarthy points to the extent of trauma which affects the protagonist. The novel which contains trimmed and apathetic conversations, repetitions, excessive paragraph divisions, minimal use of active verbs, sparse punctuations, and limited diction, denote a ruptured language which is incapable of absorbing and conveying the exact details and particulars in a shattered world. Death of the world goes hand in hand with death of word. The traumatic impacts on the protagonist are reflected in his language. The fractured sentences, abrupt diction, and indifference and immediacy in tone denote the same ". . . when deprivation is too traumatic to be acknowledged, language is refused and the empty space, which is the condition of speech and signification, becomes the tomb in which the lost object is encrypted. Thereafter, whenever the self is plunged into a state of inexpressible mourning, it resorts to this same "magical" but dangerous resolution" (Moglen 126). The language used by the novelist is hence in par with the circumstances in a traumatic, post-apocalyptic world. Along with the physical objects which lay scattered and shattered on the road, the language too is ruptured in the traumatic world. The nothingness which governs the terrain is suggested through the loss of memory and degradation of language.

The dystopian world which McCarthy presents through his novel faultlessly captures the conditions leading to the trauma in the protagonist and his fellow beings. The dystopian setting not just provides a series of tragic events which add to the man's trauma, but also functions as metaphorical of the inner landscape of the character's psyche. The

man "looked toward the east for any light but there was none" (1). This in a way reveals the dimmed corners of the inner mind of the character itself. With all those savagery, violent encounters, irking nightmares and harrowing occurrences, *The Road* explores trauma, its impacts and survival. The novel being a dreary documentation of an aimless journey, soak up how destruction and trauma seem to encompass everything. Heffernan explains, "post-apocalypse, where the catastrophe has happened but there is no resurrection, no revelation. Bereft of the idea of the end as direction, truth, and foundation, we have reached the end of the end" (11). When the protagonist in *The Road* laments, "On this road there are no godspoken men. They are gone and I am left and they have taken with them the world" (32), we realise,the end has already happened, leaving the survivors in a vile, futile world. However, *The Road* does not seem to stop at this point passively accepting the realities of a traumatic post-apocalyptic world but rather journeys forward to explore the potentials of survival in such a world.

Flight or fight is widely considered as one among the automatic survival responses. Walter Cannon who coined the term 'fight or flight response' points to the physical act of flight or fight at the moment of traumatic situations as chief reactions towards trauma. *The Road* puts forward the physical as well as psychological processes of "flight and fight" as the major survival techniques adopted by the characters. The father and the son in *The Road* flee from the place of destruction by moving towards the south in order to escape the wasteland. They make progress on the road and what drives them forward is the 'fire' inside them. The post-apocalyptic world is too harsh and hard for the people to survive. The transformed place frequently forces the father to make comparisons with the bygone world, its glories and splendour. But he does not give in."Where you've nothing else, construct ceremonies out of the air and breathe upon them" (78), he states. Not ready to be confined within the victim stage, the characters show a tendency to move forward. "Are we going to die now? No . . . we're going to keep going down the road" (92). They flee from the site of trauma as a means to overcome its impacts. And while fleeing, various tactics are employed by the father to make survival easy and possible for them. He constantly tries to make the child believe that they are survivors and not victims. A journey from victimisation to survival is laid bare before the child by the father. He narrates to the boy stories of good men, emphasises on the superiority of life over death, teaches him that they are 'carrying fire' and fills in him hope for a better future. The journey through the road hence is metaphorical since it points to a survival technique adopted by the father and his child. The family which makes an appearance towards the end of the novel is also portrayed as proceeding towards the path of survival. They too are fleeing from the place of distress, despair and destruction. When the boy joins them, the novel ends. Journey metaphor, with which the novel begins, eventually portrays the death of the father towards the end. But unexpectedly, another journey begins in the final pages. The title of the novel thus becomes pregnant with meaningssince the entire novel is centred on the journey through the road and it remains the focal point. The road which

could be seen as a site of trauma thus transforms to a path of survival for the victims. The novel which entirely focuses on movements and flights that do not halt in middle effectively suggests the healing journey that the victims undertake from the site of shock and ordeals to a promising future.

Parallel to flight technique, characters also adopt fight as a means to deal with the traumatic conditions. The text which overtly depicts death, destruction, alienation and separation places human will over any other concerns. Though affected by trauma, the major characters do not stay still, or remain defeated. A desire for survival and alleviation is exhibited by them. In spite of being frequently haunted by traumatic outcomes, they do not fall back, but proceed forward, putting up a courageous fight. Though some of the characters fall and perish, unable to survive in a post-apocalyptic universe, the focus is invariably on the characters who make an effort to survive the traumatic post-disastrous world. The novel revolves around the thoughts and actions of these characters which imply the significance attributed by the authors to the healing journey undertaken by the victims in a post-catastrophic environment. The courage and sanguinity of the father are the best lessons that the child absorbs and which drives him forward. The novel though illustrates the death of the man, gives him due reverence persuading the readers to visualise him beyond the label of a 'victim' and thus a journey from victimhood to survival is ensured in the novel.

The Road presents a rebirth after a disastrous end; the new beginning carries with it remains of past and traumatic memories. However,life continues as could be noted through the journey metaphor that lingers throughout the novel. In *The Road*, the present continues its journey bearing and transmitting the traces of the past, at the same time marching towards an uncertain yet a hopeful future.

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Vinodkumar. A.

Dystopian Feminism in Fantasy Literature

Abstract

Dystopian feminism in fantasy literature explores the intersection of gender, power, and society within a dystopian world. It explores the intersection of gender and power in imagined societies that are often repressive and authoritarian.This subgenre often features strong female protagonists who navigate oppressive, patriarchal societies while challenging traditional gender roles and power structures. Dystopian feminism in fantasy literature delves into themes such as reproductive rights, autonomy, and the impact of gender-based violence. In these narratives, authors often depict a world where women are subjugated, marginalized, or objectified, and the protagonists strive to resist, subvert, or overthrow these oppressive systems. These stories may also explore the consequences of extreme gender inequality and the resilience of individuals in the face of adversity. Dystopian feminism in fantasy literature often serves as a powerful tool for social commentary, sparking discussions about gender equality, women's rights, and the nature of power.It provides a thought-provoking exploration of gender dynamics and social justice within speculative and imaginative settings. These feminist dystopias often depict worlds where women are oppressed and society is governed by strict gender roles and patriarchal systems. Through the lens of fantasy, authors can create exaggerated and fantastical settings that highlight the inherent flaws and injustices of real-world gender dynamics.

Keywords : Dystopia- feminism-fantasy- intersectional feminism- gender roles-objectification of women

Thomas More proposed an ideal model of society in his 1516 book, *Utopia*, and is credited with creating the concept of Utopia. In the 20th century, dystopias emerged as the antithesis to utopias, representing a society's defects and decline, usually in the not-too-distant future. Dystopias can be categorized into two types: post-apocalyptic dystopias, which are the aftermath of catastrophic events, and statist dystopias, in which the government dominates and suppresses individual freedom. Yevgeni Zamyatin's *We*, written in 1920-21, is considered the first dystopian novel. Well-known dystopian novels include George Orwell's *1984* (1949) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), which served as inspiration for numerous other writers. George Orwell's *1984*, a classic statist dystopia, depicts a government embracing totalitarianism, threatening individual freedom and identity, and serves as the model for subsequent dystopias.

Dystopias can be categorized into two types: post-apocalyptic dystopias, which are the aftermath of catastrophic events, and statist dystopias, where the government

Vinodkumar A is an Associate Professor, RSM SNDP Yogam College, Koyilandy, Edachery

dominates and suppresses individual freedom. They are frequently marked by a number of recurrent themes, such as authoritarian regimes, the dehumanization of individuals, the loss of freedom and rights, the collapse of the environment, or even natural calamities brought on by scientific or technical advancements. Dystopian novels are frequently marked by recurring themes, such as authoritarian regimes, the dehumanization of individuals, the loss of freedom and rights, the collapse of the environment, and natural calamities brought on by scientific or technical advancements. Feminist utopia is a genre that envisions a society without gender oppression, where men and women are not stuck in their traditional roles. During second-wave feminism in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, feminist utopian literature surged, focusing more on societal roles and power dynamics than technological advancements and space travel. Examples of dystopian feminism in fantasy literature include Suzy McKee Charnas's *Walk to the End of the World* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, where women are reduced to their reproductive functions and subjected to a totalitarian regime that controls their bodies. Octavia Butler's *Parable series* also explores feminist themes within a dystopian framework, addressing issues of agency, community, and empowerment in a post-apocalyptic setting.

N.K. Jemisin's *The Fifth Season* presents a richly imagined world where women with magical abilities challenge existing power structures and societal norms. Many books explore both utopia and dystopia, such as Joanna Russ' *The Female Man*. Dystopia represents an ideal paradise, whereas dystopia is the complete opposite. The dystopian genre imagines planets or societies where human misery, such as poverty, oppression, sickness, overcrowding, environmental degradation, or conflict, is the norm, and life is exceedingly horrible due to deprivation, oppression, or terror. Dystopian feminism in fantasy literature delves into the intersection of gender, power, and society in a dystopian or post-apocalyptic world. This subgenre typically features strong female protagonists navigating oppressive, patriarchal societies while challenging traditional gender roles and power structures. Dystopian feminism in fantasy literature explores themes such as reproductive rights, autonomy, and the impact of gender-based violence. In dystopian narratives, authors often depict a world where women are subjugated, marginalized, or objectified, and the protagonists strive to resist, subvert, or overthrow these oppressive systems. These stories may also explore the consequences of extreme gender inequality and the resilience of individuals in the face of adversity. Dystopian feminism in fantasy literature often serves as a powerful tool for social commentary, sparking discussions about gender equality, women's rights, and the nature of power.

Gender-based violence is a commonly explored theme in dystopian feminist literature, acting as a poignant commentary on the pervasive issues of gender inequality and oppression. Authors often utilize dystopian settings to construct exaggerated or futuristic societies, replete with totalitarian governance and oppressive social structures, in order to delve into the far-reaching ramifications of gender-based violence and to highlight the potential for resistance, instigating positive change within such contexts.

Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* is set in a future North America under the theocratic Republic of Gilead. The government maintains power through surveillance, suppression of information, and totalitarian violence. Women's rights are drastically reduced. Handmaids are chosen to give children to the Commanders, who have declined fertility due to diseases and pollution. The handmaids have no control over their own bodies and must have sex with the Commander in the presence of his wife. The narrator of *The Handmaid's Tale* is Offred. This is not her original name; rather, it is an alias she uses to signify her loyalty to her Commander, Fred: "Of-Fred." In Gilead, the Handmaids have no identity of their own. They have to forfeit even their original name. Flashbacks help us to understand her past. Flashbacks are either about Offred's friend Moira or her family, which includes her mother, daughter, and husband. Flashbacks are intended to draw a comparison between Offred's past existence and current condition as a woman, oppressed and stranded in a place she did not choose. She recalls her previous freedom and autonomy. Exploring the effects of unbridled power and control is a recurring issue in dystopian fiction, frequently within the framework of a dehumanizing, authoritarian, or dysfunctional society. Dystopian fiction is a powerful tool for understanding a society's anxieties and expressing the virtues that have been lost. Offred is a handmaid in the Republic of Gilead, a theocratic and totalitarian nation that has supplanted the United States of America. Due to low reproduction rates, Offred bears children for affluent couples who are having difficulty conceiving. She works for the Commander and his wife, Serena Joy. With fewer shopping excursions, restricted room access, and constant observation by Gilead's covert police agency, the Eyes, Offred's independence is severely curtailed. Offred recounts her daily life through flashbacks, revealing her past relationships with Luke, a married man, her mother and her friend, Moira. The Gilead architects rise to power during a time of violence, pornography, and prostitution. They assassinate the President and crack down on women's rights. Offred and Luke flee to Canada, but are caught and separated. After her capture, she is sent to the Red Center, where women are indoctrinated into Gilead's ideology. Aunt Lydia teaches women subservience and child-bearing, while Moira escapes, leaving Offred unsure of her future. She endures a "Ceremony" where the Commander reads from the Bible and has sex with Offred. Offred breaks her routine when she visits a doctor who offers to have sex with her to get pregnant, but she refuses due to the risk of being sent away. The Commander sends Nick to her, and she visits him regularly, playing Scrabble and looking at old magazines. Ofglen reveals to Offred that she is a member of "Mayday",an underground organization. Offred is secretly sexing Nick. The Commander takes her to a club called Jezebel's. There, she meets Moira, who was captured before crossing the border. Offred never sees Moira again. When the Commander approaches Offred for sex. she tries to feign passion. Offred returns to Jezebel's and spends time with Nick, leading to a secret affair. Ofglen, a member of Mayday, informs Offred that the rapist was killed by her. Offred meets a new Ofglen, who is not part of Mayday. Serena informs her of her trip

to Jezebel's and sends her to her room. Nick informs her that the Eyes are Mayday members who saved her. Offred leaves with them, uncertain of her fate. The novel ends with a lecture by Professor Pieixoto, explaining Gilead's formation and customs.

The oppression of women is a common theme in dystopian feminist works, reflecting the real struggles and challenges faced by women throughout history. In these fictional worlds, authors often depict societies where women are systematically subjugated, denied their rights, and treated as inferior to men. These narratives serve as a commentary on the gender inequalities and patriarchal structures that exist in our own world, offering a thought-provoking exploration of the consequences of such oppression. One recurring theme in dystopian feminist literature is the control of women's bodies and reproductive rights. In these societies, women are often reduced to mere vessels for childbirth, their autonomy and agency stripped away by oppressive regimes. Dystopian feminist works provide a powerful examination of women's oppression, serving as a poignant reminder of the ongoing struggle for gender equality. By portraying worlds where women are dehumanized, disenfranchised, and subjected to systemic mistreatment, authors compel readers to confront the pervasive nature of sexism and its profound impact on individuals and societies. These narratives challenge us to scrutinize and address the injustices that women face, inspiring meaningful conversations and actions toward a more equitable future for all. Gender inequality is a common theme in many dystopian feminist works. It reflects the patriarchal structures and societal norms that oppress women. In dystopian literature, authors often create societies that exaggerate real-world gender disparities. This provides a lens to examine the consequences of such inequalities. The works mentioned above shine a light on the complexity of gender inequality in dystopian settings. They act as cautionary tales, encouraging readers to examine and challenge the societal norms and power structures that contribute to such inequalities. In summary, gender inequality in feminist dystopian works is a powerful tool for critiquing real-world gender dynamics. By portraying exaggerated worlds of oppression and injustice, these works compel readers to confront the consequences of unaddressed gender disparities and advocate for a more equal society.

Jennie Melamed's novel, *Gather The Daughters*, takes place on a remote island where women have little rights and are subjected to rigid restrictions. *Bitch Planet*, a feminist graphic novel, portrays the exploitation of women in a patriarchal society. Bina Shah's novel, *Before She Sleeps*, explores a reduced female population due to gender selection, war, and disease. Sowmya Rajendran's novel, *The Lesson*, focuses on violence faced by women in a future India. Jean McClellan's *Vox*, highlights global disempowerment of women. Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* presents a dystopian future where societal collapse has led to widespread chaos. The protagonist, Lauren Olamina, challenges traditional gender norms and advocates for a new belief system centered on empathy and community in the face of adversity, examining the intersections of race, gender, and power within a dystopian landscape. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* provides a

thought-provoking exploration of a utopian, matriarchal society in contrast to the patriarchal norms of the early 20th century. By portraying a world free of male violence and domination, Gilman emphasizes the destructive impact of gender-based violence in contemporary society and presents a vision of an alternative, equitable future. In fantasy literature, the authors use world-building to critique real-world power structures, weaving elements of magic, myth, and the supernatural into their narratives to offer incisive commentary on gender inequality, oppression, and resistance, and imagine alternative realities where women's experiences are front and centre. In Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* series, Katniss Everdeen represents the strength and resilience of a female protagonist in a dystopian world. As a skilled archer and survivor, Katniss defies traditional gender roles and becomes a symbol of hope for the oppressed people in her society. Her bravery and leadership abilities make her an inspiring example of a strong female character in the dystopian feminist genre. Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* explores a future where women's reproductive choices are tightly regulated by the state, highlighting the implications of such control on women's lives. Dystopian feminism in fantasy literature emphasizes the resilience and agency of female characters, showcasing their capacity to resist and subvert oppressive forces, even in the most hostile environments. It serves as a potent vehicle for exploring and addressing issues of gender inequality, sexism, and misogyny within speculative and otherworldly settings to offer readers new perspectives on the struggle for gender justice.

In dystopian feminist literature, the portrayal of strong protagonists is crucial in challenging societal norms and inspiring change. These characters are depicted as resilient, courageous, and determined individuals who actively defy oppressive systems and tirelessly fight for equality. Their unwavering commitment and bravery in the face of adversity serve as powerful symbols of resistance and empowerment. Through their actions and experiences, they offer readers hope and motivation to actively advocate for a more just and equitable world. The strong protagonists in dystopian feminist works not only serve as compelling characters within their respective narratives, but also as empowering symbols for readers. Their strength, courage, and resilience inspire readers to question existing power structures, challenge oppressive norms, and advocate for gender equality and social justice. By portraying these characters as agents of change, dystopian feminist literature offers a potent critique of existing societal hierarchies while instilling hope for a more equitable and inclusive future. Through these strong protagonists, readers are encouraged to envision and work towards a more just and liberated world for all. Naomi Alderman's novel, *The Power*, explores a dystopian world where girls gain power through a genetic anomaly, leading to societal collapse and the removal of male privilege. The story revolves around four main characters. The novel depicts a world where women gain the ability to produce electrical energy, leading to a significant change in power dynamics as they seize control over men. The novel thoughtfully explores how the overturning of traditional gender roles reveals the brutality

and aggression that women have long been subjected to.

The works mentioned above use the dystopian genre to explore the origins and consequences of gender-based violence, providing sharp critiques of real-world gender dynamics. By projecting current social inequalities into fictional futures, these authors prompt readers to consider the widespread threat of gender-based violence and the imperative of addressing systemic oppression. Furthermore, dystopian feminist works often portray the limitations imposed on women's education, career opportunities, and personal freedoms. Characters in these stories are frequently confined to traditional gender roles, deprived of access to knowledge and self-expression. These examples illustrate the diverse representations of strong female protagonists in dystopian feminist literature and their contribution to the exploration of gender dynamics, power structures, and societal oppression. Through their narratives, these characters challenge traditional gender norms and inspire readers to critically examine the complexities of gender and power within dystopian contexts. The presence of strong female protagonists in dystopian feminist literature serves to amplify the voices of women and address important social and political issues. These characters embody resilience, courage, and defiance in the face of oppressive regimes, demonstrating the transformative power of female agency. As the genre continues to evolve, the portrayal of strong female protagonists plays a vital role in shaping the discourse on gender equality and social justice in dystopian settings. In summary, gender-based violence in dystopian feminist literature offers a powerful framework for examining the ongoing struggle for gender equality. By portraying worlds plagued by gender-based oppression, authors highlight the distressing realities experienced by many individuals today. These narratives also encourage readers to imagine and strive for a future free from gender-based violence, fostering critical discussions and united efforts to dismantle oppressive systems and establish a more just world. In these stories, authors highlight the harmful impact of limiting women's opportunities and assigning them to subordinate positions. Moreover, gender-based violence and abuse are prominent themes in many dystopian feminist works. These narratives bring attention to the widespread danger of physical, emotional, and sexual violence that women experience in oppressive societies.

Feminist discourse in dystopian fantasy works has become an increasingly prominent and relevant topic of discussion in recent years. Dystopian fantasy works often explore themes of power, control, and societal structures, providing a compelling backdrop for the exploration of feminist themes. One prominent aspect of feminist discourse in dystopian fantasy works is the subversion of traditional gender roles and the portrayal of strong, independent female characters. In many dystopian fantasies, female characters are depicted as resilient and resourceful, challenging traditional gender stereotypes and expectations. This challenges the status quo and empowers women by presenting them as capable and influential figures within the narrative. Additionally, dystopian fantasy works often critique patriarchal power structures and systems of oppression, providing a

platform for the examination of feminist issues such as gender inequality, reproductive rights, and the objectification of women. Through the dystopian lens, these works highlight the potential consequences of unchecked patriarchy and offer a commentary on real-world gender dynamics. Furthermore, feminist discourse in dystopian fantasy works often delves into the concept of agency and autonomy for women. These works explore the idea of self-determination and empowerment, depicting women as agents of change and resistance within oppressive societies. By doing so, they inspire and empower audiences to challenge existing power dynamics and advocate for gender equality.

Overall, the intersection of feminist discourse and dystopian fantasy works offers a rich and thought-provoking space for exploration and analysis. Through the portrayal of strong female characters, critique of patriarchal power structures, and emphasis on agency and autonomy, these works contribute to the ongoing conversation around feminism and gender equality.

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